

HERIZONS

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JANE RULES

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HOMELAND KUDOS

Thanks to you for publishing the article by Maya Khankhoje, "Homeland. Security." in your Spring 2008 issue. It was a most lovely read. I read the piece as one who also did not grow up in Canada—but who followed a much less circuitous route to get here—and it aroused many issues related to the meaning of home and homelands, and the role of people, as well as place, not only in where one settles, but how settled one can feel there.

Thanks to *Herizons* for once more providing good food for thought.

ABBY LIPPMAN
Montreal, QC

contributors



ANNA LAZOWSKI

Anna Lazowski is a producer at CBC Radio, working on shows like *Definitely Not the Opera* and *The Signal*. A syndicated music columnist, Anna lives in Winnipeg with her husband Mike

and their son Silas.



UMA PARAMESWARAN

Uma was born and educated in India and has lived in Winnipeg since 1966. She is the author of several works of fiction, including the award-winning collection of stories *What was Always Hers*.



JILLIAN RIDINGTON

Jillian has written extensively about violence against women, pornography, women with disabilities and environmental issues. With Robin

Ridington, she has worked with the Dane-zaa First Nations for three decades. Their latest publication is *When You Sing it Now, Just Like New* (University of Nebraska Press). Jillian lives on Galiano Island, B.C.



LAURYN OATES

Lauryn is *Herizons'* correspondent in Afghanistan. She has worked throughout Central Asia, the Middle East and Africa to advance women's human rights by working with local women's organizations

and their international supporters. She is completing a Ph.D in language education at the University of British Columbia.



KERRY RYAN

Kerry Ryan lives and writes in Winnipeg. She is a regular contributor to *Herizons* and her poems have appeared in several journals and anthologies. Her first collection of poetry, *The*

Sleeping Life, was released by The Muses' Company (J. Gordon Shillingford Publishing) in April 2008.



ALAN ZUKANOVICH

Alen (pictured here at work with youngest daughter Mila) co-owns Inkubator Design with Sanja Zukanovich. Together, Alen and Sanja pursue excellence in magazine design and raise their

daughters, Pasha and Mila, in Toronto.



JOY PARKS

Formerly a columnist for the long-defunct *Body Politic*, Joy Parks wrote this issue's article on feminism and fashion on page 36. Last year, her short story "Instinct" (*The Future Is Queer*, Arsenal

Pulp Press) tied for the 2007 Gaylactic Spectrum Award.



GIO GUZZI

Gio Guzzi has been a keen and devoted member of *Herizons'* editorial advisory committee for more than 13 years. When she is not mulling over editorial submissions, she works at the Women's

Health Clinic in Winnipeg as the Coordinator for Birth Control and Unplanned Pregnancy Counselling.



fashion STATE

A FEMINIST EMBRACES HER OWN STYLE

BY JOY PARKS

Hi. I'm Joy and I'm a clothes horse.
(Hello Joy.)

Before you deem me insensitive for mocking the positive change brought about by 12-step programs, hear me out. Growing up and coming out in the middle of the second wave of feminism, my love of fashion has been as much a shameful secret as any addiction. I have hidden my passion for cashmere (preferably vintage) in the same way others have hidden a mickey of gin in their desks, and my attraction to really cute handbags has required the same level of secrecy as a chronic gambler's obsession with the ponies.

As feminists, we've had the benefit of studies that emphasize the blows to body image and self-esteem dealt to women daily via advertising and fashion magazines. There is the (now) mostly unspoken but solidly entrenched directive that looks shouldn't matter. To be concerned about what we wear, how we look, is thought to be trivial, something the patriarchy has used against us, the thing that divides us, a badge of small thinking and self-involvement. If you're a feminist, fashion shouldn't matter—an implication that at times has made me feel as out of place in radical politics as white shoes after Labour Day.



MENT

On my way to feminist or lesbian events, I used to slip into the bathroom in the subway and change out of my work clothes, my skirts and heels and pantyhose.

Like many of my butch lesbian friends, I raided my father's side of the closet—but with totally different results. I remember a particularly passionate relationship with a grey Swedish cable-knit sweater that I wore with black tights and a belt, making it into a great slouchy mini dress I wore to my small-town high school. Looked great with my grandfather's discarded fedoras, which I wore at a rakish angle.

This is why I wept when I read *It's So You*, edited by Michelle Tea. This book was as much of a treasure as the (totally brand new and still in the original bag) Hardy Amies sweater (he dresses The Queen!) I found at Value Village for \$6.95. In this enlightened volume, 35 women, several of them authors or politicians who are taken quite seriously by the feminist and other progressive movements—Felicia Luna Lemus, Ali Liebegott, Diane Di Prima, Jewelle Gomez Eileen Myers—write about their own relationships with fashion and style. Each of them, to some degree (including the editor, whose kooky devil-may-care femme fashion sense I've always loved) acknowledge that writing, nay even thinking, about this subject is fraught with risk. The underlying message of the anthology is a joyous chorus that fashion is self-expression, fashion is identity, fashion is feminist. Learning that I'm not alone in this was as freeing as the first spring day without pantyhose.

This rush of freedom touched off an examination of my own fairly severe case of Feminist Fear of Fashion Syndrome. My love of clothes, my determination to express myself in what I wear, has been one of the few consistencies in my life. It has been my rebellion and my refuge, my expression and my entertainment, and when I finally came to understand my particular flavour of lesbianism, I realized that it was a legitimate part of my sexual identity. (I have given up explaining that “femme” isn't about clothes or makeup, because I found I couldn't talk about it without talking about clothes or makeup. Or shoes.) It has also been the one thing that has always kept me on the fringes of feminism, the nagging feeling that I couldn't bring my whole self to a movement that openly criticized something that was genuinely important to me.

