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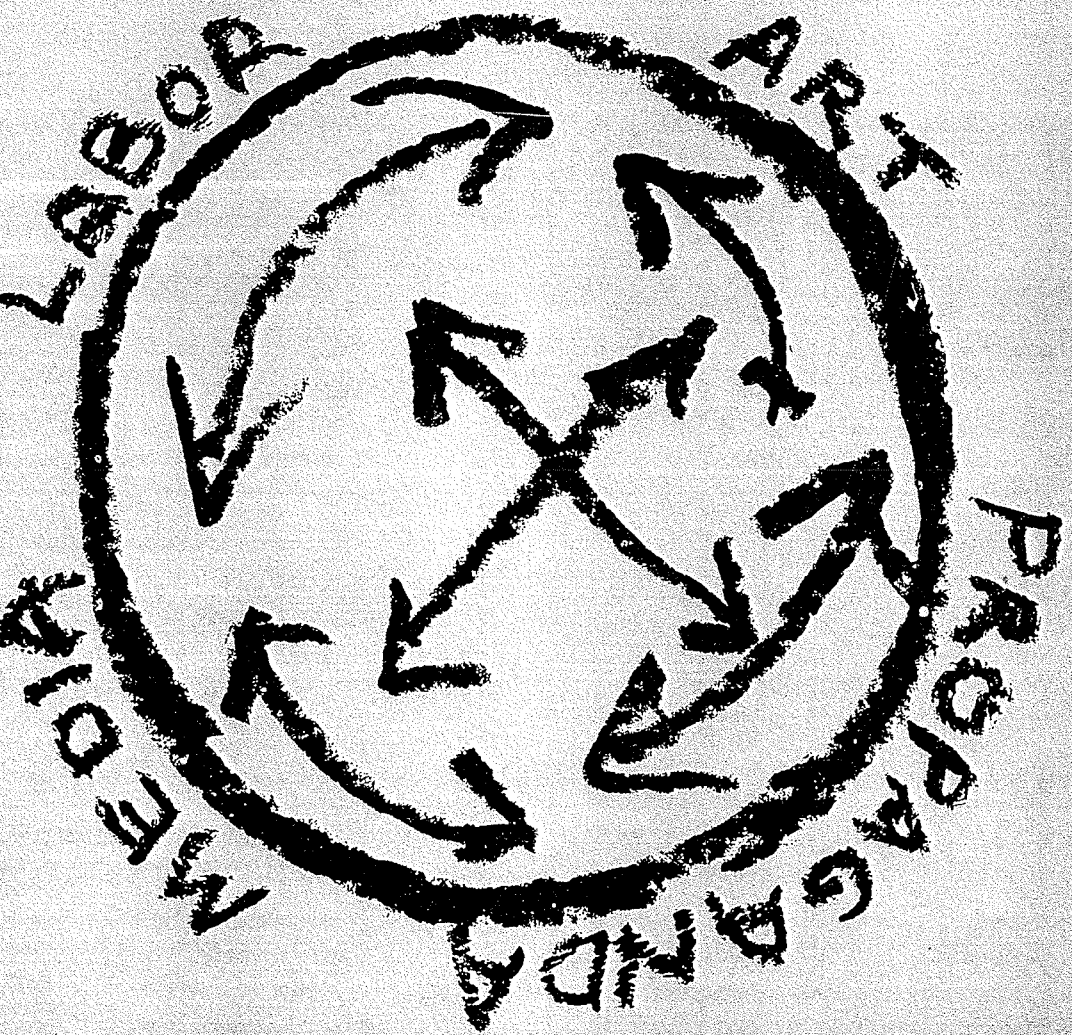

Jan Breitenbach

HERESIES #9

WOMEN ORGANIZED
WOMEN DIVIDED
PROPAGANDA
MEDIA
ART
LABOR

Women ORGANIZED DIVIDED

Power Propaganda & Backlash

Vol. 3 No.1 Issue 9

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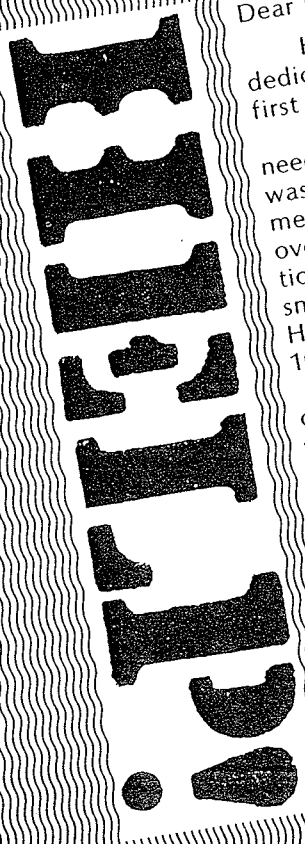

Dear Reader,

HERESIES needs money. This is not news. Every publication in this country dedicated to social change is underfinanced. With our ninth issue we make our first desperate plea. **We need your help.**

We started a feminist art and politics journal because we knew there was a need to understand the relationship of art to the world that devours it. The need was even deeper than we realized. In 1976, when we sent out our collective statement and a request for support, the response from the feminist community was overwhelmingly positive. Since 1978 we have received yearly grants from the National Endowment and the New York State Council as well as contributions from small foundations and individuals. We sell out 6,000 copies of every issue of HERESIES and with #9 we are pushing our print run to 8,000 (and eventually 10,000). In many ways we have been a smashing success.

Why, then, isn't HERESIES self-supporting? Until this issue we have charged only $3.00 for a 128-page anthology, because we wanted to reach as many women as possible. We are now forced to raise our cover price to $4.25 and to cut the magazine to 96 pages in order to keep up with double-digit inflation. We also need money to do major direct mail promotion for subscriptions. The majority of our magazines are now sold through bookstores (which take 40%) or distributors (which take 50%). **Only if you subscribe to HERESIES does the collective receive the full amount.**

If you don't already subscribe to HERESIES, please do it now. And get your friends to subscribe. Any additional amount you can contribute will be enormously helpful. Please sit down and write us a check as soon as possible! (Any contribution of $100 or more is tax-deductible if made out to The Institute for New Communications Inc.)

We also want your ideas, comments and criticisms. In the future we intend to publish your letters as well as continuing our open evaluation meetings after each issue. Four new issues have been in the works for months now and over 50 women have been working on them all that time.

HERESIES is committed to remaining a feminist collective. While this is not always the most efficient way to run a magazine, it is the most effective way of running this kind of magazine—one committed to new social structures and the direct participation of many women. In the last three years we have come a long way toward making HERESIES self-sufficient. We have no intention of stopping here. But backlash against the feminist movement is well financed and we are not. This is our first major financial crunch, and the first time we have asked you, our readers, to help us out. We must draw on the community of support that HERESIES has created in order to insure our future.

Even Heretics need stakes. We hope to hear from you soon.

—The HERESIES Collective

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Please enter my subscription

for **one** year (4 issues): ☐ $15 (individuals) ☐ $24 (institutions)

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Included is my contribution of : ☐ $10 ☐ $50 ☐ $100 ☐ other

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Editorial Collective
Joan Braderman
Marion Cajori
Harmony Hammond
Suzanne Harris
Sue Heinemann
Elizabeth Hess
Lucy R. Lippard
May Stevens

Design
Cynthia Carr

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Vivian Browne
Geoffrey Fox
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HERESIES is an idea-oriented journal devoted to the examination of art and politics from a feminist perspective. We believe that what is commonly called art can have a political impact, and that in the making of art and of all cultural artifacts our identities as women play a distinct role. We hope that HERESIES will stimulate dialogue around radical political and aesthetic theory, encourage the writing of the history of *femina sapiens*, and generate new creative energies among women. It will be a place where diversity can be articulated. We are committed to the broadening of the definition and function of art.

HERESIES is structured as a collective of feminists, some of whom are also socialists, marxists, lesbian feminists or anarchists; our fields include painting, sculpture, writing, anthropology, literature, performance, art history, architecture and filmmaking. While the themes of the individual issues will be determined by the collective, each issue will have a different editorial staff made up of women who want to work on that issue as well as members of the collective. Proposals for issues may be conceived and presented to the HERESIES Collective by groups of women not associated with the collective. Each issue will take a different visual form, chosen by the group responsible. HERESIES will try to be accountable to and in touch with the international feminist community. An open evaluation meeting will be held after the appearance of each issue. Topics for issues will be announced well in advance in order to collect material from many sources. It is possible that satellite pamphlets and broadsides will be produced continuing the discussion of each central theme. In addition, HERESIES provides training for women who work editorially, in design and in production, both on-the-job and through workshops.

As women, we are aware that historically the connections between our lives, our arts and our ideas have been suppressed. Once these connections are clarified they can function as a means to dissolve the alienation between artist and audience, and to understand the relationship between art and politics, work and workers. As a step toward a demystification of art, we reject the standard relationship of criticism to art within the present system, which has often become the relationship of advertiser to product. We will not advertise a new set of genius-products just because they are made by women. We are not committed to any particular style or aesthetic, nor to the competitive mentality that pervades the art world. Our view of feminism is one of process and change, and we feel that in the process of this dialogue we can foster a change in the meaning of art.

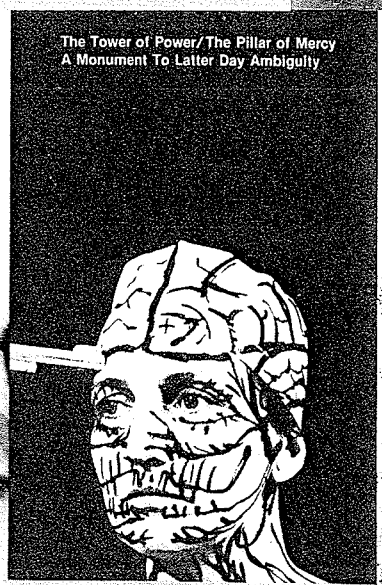
HERESIES Collective: Ida Applebroog, Sue Heinemann, Elizabeth Hess, Arlene Ladden, Lucy R. Lippard, Melissa Meyer, Carrie Rickey, Elizabeth Sacre, Elke Solomon

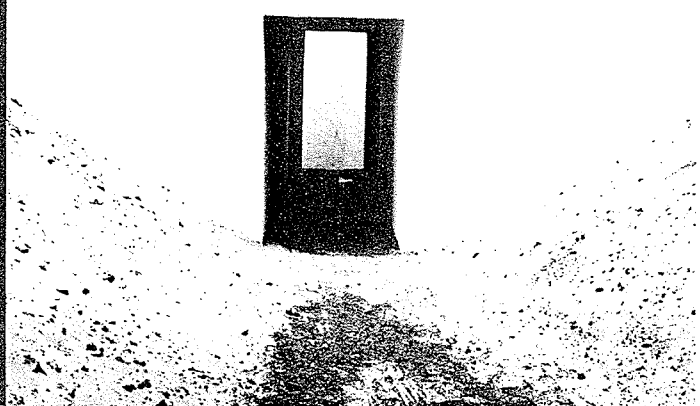
Associate Members: Patsy Beckert, Joan Braderman, Mary Beth Edelson, Su Friedrich, Janet Froelich, Harmony Hammond, Joyce Kozloff, Marty Pottenger, Miriam Schapiro, Amy Sillman, Pat Steir, May Stevens, Joan Snyder, Michelle Stuart, Susana Torre, Elizabeth Weatherford, Sally Webster, Nina Yankowitz
Staff: Sue Heinemann, Alesia Kunz, Sandy De Sando

"By Wa[illegible]tting You In
Since I Oh[illegible]Have Not Yet
Found A W[illegible]Not Abstract"

Geometric form[illegible]ture, as building blocks for both or[illegible]anic matter. When visible to the eye th[illegible]rns. They set the rhythm for the structure. Wo/man made geometric form comes from the attempt to measure the relativity of the universe. It is the language of large concepts in physics and philosophy. My work tries to visualize the point of recognition where wo/man exists, halfway between the microcosm and the macrocosm. It is my idealism that a wholistic view, presented in a form where the maximum perception can be had through the senses, is propaganda for thinking beyond the wo/man made structures of our world culture. Perhaps we can learn that the boundaries of race, sex, color, creed and class are highly artificial when seen from another perspective.

