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CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES

**CEAH Fellowship for Scholarship and Creative Activity**

Deadlines: October 3 (Fall) / February 1 (Spring)

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**Applicant Name:** Diane Price Herndl

**Department:** English and Women's Studies

**Academic Title/Rank:** Associate Professor

**Project Title:** "Breast Cancer as Metaphor"

**Amount Requested:** \$5000

**Departmental Address:**

**Phone:**

**E-mail:**

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**SECTION A. Project Summary (half page / 150 words)**

I would like funding to finish Chapter 4 of my ongoing book-project, *Thinking Through Breast Cancer*, an interdisciplinary study that critically examines the way contemporary literature and culture structure the breast cancer experience. The book as a whole focuses on the body and technology through the intersections between narrative ethics, feminist theories, and disability studies. "Breast Cancer as Metaphor" will examine works from different literary and artistic genres: Margaret Atwood's novel *Bodily Harm*; the film *Body Beautiful*; Lucille Clifton's and Marilyn Hacker's cancer poetry; and photography of post-mastectomy bodies. I argue that breast cancer heightens awareness of the female body as either *female* or as *body*, so that the patient comes to symbolize the way women in general are treated in our culture. I explore what it means to blur the distinction between wellness and illness in this way, both to the culture at large and to the patient in particular.

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**SECTION B. Intellectual Justification and Need (1 page / 300 words)**

My first book, *Invalid Women*, takes up a number of questions about embodiment and representation within the context of a historical period that largely defined all femininity as “invalid.” I grapple there with questions of the rhetoric of punishment and blame (to what extent does one bear *responsibility* for illness?); with problems of discursive framing of bodies (how do we define “invalid”?); and with the interactions of different cultural domains of representation (in what ways do medical and literary representations overlap?). I envision this new book as extending those questions into postmodern issues of technology and the “posthuman.” There are books about how to cope with breast cancer, the attempt to cure it, and the politics of the disease, but none that address the place of the breast cancer patient in culture, or that offer meditations about treatments and being the recipient of medical care, or that critically examine the representation of breast cancer in art and literature. This book addresses those lacks.

While this book will probably speak primarily to academics, I also want to address women who are facing the disease but without wanting to surrender their right to think through it. To that end, my goal is to write in accessible language, although the issues I’ll be dealing with are clearly drawn from postmodern theories. Even so, I envision this book as a kind of academic sequel to *Invalid Women*. The fields of medical humanities and disability studies, though it seems like they should be comfortable complements to one another, are largely estranged. I hope to use this book to build a bridge between the two emerging disciplines.

The book will have three main sections: “Writing Breast Cancer” examines autobiography; “Reading Breast Cancer” interprets fiction, poetry, and the visual arts; and “Breast Cancer Ethics” looks at advice books, advertising campaigns, and legal decisions from the perspective of postmodern, feminist ethics. “Breast Cancer as Metaphor” will be a central piece of section two. The book will be interspersed with small meditation chapters on critical terms in the experience of cancer and treatment that will work to link real and shared experiences in cancer treatment to abstract theory.

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**SECTION C. Intended Results (1 page / 300 words)**

I have been publishing in feminist theory and the medical humanities for almost twenty years. In addition to *Invalid Women* (which is still in print after twelve years), I have written essays for *The NWSA Journal*, *Women's Studies*, *American Literary History*, *The Hemingway Review*, and several book collections on literature and medicine. I was also chosen to take part in a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminar in 2000 on Disability Studies.

The book is already well underway, and some pieces of it are already in print (and already being cited). The chapter on Audre Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* appeared in 2002; an essay on the relation between medical humanities and disability studies (which will be part of the introduction to the book) appeared this spring in *PMLA*; I have given invited lectures at Louisiana State University, University of California-Berkeley, Muhlenberg College, and the Modern Language Association annual conference, based on four other chapters from the book; I have presented other pieces of the book in several conference papers. One of the chapters on breast cancer autobiography has received a very positive "revise and resubmit" from *Signs*. Two presses with whom I have worked before—University of North Carolina Press and Rutgers University Press—have both expressed interest in the book, as has W. W. Norton.

I received a Faculty Professional Development Assignment in 2003-04 to work on the book, and finished almost all of the basic research for the book, and drafted many of the sections of it. Since then, my teaching load has slowed my progress; I would welcome funding to be able to set aside my summer for full-time scholarly work.

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**SECTION D. Budget (Check one)**

**I am applying for salary support (no need to submit a budget)**

**I am applying for an award in the form of a grant account**

Submit an itemized budget with the printed version of your application for awards to be taken as a grant account.

**SECTION E. Curriculum Vitae**

Include in the printed version of your proposal a curriculum vitae that focuses on your research or creative activity during the last five years. The vitae should not exceed two pages.

Attached

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**SECTION F. Acknowledgment of Previous Support (check one)**

I have not received a summer-support award/summer fellowship from the Center for Excellence in the Arts & Humanities or the Council for Scholarship in the Humanities.

I have received a summer-support award from the Center for Excellence in the Arts & Humanities or the Council for Scholarship in the Humanities for the summer of 2003 or before.

List the year(s) and project title(s):

This application is for

a new project

a different phase of the work previously funded

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