

# Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Domestic Space

—Kathy Mezei

On April 7, 2001, a workshop on “Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Domestic Space,” a new and burgeoning field of study, was held at Harbour Centre, sponsored by the Institute for the Humanities, the Department of Humanities, and Graduate Liberal Studies. About sixty participants attended the daylong workshop. Presentations ranged from nineteenth century aboriginal domestic spaces, writers’ studies and scientific laboratories in private homes to the modern apartment,

Downtown Eastside, and contemporary backyards in Vancouver. Disciplines represented included architecture, history, anthropology, sociology, art and literature, and presenters included artists, architects, novelists as well as academics. Debates continued on how to represent and discuss the practice, theory and history of domestic space in Vancouver and BC. Participants also discussed ways to continue the conversations begun at the workshop.

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## Denise Riley at the Kootenay School of Writing

—Ted Byrne

Denise Riley first came to our attention at the Kootenay School of Writing when the poem “The Castalian Spring” was published in *Raddle Moon*. “The Castalian Spring,” reprinted in *Penguin Modern Poets 10* and *Selected Poems* (2001), is an erudite, self-mocking investigation of lyric subjectivity, a display of the heightened “linguistic unease” such a subject suffers, and a deployment of irony as a tactical response or “counterinterpellation.” The argument of the poem is coextensive with that of her latest work in philosophy and social theory, *The Words of Selves* (2000). That work investigates the ways in which our identity-formations in language make liars of us all, subject to and struggling against the control of an affectivity inherent in language itself. A gloss of “The Castalian Spring,” in fact, forms part of the central chapter of the latter book. The book is errant, prodigal and wonderfully useful, seeming to speak at one and the same moment of poetics and language practice, or pragmatics. It deals extensively with the poetic function of language, its insistence within language-event, with the metaphorical nature of language, particularly the spatial metaphors that dog the “structure” of thought, metaphors of surface and depth, inside and outside—there is an argument for, or even a practice of the surficial here—but also with naming and identity and their political fluctuations, with solidarity within difference, and with irony as practice.

Some of us read *The Words of Selves* in the context of the KSW’s ongoing seminar, presently called “Stupidity.” *The Words of Selves* expands upon the questions raised in her earlier book *Am I That Name* (1993), which dealt with the category of “women” in history. During her stay in Vancouver she gave a free public lecture at SFU Harbour Centre, co-sponsored by the KSW and the Institute for the Humanities. This was the third in a series of co-sponsored lectures that had previously included Barrett Watten and Amiel Alcalay. Her talk was entitled “The Right To Be Lonely,” and consisted of an application of the ideas developed in *The Words of Selves* to the recently expanding social definitions of the family. In particular,

it returns to questions of spatial metaphor, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion, and the slipperiness of these categories and social facts. Here’s a taste.

The ‘traditional’ family’s demise is coinciding with a furious intensification of its variants. It’s as if one must count as a family in order to count, while the numbers of those living alone, across western Europe at least, rise sharply. Yet as households of single people grow, the admission of even occasional loneliness remains taboo, while to be without visible social ties is inexcusable... The question ‘how single is single’ could ask: how might such singleness be considered neither pathological nor be swept up, in an ostentatious de-pathologizing, into a compulsive sociability?... Might a properly recognised state of singleness (to wrench the notion of ‘recognition’ away from its usual oppressively gregarious tone) recast that desolate and resentment-prone metaphoricality of social exclusion—might it also somewhat allay the burden, or at least the embarrassed self-reproach, of those who may find themselves living in solitude at the very same time as they live within the family?

The KSW brought Denise Riley to Vancouver with the help of the British Council and the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs. In addition to the public lecture at SFU Harbour Centre, she attended a session of “Stupidity,” animated a poetry anti-workshop over several days, gave a public reading at the KSW and talked and shopped with local poets. Denise Riley has taught, conducted research, lectured and read her poetry extensively in Europe, Australia and the US, but this was only her second visit to Canada. Other books by Denise Riley include *Marxism for Infants* (1976), *War in the Nursery: Theories of the Child and Mother* (1983), *Dry Air* (1985), *Poets on Writing: Britain, 1970-1991* (1992), and *Mop Mop Georgette* (1993). A study of social philosophies, policies and ethical theories from 1890 to 1914, provisionally titled *A Condition of England*, is forthcoming.