—Suzanne Harris, 1979

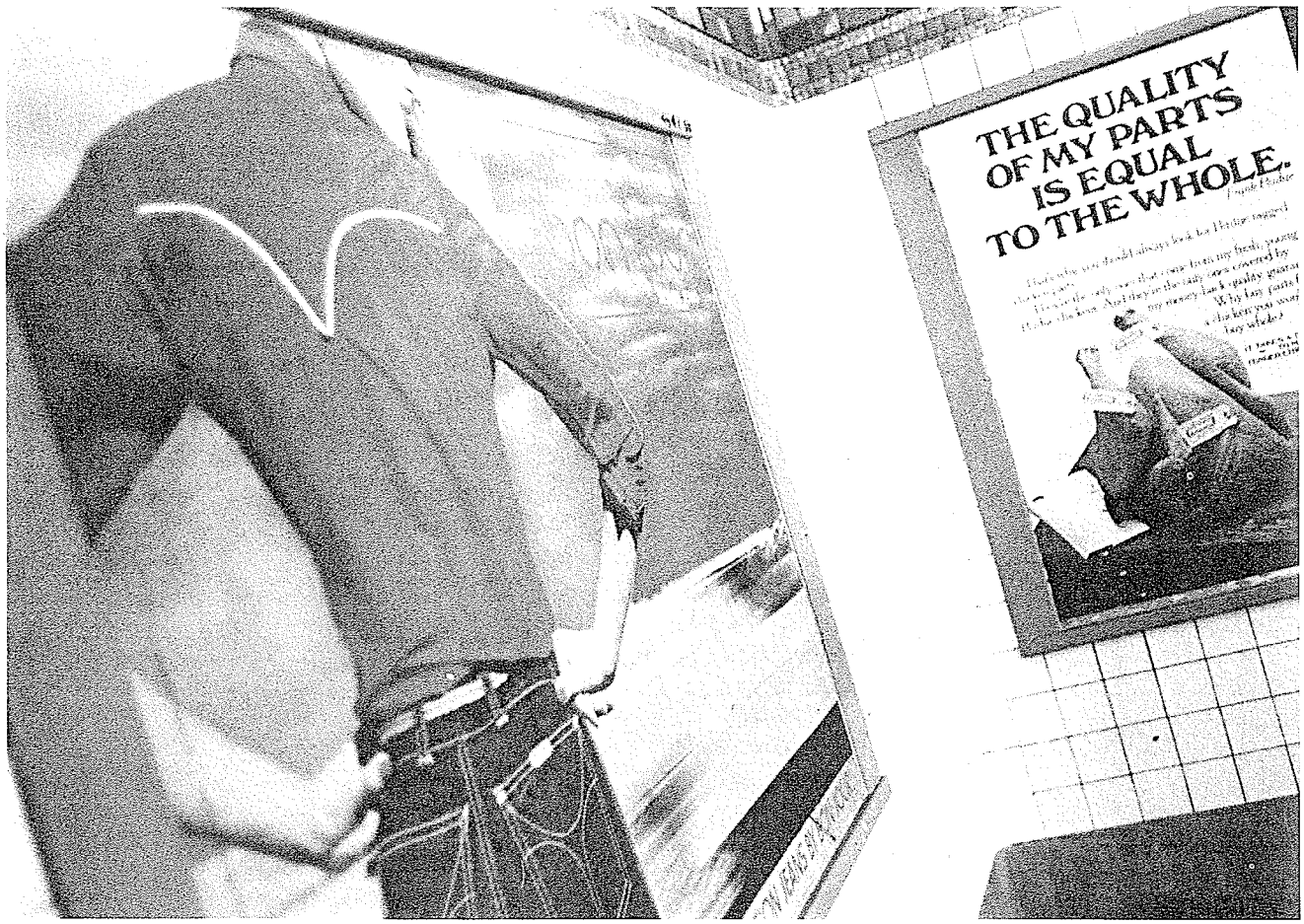


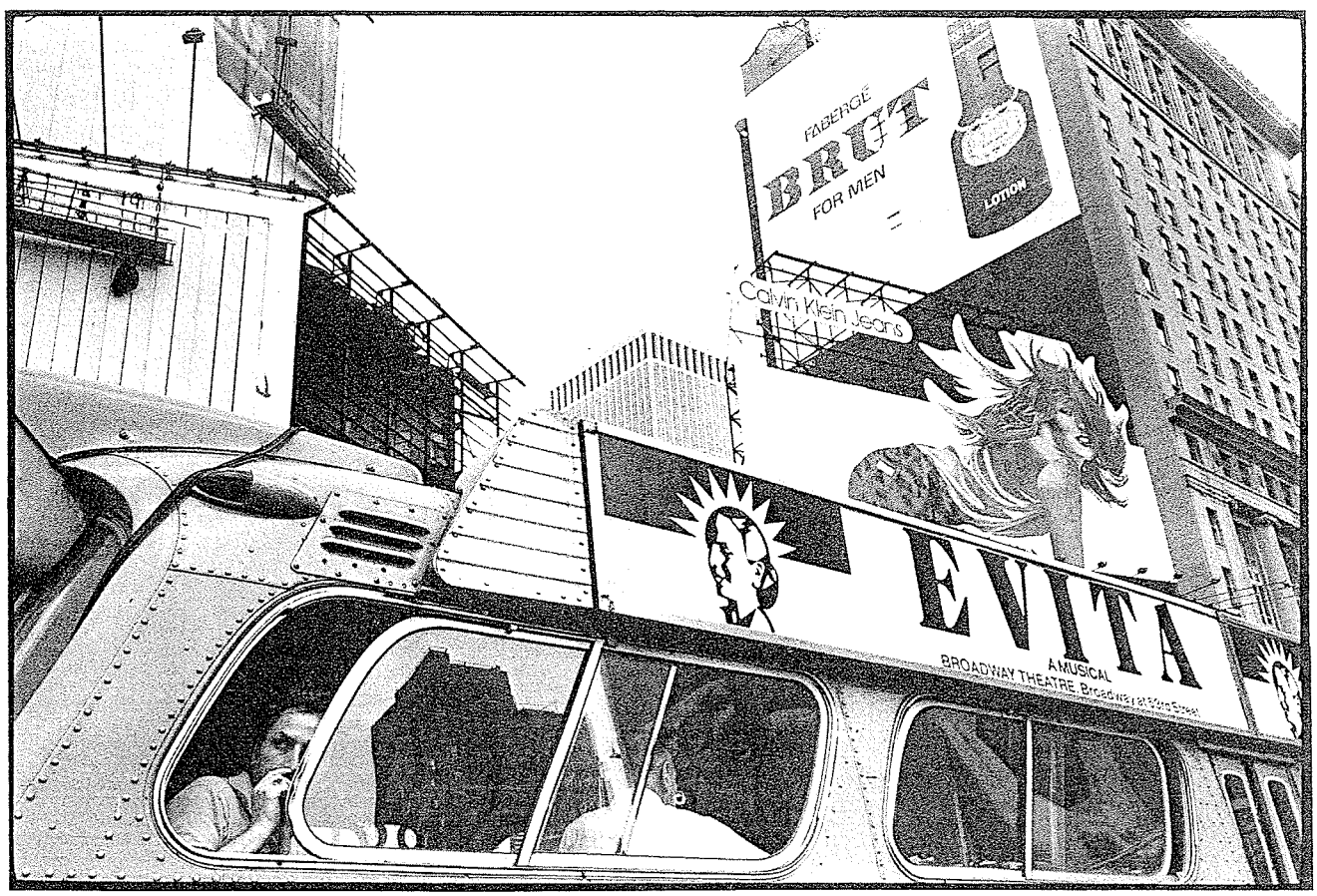


"Androgyny is not and was not meant to be the answer to sexual politics. Freedom from repression and dominance is. Freedom of choice is. Freedom of contact with and expression of our feelings and needs was not meant to be construed as riding shod over others or an exchange of roles. Social change is threatening to the dominant ideology. Backlash, while undesirable, is inevitable. Shall we meekly go back to our corners, put back on our costumes and apologize for our transgressions?"

SUZANNE HARRIS (1940-1979) was an editor on our collective. This issue is dedicated to her.

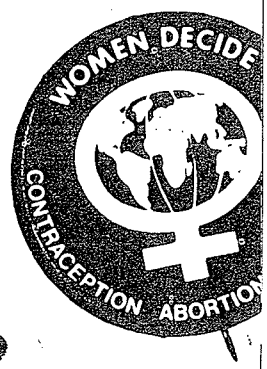
Media Photos I by Lyn Hughes

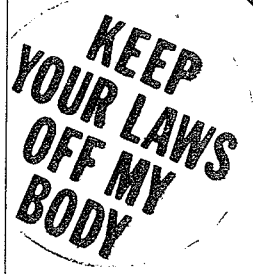




©1980 Lyn Hughes

Lyn Hughes, photographer and occasional performance artist, lives in Brooklyn and is currently working on a photographic project on the visual anthropology of her own culture, especially in terms of the representation of sexuality.





*A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Socialist Feminism**

by Barbara Ehrenreich

We sometimes forget, as the "second wave" of feminism enters what is really its second generation, that our movement is rooted in a broad stream of radical upsurge—New Left, socialist and anti-racist. Feminism inherits many of its insights, concerns and even personnel from the left, just as any revived American left will have to acknowledge the impact of feminism as a radical force in our society.

Yet, at the level of theory—the attempt to come to a common understanding of the world and how to change it—the dialogue between feminism and the left has not been a resounding success. You are probably familiar with some of the cruder forms the exchange has taken: on the part of the left, the question of which is really the "primary contradiction"—class, race or sex—and the related question of which came first—class society or male supremacy, property or rape? The verdict, popular in certain left circles in the mid-seventies, was that class and race were so far ahead in terms of primacy that feminism could only be understood as a distraction invented by the petty bourgeoisie.

Then, of course, on the other side, some feminists have denounced the entire left as a "male movement" and socialism as the most advanced form of patriarchy. In the seventies, the interface between feminism and the left became charged with rigid moral superiority, terror and, above all, guilt. Not exactly a promising atmosphere for the creative development of theory and strategy. In fact, a funny thing happened to socialist feminist theory under these conditions (and I'm not talking about "high theory"—existentialist, Freudian, Lacanian or whatever—but about the ways in which we rank-and-file feminists were thinking): "theory" became a method of *evading* any contradictions or tensions. I think because they were just too scary.

To caricature the situation, the basic line went like this: "There is sexism, racism, class oppression, homophobia, imperialism, and all these things reinforce each other and prop each other up to make one big evil glop which will inevitably be defeated by the appropriate mix of feminism, anti-racism, class struggle and gay rights marches." In other words, what we called "theory" was little more than a *list*.

In some ways, the socialist feminist "list" was a real advance. It's better to have several items, rather than just one—like class, or testosterone—to explain everything. And it's important to acknowledge the connections between the items. But what this approach could not acknowledge is that there are some *real* contradictions between the items on the "list." Feminism, class consciousness and racial or national identity do not neatly dovetail in some revolutionary scheme of things. They also contradict and subvert each other.

Let me put it very concretely. We are all pulled in at least two directions. On the one hand, as feminists, we are drawn to the community of women and to its political idealization as a sisterhood of free women. It is this sisterhood, this collectivity of women, that we believe to be the agent of revolutionary change.