The things that originally attracted me to feminism, as I understood it in my naive youth, are the same elements that influence what I wear. I've always been a rebel, a fan of freedom, of making my own choices. That should have made

me a valuable member of the movement, a model of defiance, even. But the theory hasn't always fit the practice and the disconnect has been palpable. Coming out as a lesbian in the 1970s, I rebelled against the clothes that were supposed to be part of my rebellion as a feminist and a lesbian—the baggy, fatigue-like trousers, the flannel and the turtlenecks that chafed me, the boxy boots that made my feet hurt. “The personal is political” is noble in theory, but I hated that the application seemed to mean ugly shoes were good, but lip gloss was inherently evil.

On my way to feminist or lesbian events, I used to slip into the bathroom in the subway and change out of my work clothes, my skirts and heels and pantyhose. I'd wash the makeup off my face. I'd put on the uniform, in order to be acceptable to the women I was meeting to discuss our fight for the freedom to live as they (and, by extension, I) chose. The irony didn't set in for years, but now I realize that not wearing what I wanted, dressing in a way that made me more acceptable to my sisters, was a greater concession than I've ever given the mores of the patriarchy.

I remember when the very radical editor of a West Coast women's paper and her lover showed up a day early at my apartment in Toronto, my panic at trying to hide my bubble bath and makeup, get rid of the lacy peignoir set hanging behind my bedroom door. I was so afraid of being found out.

The beauty of so many of the essays in *It's So You* is that it's obvious that this is the first time many of these writers have had the opportunity to write about their own sense of style. Or lack thereof. It was their first chance to think about how the things they chose to put on their bodies reflect who they are, how they feel and the kinds of things they want to express. More often than not, these essays are smart and sassy and rebellious. They depict how so many of these (mostly) young, talented, creative, politically aware women have no desire to adhere to any sort of commercialized *Vogue*-inspired mainstream fashion sensibility, but do luxuriate in finding and wearing the things that make them feel good about themselves. Sounds oddly like a feminist ideal. But the real lesson was, since we know clothes really don't matter, why would anyone care what we wear? So equally, to hell with the fashion industry, and also to hell with anyone and any political movement that wants to prescribe our choice and behaviour at any level.

In university, there were all those little (mostly black) cocktail dresses I assigned to the newly minted credit card my parents had given me for emergencies, the dresses I needed to wear to the myriad literary parties that I managed to get invited to. The very next day I would carefully sponge and spot clean, replace the tags and return them to the store. My way of sticking it to the man.

What I'm wearing is a barometer for where my life is at. For nearly 20 years I worked in advertising, and everything I owned was black. A stranger looking at my wardrobe might have ventured a guess that I had a night job as a hired mourner. My wardrobe was easy to match and slimming, but more important, it made possible a certain form of disappearance. In a tense boardroom, it kept the focus on the work.

Six years ago, I went through an emotional crisis in which I basically ran away from my life. The first place it hit was my closet. I gave up my stiffly tailored black duds and dove headfirst into creamy velvet form-fitting blouses with tons of buttons in emerald green, ruby and royal blue, lacy pastel pearl and rhinestone-studded bras, flouncy skirts, long earrings, piles of beads and bracelets, and thrift-store silk scarves trailing the scent of fresh cucumber or warm vanilla. I never went anywhere without the leather bomber jacket

that made me look like the ringleader in a femme street gang. Life felt exciting again, new and lusty. I was in bloom.

While I've given up the extreme flounce, my wardrobe is more colourful and just plain fun than it has been in decades. Not a single thread of the uniform remains. Still, this past year has been a difficult one: minor surgery; the selling of one house and the building of another; my lover's wonky mammogram that turned out to be nothing. I lost 20 pounds from exertion or stress, and now everything hangs off me. But I knew I had hit bottom when I realized how often I have been wearing the clothes that other people bought me. I had been wearing beige. I needed to get back on track. Get back to me.

My most recent clothing purchase was a pair of pink plaid running shoes and three popsicle-coloured cotton sweaters. I need some summer skirts, a pair of sea blue flats, a great sheer nude shade of lipstick. But mostly I need to be brave again, I need to take a stand (in kitten heels, if I so desire) and remind myself that if clothes are too minor to matter, then what I'm wearing shouldn't wear on anyone's political sensibilities. No one will ever again, explicitly or implicitly, send me to the bathroom to change. I am fearless, I am feminist ... and I am fabulously dressed. ❀

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Women's studies professors tell us that *Herizons* is an invaluable source of feminist news and analysis, covering topical issues, public policy debates. *Herizons* research is useful in their classes and we have had positive feedback from students attesting to its value as well.

HERE'S WHAT PROFESSORS ARE SAYING ABOUT *HERIZONS*:

"I love having copies of *Herizons* to hand out to my intro women's studies students!"

*Ann Braithwaite, Ph.D., Assistant Professor,
Women's Studies, University of Prince Edward Island
Charlottetown, PEI, Canada*

"*Herizons* always makes my work for women exciting and worthwhile."

*Cheryl Gosselin, Women's Studies Coordinator,
Bishop's University
Lennoxville, QC, Canada*



***Herizons*, a great teaching tool for women's studies professors.**