On the other hand, we are pulled by what Jessica Benjamin has called "fleshly, familial ties" to a community of women *and* men—fathers, lovers, brothers, sons, neighbors, co-workers. And we know, for all our criticisms of the patriarchal family, that this community of women and men is not just a swamp of immanence and degradation for women. The love and dependencies which tie us (not only heterosexual women) to this community are not just an expression of false consciousness. In fact, such communities, based on kinship and thousands of shared experiences and expectations, are the ground out of which comes our sense of *class* solidarity.

When I think of myself as a member of a class, I mentally throw in my lot with my brother, my son, other men who share more or less common life chances and expectations. When I think of myself as a member of a sisterhood of women, I mentally abstract myself from immediate family or community ties, and focus on what I have in common with women who may, in some cases, live in vastly different circumstances from my own.

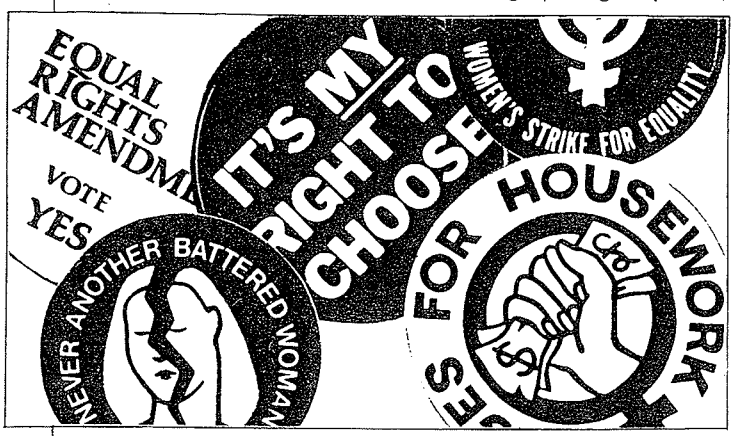
The point is that both ways of imaginatively situating ourselves are true to our experience. We exist in two kinds of "community"—as women in a class of women and men, and as women in the sisterhood of women. Both are real. But we do not have a feminist politics that expresses the totality of our experience as women—"the both and the and" that Camille Bristow and Bonnie Johnson have spoken about. We have "partial feminisms," and I am afraid that these partial feminisms only end up doing violence to some part of ourselves.

Radical feminism is one of these "partial feminisms"—a feminist politics that recognizes (not without some qualifications) only our allegiance to other women. But, paradoxical-

Barbara Ehrenreich is an editor at Seven Days *and a member of the HealthRight Collective. Her most recent book is* For Her Own Good.
©1980 Barbara Ehrenreich

ly, the more it insists on an allegiance to women and women only, the more it turns against those women (the great majority of us) who are tied in to the community of women *and* men. In the most Jacobin, separatist versions of radical feminism, "sisterhood" comes to embrace only a tiny minority of wholly "woman-identified women." All others are complicit with the enemy—and suspect.

In feminist theory, it is the *mother* who symbolizes this complicity, for no one else is so thoroughly caught up in or,



from one point of view, *compromised by* the "fleshly, familial ties" which bind us to men as well as to other women. Feminist theory, again and again, points to the mother, either metaphorically or in person, as the source of our problems. She (at best, unwittingly) manufactured our gender while we were still infants, repressed our sexuality, bound our feet, curled our hair or straightened it, and in general demanded that we too be dutiful daughters—future mothers.

The critique of the mother runs through Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and on into this conference. To give just two examples: Lucy Gilbert and Paula Webster state flatly that "the mother was our original victimizer." Reflecting on the radical feminist experience, Jessica Benjamin asks whether our freedom as women "must be bought by the betrayal and denial of our mothers." The simplest and ostensibly most militant answer is "yes": insofar as she has consorted with the enemy or, worse, conspired to reproduce gender, the mother is guilty, and we must denounce her.

This particular thrust of feminist politics is also visible from outside the movement. The anti-feminist charge that we are against motherhood and the family is not entirely a distortion, and the anti-feminist movement is not entirely a result of right-wing manipulation. If some women—women who by all rights should be on our side—can say they feel "attacked" by feminism, it may be because they have sensed the undercurrent of anti-woman anger in what is still a "partial feminism."

The other kind of "partial feminism" is something we commonly find on the left. It is a politics which readily recognizes the "rights of women," but, as Linda Gordon has pointed out, is hostile to any *collectivity* of women that abstracts us from the collectivities of class or nation. Contemporary Marxist-Leninism offers "women's liberation" but fears sisterhood (and is usually terrified of lesbianism). Our liberation is supposed to come about through the struggles of a class (women enmeshed in the lives of men) and not through our collective efforts as independent women; our feminist utopian visions, our glimpses of a women's culture, will have to be abandoned.

At the extreme, the leftist feminine ideal becomes the woman who is most securely enmeshed in the ties of family, community and class—the long-suffering mother. Stalin's heroic mothers. Or, from the iconography of the more recent left, the woman liberation fighter with a baby on her back and a rifle in her arms. The mother-as-ideal comes out too in the politics of reproductive freedom: if radical feminism has at times veered dangerously toward anti-natalism, the left and leftist feminists sometimes go too far the other way—seeing all birth control programs for the poor and people of the Third World as "genocidal," or seeming to reject sterilization for women under any circumstances.

If I could label the two "partial feminisms" I have talked about in a somewhat metaphorical way, I would say we have had a choice between, on the one hand, the politics of the daughters; on the other, the politics of the mothers. And as Elizabeth Janeway said in the opening panel at this conference (though she meant it in a somewhat more literal way), it may be time for a reconciliation. We need a feminist politics that recognizes both the mother and the daughter in us, both our collective identity as women and our ties to a class of men and women, and we need to develop this politics in such a way that we do not—out of fear or guilt—evade the contradictions or flatten them out.

Let me end with some questions which might point us toward that next step—toward a feminist politics that is both revolutionary *and* true to the totality of our experience as women. Can we build a political community of women, or is sisterhood just a sentiment? There are many sub-questions here, but what concerns me most right now is the narrowness and exclusivity that so often characterizes feminist projects and communities. Linda Gordon describes feminist communities today as "often small, self-conscious, tense, ridden with moralism and right-lineism." I think she's right, and we have to ask how much of our anger has been directed toward other women, particularly those who show any sign of "complicity." We talk about universal sisterhood, but, too often in practice we are horrified by a woman who wears spike heels or black eye-liner or (god forbid) calls her women friends "girls." There is a class bias in this, but also fear. Do we have the strength now for a more generous and open form of sisterhood—one that can meet other women where *they* are?

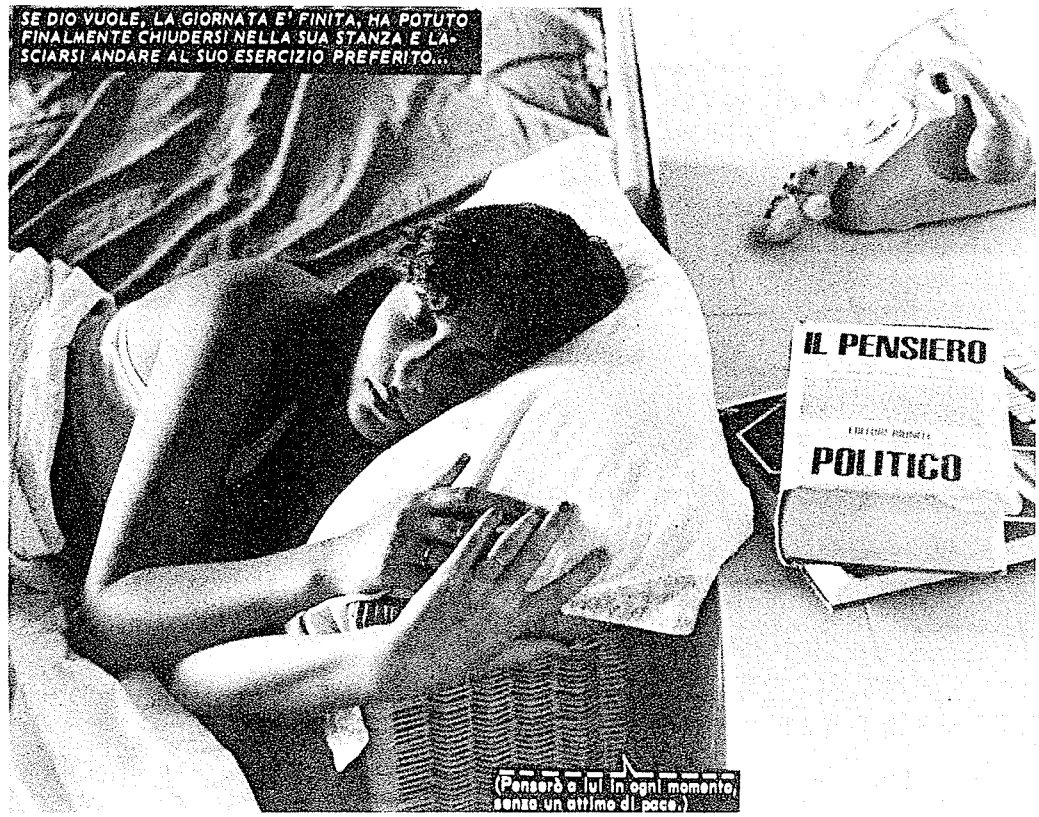
I think we need less "theory," and *more* analysis. We have roughly 329 theoretical syntheses of Marxism and feminism on the books and in the journals, but only the sketchiest understanding of the real situation of women's lives today and how they are changing. We are vaguest of all when it comes to Third World women—the enormous *female* peasantry or the growing *female* proletariat being created by multinational corporations. If we are serious about the collectivity of women as a revolutionary force, then where is our analysis of the objective factors drawing us together, or separating us? Is the objective basis for sisterhood declining, as compared to the 19th century, or is it expanding as women leave their homes and enter a sharply sex-segregated labor force?

Linda Gordon has challenged us to develop our feminist utopian vision. In some ways, we have been longer on visions than we have been on analysis, but too often our "visions" have been exotic, spiritualist, impossible to connect with ordinary women's needs and fantasies. I think we need a vision of human community which grows out of the contradictions we live, one which addresses both the "mother" and the "daughter" in each of us—both our needs for collectivity and for independence, both our capacity for nurturance and for self-reliance, both our ongoing ties to men and our emerging strength as a sisterhood of women.

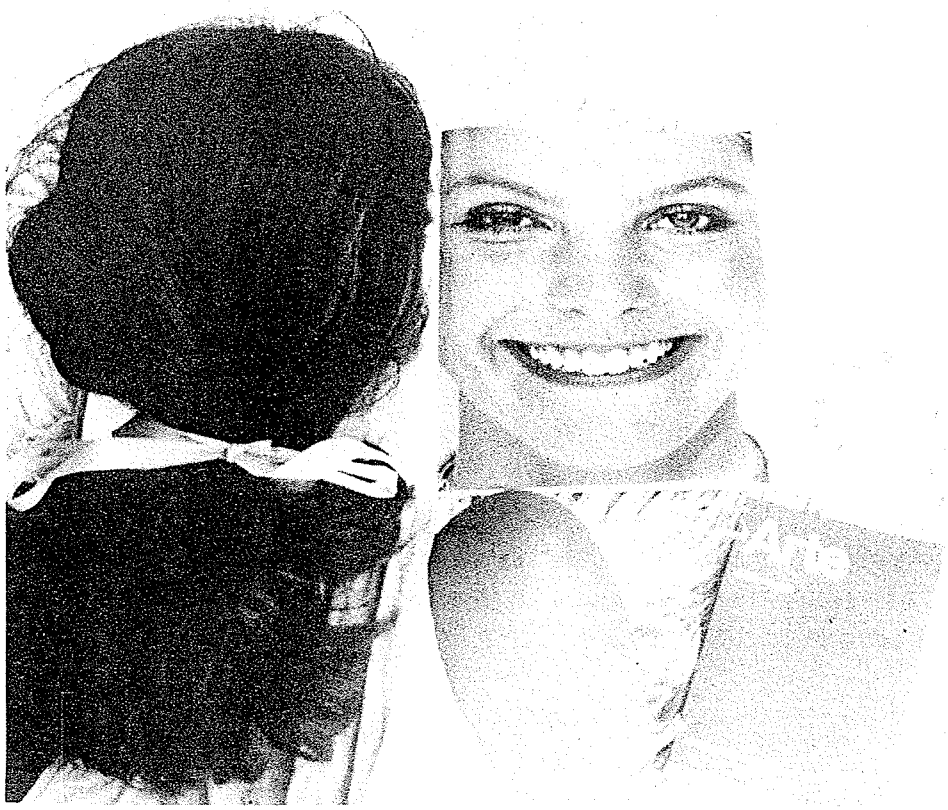
*This talk was first given as a commentary on the papers for a panel on "The Personal and the Political" at "The Second Sex—Thirty Years Later," a conference on feminist theory commemorating the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's major work, held at New York University, Sept. 27-29, 1979. The papers discussed include Jessica Benjamin's "Starting from the Left and Going Beyond," Camille Bristow and Bonnie Johnson's "Both and And," Linda Gordon's "Individual and Community in the History of Feminism," as well as Lucy Gilbert and Paula Webster's "Femininity: The Sickness unto Death" (which was given at another panel, on "Heterosexuality and Power").

Myths and Clichés

by Nicole Gravier



Nicole Gravier, "As God wills it, the day is finished, she has finally been able to close herself in her room and give reign to her favorite exercise. . . ."
"I will think of him every moment, constantly." Color photograph from *Myths and Clichés*, 1979.



Nicole Gravier, "She is sad, so sad. . . ." Color photograph from *Myths and Clichés*, 1979.

Nicole Gravier is a French artist who has lived in Paris and Milan since 1971. She calls her large color photographs from the Myths and Clichés *series "a work of decodification," in which she exposes the concepts of happiness, well-being, beauty, success and "culture" in the mass media. In her "Love Story," she uses books and other props as ironic vehicles of "a certain ambiguity between the true and false, the object and its representation, the real and the staged, and between identity and posture."*

©1980 Nicole Gravier

Edie and Ruthy

ONCE
two small girls named Edie and Ruthy were sitting on the stoop steps. They were talking about the real world of boys. Because of this, they kept their skirts pulled tight around their knees. A gang of boys who lived across the street spent at least one hour of every Saturday afternoon pulling up girls' dresses. They needed to see the color of a girl's underpants in order to scream outside the candy store, Edie wears pink panties.

Ruthy said anyway she liked to play with those boys. They did more things. Edie said she hated to play with them. They hit and picked up her skirt. Ruthy agreed. It *was* wrong of them to do this. But, she said, they ran around the block a lot, had races and played war on the corner. Edie said it wasn't *that* good.

Ruthy said, another thing: Edie, you could be a soldier if you're a boy.

So? What's so good about that?

Well, you could fight for your country.

Edie said, I don't want to.

What? Edie! Ruthy was a big reader and most interesting reading was about bravery—for instance Roland's Horn at Roncevaux. Her father had been brave and there was often a lot of discussion about this at suppertime. In fact he sometimes modestly said, yes. I suppose I was brave in those days. And so was your mother, he added. Then Ruthy's mother put his boiled egg in front of him where he could see it. Reading about Roland, Ruthy learned that if a country wanted to last, it would require a great deal of bravery. She nearly cried with pity when she thought of Edie and the United States of America.

You don't want to? she asked.

No.

Why, Edie, why?

I don't feel like it.

Why, Edie? How come?

You always start hollering if I don't do what you tell me. I don't always have to say what you tell me. I can say whatever I like.

Yeah, but if you love your country you have to go fight for it. How come you don't want to? Even if you get killed, it's worth it.

Edie said, I don't want to leave my mother.

Your mother? You must be a baby. Your mother?

Edie pulled her skirt very tight over her knees. I don't like it when I don't see her a long time. Like when she went to Springfield to my uncle. I don't like it.

Oh boy! said Ruthy. Oh boy! What a baby! She stood up. She wanted to go away. She just wanted to jump from the top step, run down to the corner and wrestle with someone. She said, you know Edie, this is *my* stoop.

Edie didn't budge. She leaned her chin on her knees and felt sad. She was a big reader too, but she liked The Bobbsey Twins or Honey Bunch at the Seashore. She loved that nice family life. She tried to live it in the three rooms on the fourth floor. Sometimes she called her father Dad, or even Father which surprised him. Who? he asked.

I have to go home now, she said. My cousin Alfred's coming. She looked to see if Ruthy was still mad. Suddenly she saw a dog. Ruthy, she said, getting to her feet. There's a dog coming. Ruthy turned. There *was* a dog about three quarters of the way down the block between the candy store and the grocer's. It was an ordinary middle-sized dog. But it *was* coming. It didn't stop to sniff at curbs or pee on the house fronts. It just trotted steadily along the middle of the sidewalk.

Ruthy watched him. Her heart began to thump and take up too much space inside her ribs. She thought speedily: Oh! A dog has teeth! It's large, hairy, strange. Nobody can say what a dog is thinking. A dog is an animal. You could talk to a dog, but a dog couldn't talk to you. If you said to a dog STOP! a dog would just keep going. If it's angry and bites you, you might get rabies. It will take you about six weeks to die and you will die screaming in agony. Your stomach will turn into a rock and you will have lockjaw. When they find you, your mouth will be paralyzed wide open in your dying scream.

Ruthy said, I'm going right now. She turned as though she'd been directed by some far-off switch. She pushed the hall door open and got safely inside. With one hand she pressed the apartment bell. With the other she held the door shut. She leaned against the glass door as Edie started to bang on it. Let me in Ruthy, let me in, please, oh Ruthy!

I can't. Please Edie, I just can't.

Edie's eyes rolled fearfully toward the walking dog. It's coming. Oh Ruthy, please, please.

No! No! said Ruthy.

The dog stopped right in front of the stoop to hear the screaming and banging. Edie's heart stopped too. But in a minute he decided to go on. He passed. He continued his easy steady pace.

When Ruthy's big sister came down to call them for lunch, the two girls were crying. They were hugging each other and their hair was a mess. You two are nuts, she said. If I was mama, I wouldn't let you play together so much every single day. I mean it.

MANY YEARS LATER
it was Ruthy's fiftieth birthday.

She'd invited three friends. One of the friends was Ann a great traveler. Ann said, I love that story. You've told it

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Grace Paley is a NY writer and activist who was one of the Washington Eleven. She publishes in the New Yorker *and her latest book is* Enormous Changes at the Last Minute.

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by Grace Paley

about 25 times. I don't mind. But let's be serious. She'd been away for a couple of years and wanted to offer witnessing information about several countries. Ruth was afraid she would talk forever. She had planned a family birthday supper for six o'clock. She said, please Ann, just say one good thing and one bad thing about each country.

Ann laughed. OK. One good thing about Chile before the coup: Before the last election, capitalism and socialism were actually debated on radio and TV. One bad thing: The people were still pretty poor and unarmed.

Ruth said, oh shit! What about the American Left? How come they weren't interested till the thing blew? There's more to it.

All right, said Ann, but please I'm not finished. She spoke briefly about Rhodesia, the Soviet Union and Portugal.

Aren't you going to say a word about China? Ruth asked. I'm dying to hear you tell them about China.

Not yet, said Ann. You'll only contradict every word I say, Ruth.

Edie, the oldest friend was there too. She had not been listening to Ann. She was remembering the two children, Ruthy and Edie. You know Ruth, it wasn't exactly like that. You know we *both* ran in and out a lot and I would have slammed the door on you except it was your house—and that slowed me down.

All so long ago and far away, said Louise the third friend. She'd also heard Ruth's story several times. What does it mean to you Ruth? She said she was getting pretty tired of Ann's endless discussions of far-off socialist countries. She wanted to talk about the urban and rural problems of the United States. Political energy should now be centered in the neighborhoods of this city. There, women would have natural leadership and that would be the two giant steps in the right direction. She said, this great center looks like the abandoned colony of some embarrassed imperial power.

Edie agreed. She taught in the city's unhappy high school system. When asked about her work, she said, oh, but the whole thing is hopeless. It's hopeless. She was thinking about the students, the young people. Oh hopeless! She began to cry.

No tears! they shouted. Edie, No! No tears! They had all at different times been quite fierce in the nation's wintry face. Though they sighed for the world's future, they were against despair.

Louise was also concerned about the grand juries which were being called up by federal attorneys all over the country.

Edie wasn't interested. She said, they're going through something. It'll pass.

I doubt it, said Louise. You know that woman in New Haven who was called. I know her. Personally. She wouldn't say a word. She's in jail. They're not kidding.

I'd never open my mouth either, said Ann. Never. She clamped her mouth shut then and there.

I believe you Ann, said Ruth, but suppose you were in Argentina and they had your kid. God, if they had our Letty, I'd maybe say anything. (Letty was the first grandchild. When she came to the door at six o'clock for the family dinner, she'd probably think it was her own birthday party, such a fuss would be made over her green eyes, her curly hair, her new sentences.)

Oh Ruth, you've held up pretty well once or twice, said Louise.

Yes, said Ann, opening her mouth. In fact we were all pretty good that day, we were sitting right up against the horse's knees at the draft board—were you there Edie? And then the goddam horses started to rear and the cops were knocking people on their backs and heads—remember? And Ruth I was watching—you just suddenly plowed in and out of those monsters. You should have been trampled. And you grabbed the captain by his gold buttons and you hollered, You bastard! Get your goddam cavalry out of here. You shook him and shook him.

He ordered them, said Ruth. She put her birthday cake which was apple pie on the table. She sat down. I saw him. He was the responsible person. I saw the whole damn operation. I'd begun to run away but I turned because I was the one in charge; I was the one who was supposed to be there and I saw him give the order. I've never honest to god been so angry.

Ann became cheerful. Oh there's plenty to be angry about right now. Whenever she remembered an energetic action, she forgot her travels and her troubles and became lighthearted.

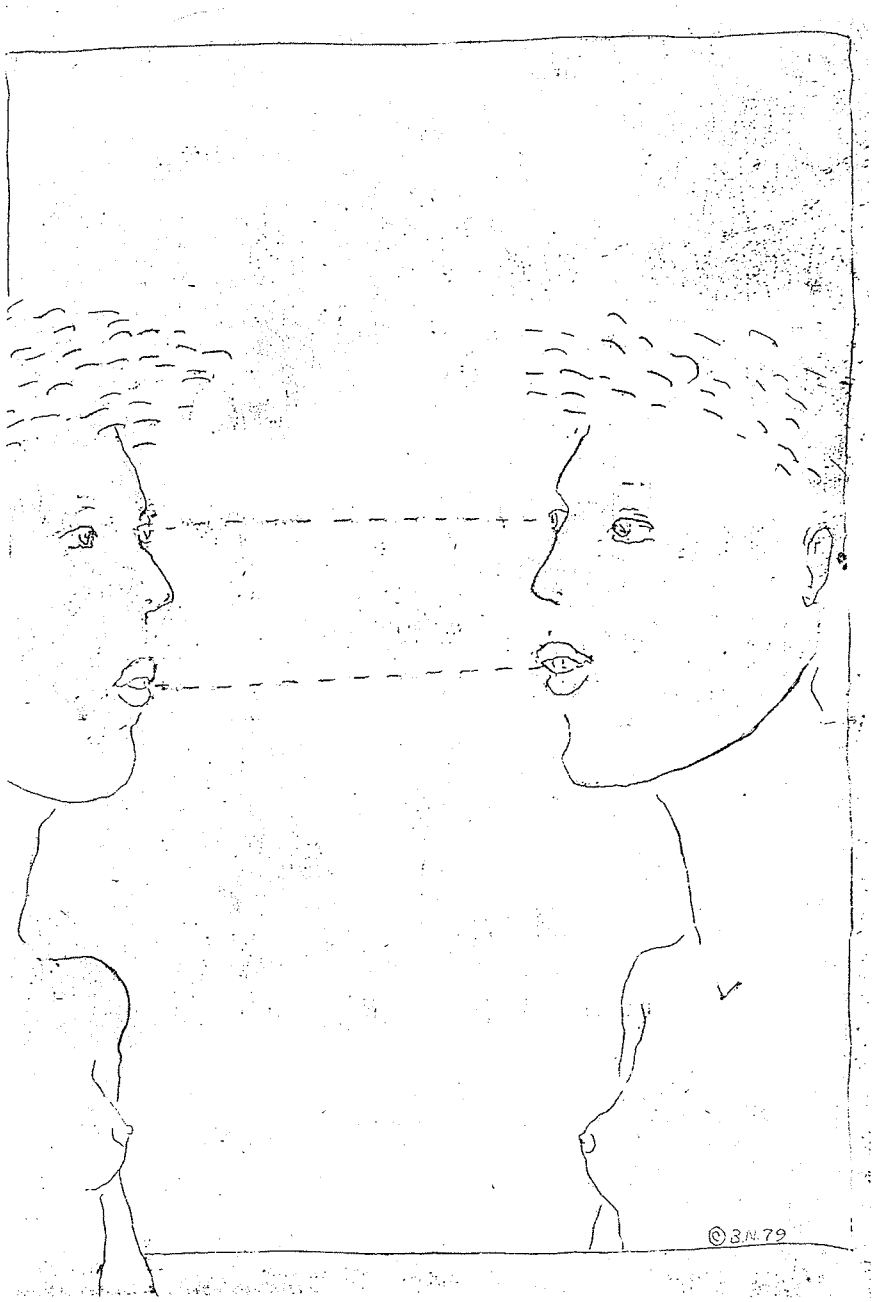
Ruth lit the candles. We've got to blow this out together, she said. I haven't got the wind I used to have.

But you're still full of hot air, said Edie and kissed her, because of time.

Will I see you all next week? asked Ann. She had wrapped her piece of birthday pie in foil to bring it to her mother, a very old lady who waited patiently for little pleasures since death was so slow. Will we meet here? You have the biggest kitchen Ruth.

OK, they all said at once. Yes.

This was because they had talked it over earlier. Even before Ruth told her old childhood story, they had reviewed the facts. They had taken it easy for a couple of years—not Edie (not you Edie!)—advancing the interesting careers of middle age, traveling, baking bread, taking long walks with their grown-up children. They criticized themselves for this. Now, they decided it was about time to gather once again with others. They wanted to go forth with fear and rage (as they had when young) to save the world. Or at least, said Louise, sticking to her analysis, the famous, decaying city which was their home.



Who Needs Woman Heroes?

The heroic imagery that pervades the women's movement is a source of both exhilaration and pain. The exhilaration comes from identifying ourselves with feminist heroes. The pain comes from comparing ourselves and the women around us to these heroic images and seeing how poorly we measure up. The fact that the images of woman-as-hero can cause pain should make us ask whether they are a good thing. In the context of the women's movement, such pain can be justified only if it contributes to the progress of women in general. Although heroic imagery may be inevitable (and I don't propose to explore that issue here), its progressive nature is open to question. At the heart of this question lies a contradiction which both our pleasure and our pain reflect.

The contradiction is this: on the one hand, the women's movement, like modern social movements in general, uses heroes to distinguish its goals and values from traditional ones. Heroes show us where and how to draw the line between our actions and the actions of those around us who do not share our goals and values. On the other hand, the women's movement demands that we include all the women around us in our struggle. Although our mothers, sisters and daughters may still follow traditional life-styles, we must somehow measure these women by the same heroic standards by which we judge ourselves; we must show how our common capacity to respond to shared oppression makes us sisters in the larger movement. Should we be unable to do this, the movement's claims to universality will be discredited, and we will be cut off from one of the most dependable sources of comfort and support for our activity. Thus, heroism and our inherited web of social relations stand in opposition to each other, both inviting the possibility and posing the problem of their reconciliation.

There are many ways of interpreting heroism, but the one most consistent with the contemporary women's movement pictures heroes as validating a historical struggle, marking its points of progress, and serving as models for the ordinary person. The notion that the hero serves as a model entails a relatively democratic theory of social change, in contrast to elitist theories in which the heroic figure stands as the beacon of a social movement because

Berenice Fisher is a teacher who lives in NYC.
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Barbara Nessim is a NY painter whose illustrations have appeared in many national magazines, as well as in Ti-Grace Atkinson's Amazon Odyssey *and Gloria Steinem's* The Beach Book.
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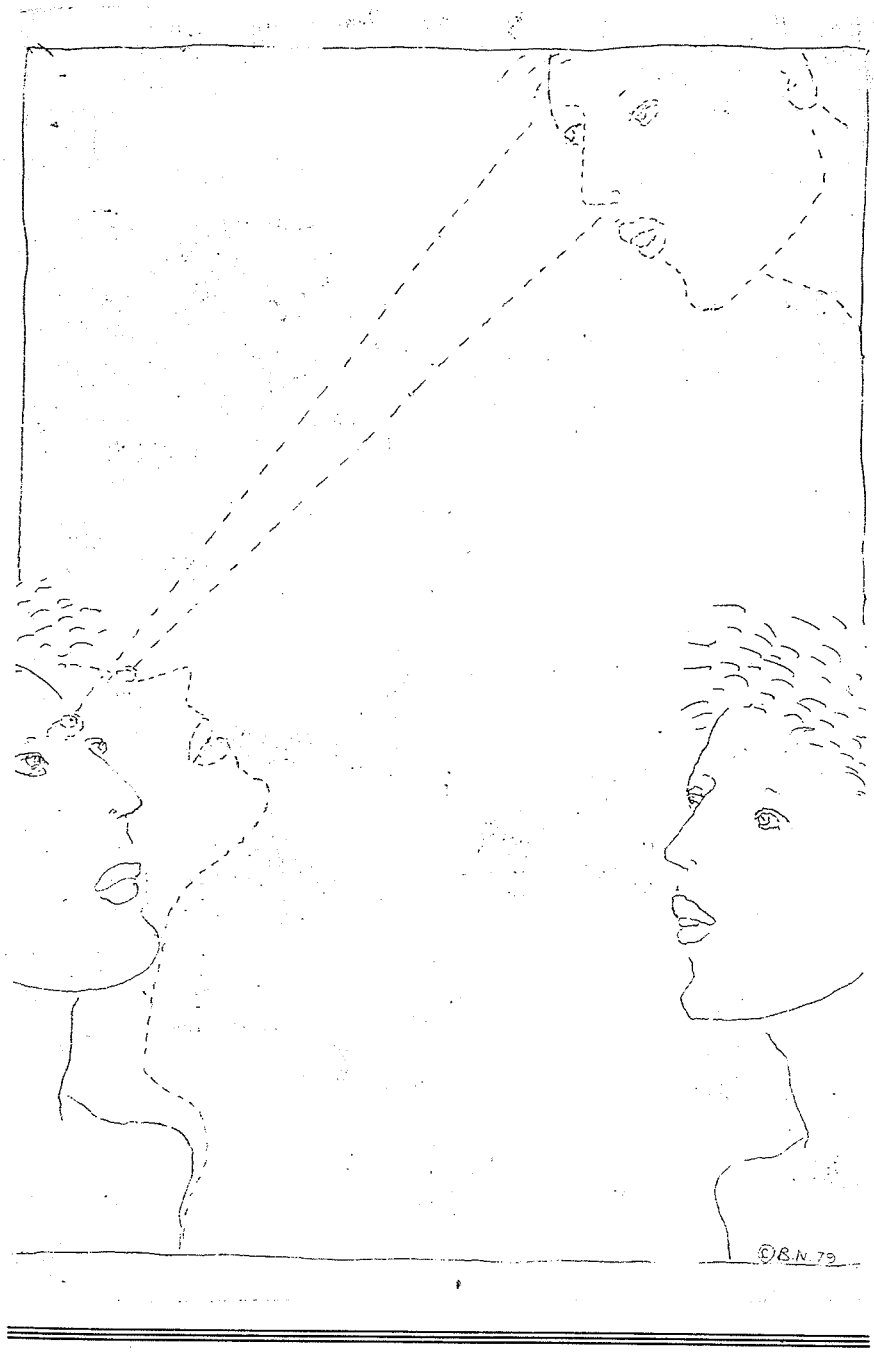

—by Berenice Fisher
——Illustrated by
——Barbara Nessim

of some supposed superiority (in brains, courage, charisma, etc.). In the democratic theory, the hero's superiority consists of having greater vision and undertaking more significant action than the rest of us. Through this action, the hero calls out in us our own capacity to grasp the situation and to act. According to some versions of this theory, followers *choose* their heroes, so that the ultimate meaning of heroism lies in the people's own urge for progress, rather than in the hero's. Yet, even in their most participatory versions, theories of heroism have built-in dangers: their conservative or reactionary potential (the heroes of the authoritarian state or of fascistic movements), the problem of false heroes (how does one know who the true hero is?), the limits that often accompany success (such as when heroic leaders become bureaucrats) and the high psychological and material costs of heroism in people's personal lives.

These high costs relate directly to the collision between heroic models and the conventional relationships with other women into which we are born. The attitude of the women's movement toward everyday relationships among family members is strikingly ambivalent. One the one hand, radical feminists have focused on the oppressive nature of male-female relationships within the family and have challenged both conservative and liberal justifications of the family's role in society or in promoting individual self-interest within the capitalist context. On the other hand, socialist and Marxist feminists have increasingly stressed the fact that most women live in family situations: that despite the strains of family life, all-women collectivities are not a real option, and the revolutionary restructuring of the family is only a vague and distant promise. Moreover, even in its present form, the family does contain certain progressive or potentially progressive elements: its partial resistance to state bureaucratic infringement and its tradition of cooperation, including especially the cooperative patterns among women themselves. Like the community self-help idea it resembles, the notion of women relatives, friends and neighbors assisting each other is fundamentally unheroic. Traditional obligations are valued precisely for the predictability they imply, not for their potential for encouraging social vision or risky behavior. This is not to say that traditional family roles are just, or that the women fulfilling such roles do not grasp the injustice; but that given the limited alternatives conventional life offers, women tend to value the dependability precisely because it helps to make that life more livable.

In literature and discussions, the women's movement has tried to cope with the tension between the heroic and the prosaic views by cutting down heroes to mundane proportions—(1) *personalizing* heroes by discovering them in our own families, (2) *reducing the stature* of heroes by pointing out the crucial function of "role models" in everyday life, and (3) *proletarianizing* heroes by showing how they exemplify rather than rise above the group. These three strategies all emphasize the hidden strength of women, although what it really means to be a "strong" woman often remains ambiguous or unexplored.

The personalizing trend can be seen in the discussion of strong mothers and grandmothers and the frequent mention of female predecessors in establishing one's own identity. Distant female ancestors often make good candidates for heroism: time has blurred the details of their lives, and, in any event, there are so many of them from among whom to choose a hero. In contrast, close and current relationships pose more of a problem. We cannot always choose the person who will play a central role. Smaller families limit our choices even more. There are also obvious difficulties in sustaining a heroic image of someone we know too well. Indeed, the attempt to picture women close to us as heroes often results in torturing the image to fit realities (mothers as domestic heroes because they stoically stood behind their stoves). Or we may feel uneasy if a woman important to us threatens to subvert the heroic image itself (the sister who reminds us of how close we came to taking a very unheroic path; the daughter who rejects the heroic image in favor of a highly conventional role). The insistence on the heroic measure for women close to us either strains our relationships to the breaking point or produces a kind of social schizophrenia in which political attitudes and activities are suspended when we "go home."

Finding heroes in role models rather than just relatives has the advantage of allowing a broader choice, at least as the term "role model" is used in feminist discussion. Psychological theories of role modeling tend to focus on how children learn social behavior, including gender-linked behavior, and how parents and other adults promote such learning. In feminist writing and popular feminist usage, "role model" usually refers to any strong female figure who has played a significant part at any point in a woman's life—a relative, a teacher, a therapist, a boss, a neighbor. The argument suggested here is twofold: that women should fight to get more strong women into a variety of occupations and activities, and that the presence of such women increases the likelihood, if it does not actually guarantee, that other women will follow suit. Psychological researchers and feminists characterize this strength in a variety of ways, but both tend to equate strength with a lack of ambiguity about what constitutes a complete (or normal or autonomous) woman. As girls, we may have a hard time finding an acceptable and satisfactory version of womanhood, but once we make the transition, we become guiding stars for others who also want to be adequate women. The logic of modeling seems to demand a lack of ambiguity: modeling is implicitly a form of teaching (although not necessarily purposeful teaching), and teaching requires a fairly consistent image of what is to be learned. Indeed, the current emphasis on the damage done to children by conflicted adults reinforces the notion that models ought to be consistently strong, sure figures. From this point of view, women cannot function psychologically, let alone politically, as effective examples if they are conflicted themselves, or if they deviate too much from a life of decisive action.

The final strategy for defining heroes pictures the masses as the most genuine heroes of all. By virtue of its socialist basis, the proletarianizing strategy almost always links heroism to work and sees collective struggle against exploitation as the heart of heroic activity. This viewpoint suffers from several well-known difficulties: the fact that much of women's labor is unpaid and atomized, and the fact the much of women's paid work is badly paid, unprestigious and unorganized. This situation creates a dilemma for heroic imagery. On the one hand, it seems unlikely that women workers can become heroes without a successful labor movement. The harsh struggle for organization has dignified many traditionally female jobs (e.g., textile work), but those women's jobs which have remained unorganized retain the unheroic reputation that sexism and capitalism have given them (note how difficult it still is to imagine a truly militant secretary). Although women have played important roles in union struggles, they tend to be pictured as unique, charismatic leaders (like Mother Jones). Once the movement has become institutionalized, heroic imagery adheres to the male leaders, rather than to the women, who are still primarily in the rank and file. Even when women attain leadership positions, through fighting for equal treatment within the unions or by starting alternative women's organizations, the very radical character of their stance separates them from other women workers. As organizers who are also confronting sexism, they must draw clear lines between their position and the prevailing one. That posture alone makes them heroic; but to the women they are trying to organize, they are difficult heroes to emulate. They are the unusual women; the ones who take an oppositional stance in a traditionally passive occupation; the ones who do not have families, or perhaps don't worry enough about their families to rush home from work to cook dinner. In short, the political courage and determination of this female vanguard also renders it suspect: these women do not seem to suffer from the cross-pressures ordinary women experience or share the same fears and anxieties.

The process of hero-making always carries built-in dangers, and, paradoxically, these dangers increase when heroes are cut down to life-size. However inevitable the glorification of public figures may be, such hero-worship is limited by its very stylized character. It is also frequently undermined by various forms of debunking, through which we assure ourselves that our public heroes are indeed real people. But everyday heroes *are* real people. The process of idealization simply flattens them out, denying the contradictions in their lives and characters, and thus in our own. This flattening frequently gains support from certain false assumptions about human nature, which, in turn, are used to justify political authoritarianism and psychological violence. The first assumption is that we only admire people for their perfection and consistency, and that, therefore, we should suppress the less attractive or conflicting truths about other people's thoughts and actions. The second assumption is that we cannot tolerate much inner conflict; thus, we should be encouraged to disown or deny conflicting parts of ourselves and contradictory aspects of our lives. These assumptions essentially view people as children in the derogatory sense—as incapable of wielding authority, as ineffective in their actions and as unworthy of full respect. Since the movement for women's liberation constitutes a negation of precisely these judgments of ourselves, we have a special stake in avoiding theories that picture the hero as a "one-dimensional woman."

More positively, we have a special stake in developing truthful and honorable images of ourselves that acknowledge the profound and inevitable conflicts which all women (and perhaps all people) must suffer in a contradictory society. These realistic images should be positive in emphasizing how we have struggled with our conflicted heritage and have devoted ourselves to trying to create a more just social order. But it is crucial that these

images do not deny or ignore the internal and external contradictions involved in this struggle or mask how uneven any heroic commitment may be. When such conflicts and unevenness are denied, heroic images stand *between* women, obscuring our common situation and common struggle. This is one reason why women at the "center" of the movement often have difficulty in seeing what is happening to women at its peripheries, and why women who cannot identify with prevailing heroic images have difficulty connecting their changes in consciousness and behavior with the doings of distant groups or remote and odd-seeming public figures.

The problem remains, then: How can we develop more realistic images of feminist heroism, and how can we convey these images to a broader range of women? In part, the women's movement has already generated a powerful tool for realistic portrayal through consciousness-raising, autobiographical writing and the gathering of women's oral histories. But we need more of these life-stories, from a wider variety of women. A further task is biographical. We must show how our lives have been (and are) historically situated, and how we can deal with the conflicting interests and values they entail. To place a person's life-history in its historical context involves showing how she has acted, or has been constrained in acting, by the sexual, class, and racial structure in which she lives. It also means delineating how she has struggled to recast those constraints. This is one possible definition of heroism: the willingness and opportunity to test the limits that an exploitative and/or oppressive social order imposes. Since women live in biological as well as historical time (and how much women differ from men in this respect is still open to question), we also need to ask to what extent the time of a woman's life shapes her willingness and opportunity to test social limits. As biology is filtered through our current social arrangements, it is certainly far easier for most of us to engage in political action at some points in our lives than others. This suggests that just as we may have a special stake in restructuring the notion of work, to account (among other things) for the demands of childbearing, so we may have a similar stake in restructuring the notion of political action, to make room for the part-time (part of her day, her month, her life) hero.

Crucial to the development of more realistic images of women-as-heroes is the problem of collective action and the deep rifts that exist among us as women. Although there is obviously no simple solution to this problem (any more than to the parallel problem for the political left), the questions posed by heroism are suggestive. A clear-eyed look at feminist heroes reveals the central role that networks or collectivities have played in making heroism possible. Women political activists have not acted alone. The more we explore this central fact of our political history, the more we are forced to question the strongly individualistic bias of the concept "hero," in all its various uses. Feminists may need to go far beyond the democratic theory of heroism to articulate a more genuinely collective theory of heroic action.

One of the greatest difficulties in moving toward such a collective image lies, of course, in the actual splits between us. By exploring the collective contexts of heroism, we can learn something about how women have been able to transcend socially imposed barriers to engage in collective action. Such action requires, among other things, a sufficiently realistic notion of how differently situated women are both constrained and motivated by their particular circumstances. More specialized heroic imagery—of black women, disabled women, lesbians, older women, Catholic women, Asian-American women, etc.—may play an important role here in showing us how variously situated women can and cannot respond to our shared oppression and by broadening our collective notion of what constitutes authentic and effective action. But such specialized images must be used with care. They run the same risks of idealization as the more "general" ones. It can be as burdensome to have to be a black superwoman or a "plucky" disabled woman as to have to live up to a more diffuse ideal of female heroism.

One last point: a truly life-sized hero does not merely share our conflicts and struggles in an objectively contradictory world; she shows us how to struggle more successfully. It is not enough for a hero to call forth similar capacities in us: we need to know how to use our capacities in concrete ways. The genuine hero helps her friends and comrades by teaching them directly or indirectly what she has learned from her experience, and how she has applied theoretical and practical knowledge to specific situations. But this sort of heroism has its own problems. The competitive structures that frame our lives make it difficult to share our conflicts and confusions, our trials and errors. The oppressive conditions under which we struggle make it expensive to reveal the less-than-glorious means by which even our most progressive victories are won. From the standpoint of our common progress, however, it is important to demystify our achievements. There is nothing inglorious about doing so. It is the stuff of great drama, as little girls already know. History marches on. But they continue to snuggle under their covers, reading far past their bedtimes, trying to figure out what they are going to be, and how they are going to get to be, when they grow up.

I am especially grateful for suggestions from Joan Braderman, Roberta Galler, Joan Mathews and Mary Sue Richardson. My essay offers virtually no examples of woman heroes because I envision the reader as drawing on her own experience to complete (or challenge) the basic argument.

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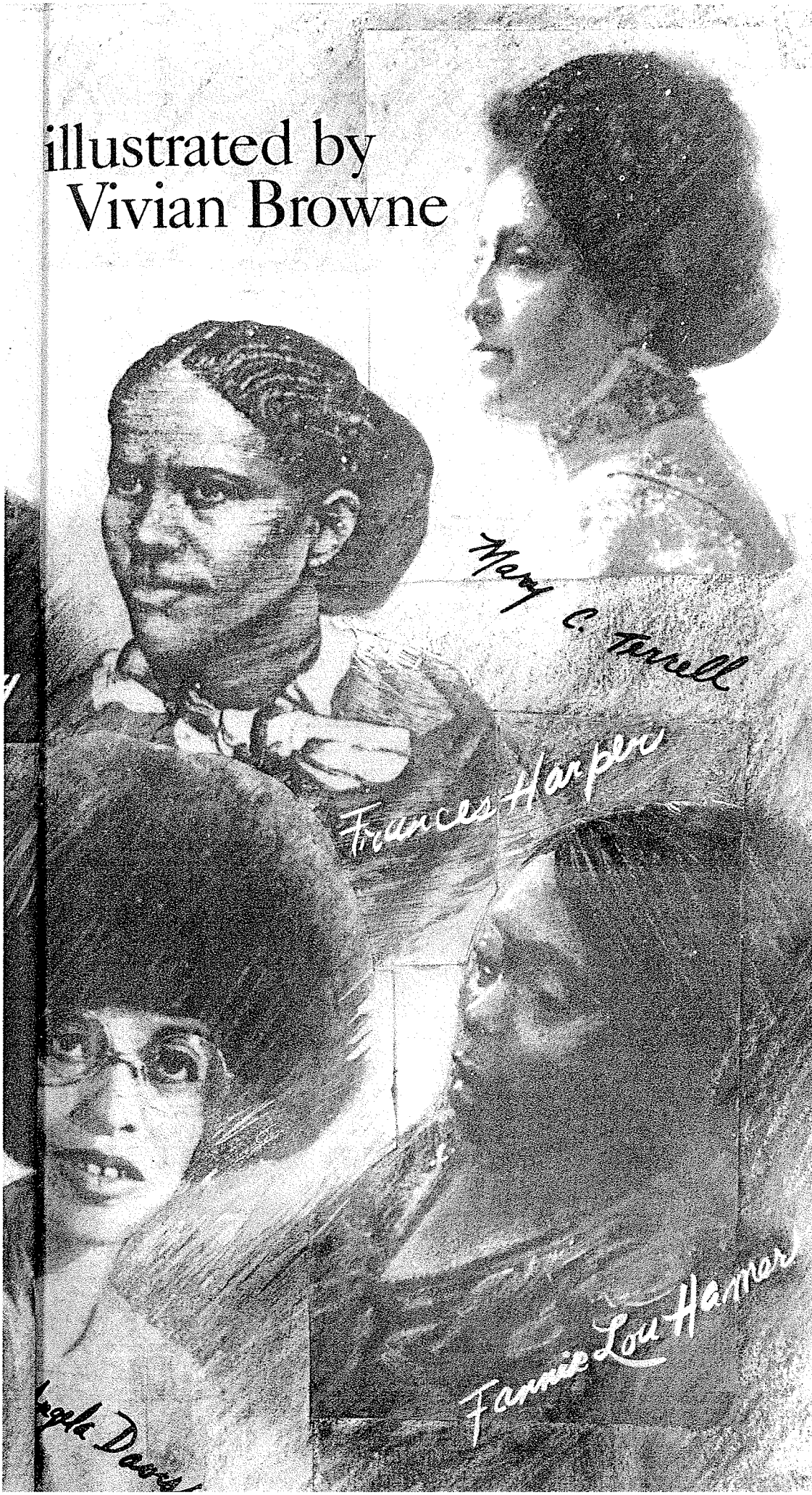
Black Activists

by Carole E. Gregory

illustrated by Vivian Browne



The image of Black women as political activists is one of the most neglected in American media; many of these women are still unknown today. My brief profiles of some Afro-American women activists are an attempt to reclaim this lost history for us.

Frances Watkins Harper (1825-1911), born in Baltimore of free parents, was orphaned at a young age. Educated by an uncle and at a school for free colored children, Frances began to support herself at 13 as a nursemaid. Frances eventually left Maryland for Pennsylvania, a free state, where she taught school and began to work with Harriet Tubman on the Underground Railroad. Her involvement in anti-slavery activity came to determine the themes of her creative writing, as she worked alongside Sarah Parker Redmond, Sojourner Truth, Charles Redmond, Henry H. Garnet and David Ruggles in the American Slavery Society. After President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, Frances dedicated herself to strengthening family bonds. She once wrote: "An acquaintance of mine, who lives in South Carolina, and has been engaged in mission work, reports that, in supporting the family, women are the mainstay."

Ida B. Wells (1862-1927), one of the greatest freedom fighters ever born, was to launch single-handed a campaign against the lynching of Afro-Americans in the racist aftermath of the Reconstruction. Born in Holly Springs, Mississippi, she became a journalist—"The Princess of the Press"—and wrote for *Our Women and Children* and *Free Speech and Headlight* (in Memphis). Earlier, while still a teacher, Ida had written an article criticizing segregated schools staffed by the concubines of white professional men: "I was teaching and I wanted to hold my position. Yet I felt that some protest should be made over conditions in colored schools. The article was a protest against the few and utterly inadequate buildings for colored children. I also spoke of the poor teachers given us whose mental and moral character was not the best." Ida was fired for this article.

The sexism of white males, expressed in the sexual exploitation of Afro-American women, was firmly entrenched. Concubinage and brutal murders of Afro-American men were used to maintain white supremacy. After the lynching of some well-respected Black men who had gone into business for themselves, Ida wrote an angry editorial

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in *Free Speech*. She stated that the lynching of Black men was *not* to protect white women from rape, but to block the economic and political development of Afro-Americans. It was an attempt to keep Southern ballot boxes "lily-white." While Ida was out of town, whites destroyed her newspaper and threatened to kill her if she ever returned to Memphis. But Ida continued to write, and she traveled around the country, lecturing on her Memphis experience. Women of color rallied to her support, and after they heard her, they continued to meet. Ida's crusade against lynching initiated the woman's club movement among Afro-Americans.

Eventually Ida moved to Chicago and married Ferdinand Barnett, another militant newspaper owner. In 1898 Ida met with President McKinley to formulate a federal law against lynching. Unsuccessful in this, she continued to campaign, although W.E.B. Dubois's sexism excluded her from the formation of the NAACP.

Mary Church Terrell (1863-1954), born in Memphis to a middle-class family, was a feminist and anti-segregationist activist. After specializing in classical languages at Oberlin College, she taught at Wilberforce University and at the "M" Street Colored High School in Washington, D.C. She was elected president of the National Association of Colored Women at its first meeting on July 21, 1896. Although, unfortunately, she viewed herself in competition with Ida B. Wells, she too lectured on lynching as a woman's issue, and she worked with suffragettes for the right to vote. At the age of 90, Mary won a 1953 Supreme Court case against the segregation of public accommodations in Washington, D.C.

Mary McLeod Bethune (1875-1955), the daughter of a slave, became one of the best-loved women activists. A statue in Washington, D.C., commemorates her contributions. Educated in segregated Southern schools, she dreamed of a world where the sorority woman would work alongside the cleaning woman to uplift the Black race. A noted baker, Mary sold her pies to buy a piece of land for a school. One of her customers was James A. Gamble, the owner of Ivory Soap. Eventually Gamble financed the purchase of the land, and today we have Bethune-Cookman College in Florida.

Mary worked with Paul Robeson on the Council of African Affairs and participated in White House activities—the Conference on Child Health and Protection (1930) and the Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership (1931). President Franklin D. Roosevelt first appointed her to the Advisory Committee of the National Youth Administration (NYA) and then made her Director of Minority Affairs for NYA—an important breakthrough, as this was the first post created for a Black woman. Mary also organized the National Council of Negro Women, which still thrives today.

Lorraine Hansberry (1930-1965) grew up in a middle-class family on Chicago's South Side. She wrote for *Freedom,* Paul Robeson's newspaper, and studied history with Dr. Dubois. Her association with Robeson and Dubois led to the U.S. State Department's revoking her passport.

In 1959, her *A Raisin in the Sun* became the first play by a Black woman to be produced on Broadway. In a letter to her mother, Lorraine wrote: "Mama, it is a play that tells the truth about people, Negroes, and life. I think it will help a lot of people to understand how we are just as complicated as they are—and just as mixed up—but above all, that we have among our miserable and down-trodden ranks—people who are the very essence of human dignity."

In *To Be Young, Gifted and Black* Lorraine spoke out against exploitation. Elsewhere she wrote: "The acceptance of our present condition is the only form of extremism which discredits us before our children." Although she was directly referring to racial prejudice, we can also extend this to the exploitation of women of men by *any* race. Lorraine also wrote the text for a photo-essay on "The Movement," in which she affirmed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), organized by Ella Jo Baker and Fannie Lou Hamer. (For more information about Lorraine Hansberry see *Freedomways*, Vol. 19, no. 4, 1979.)

Ella Jo Baker (1903—) is one of the least known and most significant figures from the Civil Rights period. A champion debater and valedictorian of her class at Shaw University, North Carolina, Ella wanted to go to medical school, but family obligations interfered. Even with a college education, she could find work only as a waitress or in a factory. In the 1930s Ella lived in Harlem, amidst much discussion of Paul Robeson's ideas. She worked for the WPA on consumer education, and in the 1940s became a field secretary for the NAACP. In 1958 she joined the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) as field secretary. There she worked with Dr. Martin Luther King, Bayard Rustin and Stanley Levinson.

Ella should be remembered as the one who conceived and organized the first student sit-ins. In February 1960 outrage was burning inside Black people. Courageous college students actively protested segregation. Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* had played to packed houses for a year, dramatizing Langston Hughes's question: "What happens to a dream deferred?" SCLC donated $800 for a Southwide Student Leadership Conference at Shaw University, where over 300 students gathered. With Ella's counsel, SNCC was born.

In *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, James Forman describes Ella's break with the Reverends King, Abernathy and Wyatt T. Walker, who wanted only a "youth wing" of SCLC. She thought the students should design their own structure since they had sparked the "sit-in" movement, and Ella advocated "group-centered leadership" over SCLC's "individual leader-centered group pattern of organization." Her model discouraged sexism and paved the way for women's significant roles in SNCC.

Ella's goals paralleled those of women as far back as Frances Watkins Harper. She wrote: "Whatever may be the difference in approach to their goal, the Negro and white students, North and South, are seeking to rid America of the scourge of racial segregation and discrimination—not only at lunch counters, but in every aspect of life."

Fannie Lou Hamer (1917-1977) became active after a childhood of poverty and exploitation on the Mississippi Delta. We know this woman by one of her favorite freedom songs: "This Little Light of Mine, I'm Gonna Let It Shine." Before the Civil Rights Movement, Fannie Lou and other Black people in her Mississippi county could not vote. One day, at a discussion on voter registration, she put up her hand and said, "Yes," she'd like to vote. Out of this decision came her life commitment to eliminating poverty and racism on the Delta.

Fannie Lou became involved in SNCC and encouraged thousands of young people to combat racism. Her resistance to oppression culminated in her work with Ella Jo Baker of SNCC and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party delegation, which challenged the 1964 Democratic National Convention. The SNCC leaders refused to compromise and defied Hubert Humphrey, Dr. King, Walter Reuther, Bayard Rustin and others, who were willing to settle for only two seats.

The leadership of women like Fannie Lou Hamer and Ella Jo Baker spurred the 1965 Moynihan Report, which condemned the "matriarchy" of Black families. Other reactionary remarks ensued, blaming Black women for the oppression of Black men. In contrast take

one of Fannie Lou's most brutal experiences with sexism and racism. A white sheriff, who had arrested her, ordered a Black male prisoner to beat her with a black jack. Fannie Lou then voiced her compassion for this Black man who beat her at gunpoint. As Pap, her husband of 36 years, said,"She was a wonderful woman."

Angela Davis (1944—), in her own eloquent way, represents a culmination of political activism in Afro-America. Born in Birmingham, Alabama, she was raised in a neighborhood nicknamed "Dynamite Hill" for the terrorist acts against Black people there. After graduating from Brandeis University and studying in Frankfurt, Germany, she began teaching philosophy at UCLA.

Through her involvement in the Civil Rights Movement and her studies with Herbert Marcuse, the Marxist scholar, Angela became a political activist. The FBI designated her "Public Enemy Number One" for her work against prison slavery. Because of her commitment to George Jackson and the Soledad Brothers, Angela was falsely charged with conspiracy to murder, kidnap and assist jailbreaking. President Nixon congratulated J. Edgar Hoover on her capture. She was acquitted in July 1972. "The best defense," she has said, "is the mass defense. Oppression is a crime against the poor." In a letter to George Jackson, Angela wrote: "Liberation is a dialectical movement—the Black man cannot free himself as a Black man unless the Black woman can liberate herself from all this muck —and it works the other way round."

Angela Davis is now co-chairperson for the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression. The motto of the Alliance is an old gospel refrain: "They say that Freedom is a constant struggle." With this motto in mind, we celebrate all these Black women political activists.

Carole E. Gregory is a writer and lecturer in Afro-American Studies at York College Jamaica, N.Y. She has published poetry and criticism, most recently in Freedomways *and* Conditions 5.

Vivian Browne, an artist living in NYC, is Assistant Professor at Rutgers University.

Woman Who Is Not My Sister

by Elizabeth Zelvin

"If there's no dancing at the revolution,
I'm not coming."
—Emma Goldman

Woman who is not my sister
you talk of feminism.
Your philosophy is in my bones.
Revolution is the rich marrow
but will it satisfy you
if you suck me dry?
Your words are sweet but brittle
frozen honey coating the fear
sticky words to trap the violence
inside you.

Woman who is not my sister
you talk of anarchism:
the ideology of tenderness of the self that loves
of individuals as distinct as the rocks at Stonehenge
gathering meaning from the way they stand together.
On the unpopulated plain of theory
you huddle, reading
too absorbed to hear the thunder.
The light cracks you open
you splinter hollow
your body is a mouth that cannot be fed.
A friend approaches and lies down at your feet.
Putting down your book on the abuses of power
you stand upon his/her neck.
You do not name the pleasure
rising from your soles.

Woman who is not my sister
you talk of dancing.
Your feet are hungry
your mouth is ravenous for violence.
With words you rape me
in the silent presence of men
who later steal your power
steal your money
and hide despair
in the old sock beneath your mattress.
A sister could have told you
This has happened before.

Woman who is not my sister
woman who quotes Emma
woman who loves women
woman who hates me
woman who never shouts
woman who never cries
When the revolution comes
who will you dance for?
When the revolution comes
who will you dance on?
When the revolution comes
who will you dance with?

Elizabeth Zelvin has had poems published in Chrysalis, 13th Moon *and other journals and her collection of poems,* I am the Daughter, *is looking for a publisher.*

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FROM THE BRAZILIAN DIARIES

by Judith Malina

edited by Karen Malpede

The following selections are from Judith Malina's unpublished Brazilian Diaries (1970-71).

In 1947 Malina co-founded the Living Theatre with Julian Beck. Early productions included Jack Gelber's The Connection *and Bertolt Brecht's* In the Jungle of the Cities *and* Man Is Man. *In 1963, to close the Living Theatre, the IRS brought charges of tax evasion. After serving prison terms, Malina and Beck joined their company in Europe, where they collectively created four new works:* Mysteries and Smaller Pieces, Frankenstein, Paradise Now *and Malina's version of Brecht's* Antigone.

In 1970 the Living Theatre went to Brazil, where they began to work on a cycle of plays called "The Legacy of Cain," to be performed for and with the poor in streets; at factory gates; in schools, hospitals and insane asylums; on picket lines. In 1964 the democratic government of Brazil had been toppled by a military coup. In the decade before, rapid economic expansion (basically due to enforced low wages and the resultant high profit) had led to inflation and unrest. A last-ditch effort to appease the working class with sweeping public programs aroused middle- and upper-class fears—paving the way for the military coup. By the time the Living Theatre arrived, public officials had been driven into exile. Elections had been repeatedly cancelled; in those held, all the candidates were generals and only generals could vote. Opposition press and university professors were harassed, arrested, tortured—and they disappeared. The civilian and military police regularly tortured suspected dissidents. Small bands of urban guerillas were the only organized opposition, and their actions only intensified the repression.

The Living Theatre's work in the slums of Brazil led to their arrest by the police. This time the charges were "subversion" and "possession of marijuana." Malina, Beck and other Living Theatre members served three-month prison terms in Brazil.

Currently, the Living Theatre resides in Rome. One volume of Malina's diaries, The Enormous Despair, *was published by Random House in 1972.*

April 28, 1971 Ouro Preto, Brazil

The time is still dark. We move slowly but very conscientiously. The company talks to the people. The courses go on. We are getting a reputation in the city. We work on new pieces.

The school at Saramenha asks if we will do a piece with the children for Mother's Day. We agree. Birgit and Pierre have been talking about doing dream plays and I suggest an enactment of a dream about the mother to be played by the dreamers, the real mother, the class, and the Living.

Any dream about the mother is revealing, is both transparent and informative and yet veiled and hermetic.

But I forgot how deep the roots of the Brazilian reality can go.

The children, aged 11 to 14, give us copies of their dreams as told to the teacher and transcribed by her for us.

The children write frantic paeans of praise to the mother:

"My mother is the only thing there is."

"Without my little mother my life would be nothing."

Full of dependency and fear of loss.

One dreams of the death of the mother and dates the dream specifically as if in message to us: March 23—A terrible dream. The child dreams that he tries to stab himself with a knife when he finds his mother dead. . .

We will only use the optimistic ones—it is after all a class for Mother's Day. It is an example of the limited situation and the "special situation."

And there is an adult dream play that we want to do. Perhaps very ambitious, perhaps very simple, but complex enough to include a valid interpretation in the language of the "The Legacy of Cain." The dreamer tells us a dream. We inscribe it, write it down, and repeat it so that the dreamer can repeat it phrase by phrase as he and we enact the interpretation of the dreamer's visionary experience. So that it will be clear that he is possessed by the six points of the suffering star.[1]

Of the children's play, Birgit says, tie the mother and child together with a ribbon, let the child cut the cord. . .

The house is full of guests as at the *Shiva*. Dozens of people arrive.

We have no money to feed them all. They drive down from Rio and São Paulo in fancy cars and rich hippie clothes and eat our last rice.

But the purists don't want to put up a bottle with a sign saying, "If you have the money and you eat here, please help pay for the food." They feel it's inhospitable.

Lots of people come and sleep on the floor and the kitchen floor is full of bodies in the morning. . . .

We want to be into the new work. But Julian and I are burdened down by the literature. We sit all day, every day, in the white-walled workshop behind the Calabouco Restaurant and Julian works on "The Life of the Theatre" and I edit the scrambled passages of my journals of 1947 and 1948.

Outside the door a poinsettia tree in full bloom spangles the light blue sky with flashing red petals patterned against its deep green leaves. It is quiet. We spend hours grueling at the typewritten pages, arranging, rewording, and painfully, often painfully, reminiscing.

Our life is divided between the meetings and the literature.

And Isha Manna,[2] who changes, belongs partly to a world that speaks Portuguese. . . .

Early one morning there's a shouting outside the house, a militant cry rouses us and we look out of doors and windows: "Tradition! Family! Property!" shout ten young men dressed in neat, dark suits, wearing red berets and stoles of red satin slung around their shoulders in a theatrical flare.

They make street theatre.

They shout in chorus: "Tradition! Family! Property! TFP Brazil's strongest defense against communism."

They carry a banner, a very large red banner elaborately inscribed Tradition, Family, Property—in the manner of the samba [dancing] schools, but with the dignity of the banners that the church carries in processions.

The standard is planted in the middle of the plaza. In this case the Plaza das Inconfidencias, the conspirators'

[1] The central thematic image of the Cain cycle. The six points of the star are: Love, Death, Money, the State, War and Property.

[2] Judith's daughter, then four years old.

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plaza. They fan out, the ten boys. They are from 14 to 20 years old, and approach the people who have come out of doors to see what the shouting is about.

They deliver a spiel, about their newspaper, pointing out the back-page article about the visit of Gomide (the consul, recently ransomed from the Tupamaros) to a rally of the TFP. They also politely answer questions. Rocky rapped with the standard bearer in the middle of the *praca*. I have a brief dialogue with two boys who come to the window. I do not do a number on them.

We watch them regroup and to the cadence of their slogans go on down the street to their meeting place. The impression is of great organization. The manifestation is about power. They come as the knights of tradition, resplendent with their satin blazing, to protect the helpless people from the often-named enemy. The people are surely impressed and feel protected indeed when these fine young men come and promise the women in their doorways that they will protect their families.

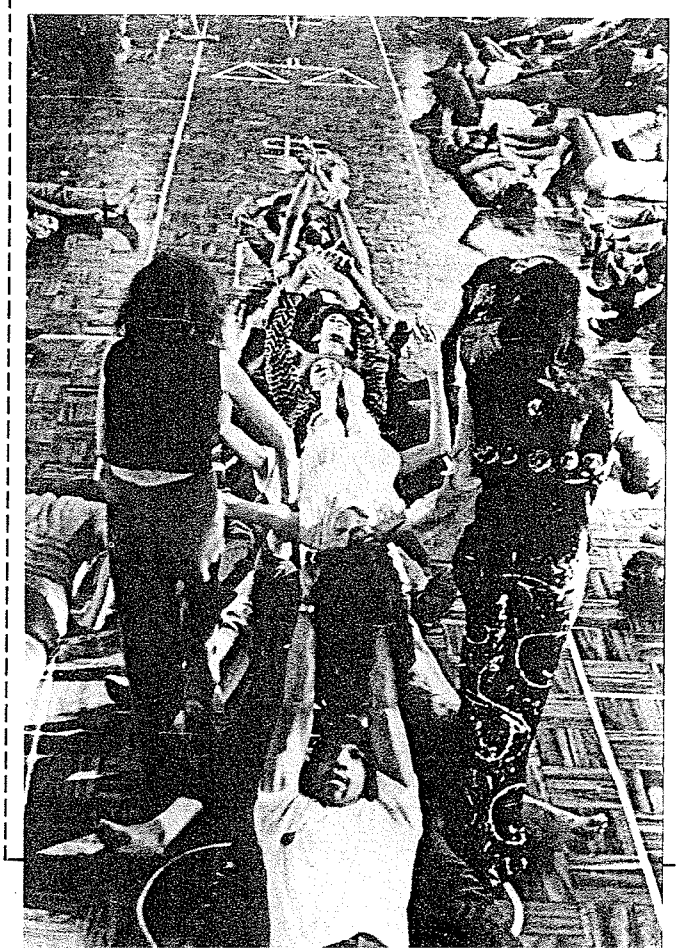
The inventor of these pieces has a fine sense of street theatre—within the rigid form he exploits the possibilities fully—sound and color and costume and contact and chorus and flags.

We read in *Time Magazine* of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. In Washington doing street theatre. A brigade of 5,000 veterans carrying plastic MC rifles "occupy" Washington for five days "fanning out across the city" to take over one neighborhood after another in mock "search and destroy" missions.

May 5, 1971

News. Washington. Fires and arrests. War protests. 6,000 or 8,000 busted. Headlines in the papers here, in the Minas papers, are all about Washington. This morning's headlines. Police stop protests. But today is the fifth day of a campaign starting May 1st to paralyze the nation.

A general strike for peace.



The news we get is incomplete. We strain to learn more.

Sense of distance.

After, the question flashes: Why am I in Brazil?

The answer flashes clear.

The school at Saramenha was built by Amérigo René Giannetti who founded the aluminum foundry. . . .

Eighty children. Pure, eager, intelligent.

All their fathers work there in Vulcan's forge.

And they will likely work there too or marry and give birth to the men who do.

The smoke of the factory blows over the schoolyard when the wind changes. It is white and gold and black.

It never stops day or night.

Is this not the smoke
of Cain's fire
unacceptable to God
polluting the world?

First we show them the chord,[3] give and take. In the bright sunlight of their playing field we dance and sing and move with them. They close their eyes and shut off that dreadful backdrop of billowing fumes and we guide them gently to touch each other, their closed eyes and their fingers feeling through the embarrassment, through the laughter, into the new language.

Give and Take is *Lee's Piece* is Joe Chaikin's *Sound and Movement* played in a circle.[4]

The children are shy to come into the center and perform for all eyes. And it occurs to me that in all the years of *Mysteries*, in all the lands—I never played this moment. I avoided it perhaps for the same reason that these children avoid it.

When Paulo came toward me bellowing like an ape I thought of the whole tour, a hundred stages. Jenny and Carl on the famous poster—and I went into the center.

Easily.

And then we finally lured the children *en masse* into the center with a dance and the bolder ones came first.

And we danced together.

The feeling between these children and us is remarkable; they feel how much we want to please them. . . .

The children begin to give in. They begin to understand what we are bringing them, what they can do. They begin. . . .

Today we took the dreamers on the Voyage of the Pontian Sea.

We plan the play as follows: a sweet invasion in which the children enter from three doors flying, swimming, running (by earth, air, water).

Yes, by earth air water.

The mothers, teachers inside.

Take them inside the dream work. The dreamer is wafted to the mother on the hands of the Pontian Sea.

Their dreams . . . are enacted in a Rite of Adoration with the mother which ends on the little stage, the child and mother bound together with a crepe paper ribbon.

In the Rite of Demystification the mask of this relationship is dropped. In the lines about punishment in all the children's dreams, the mother is praised for her decision to punish, and the child expresses his or her gratitude for the mother's punishment. We can show this delicately only by a comic element.

[3] The chord is a vocal acting exercise about give and take, about listening to other people in the group and responding to them. One person starts a sound, the others pick it up. As the group energy changes, the sound made by the group also changes.

[4] Lee Worley was a member of the Living Theatre in its early days. She and Joe Chaikin developed this sound and movement exercise together.

Julian suggests a strip of paper which slaps the child clown-style, the sadomasochist element hidden, yet apparent, as in a Tom and Jerry cartoon.

After the sweetness of the Adoration, the comedy will be what Andy calls a "profanation."

And this demystification ends with the Rite of Liberation and leads to the flying—and a space trip—about the world of the future.

Paulo Augusto rehearses the Rite of Adoration with me. He embarrasses me and calls me his mother and in the flattery and exaggerated rhetoric of the dream/poems he worshipfully praises me. I think: if the psychoanalysts are right, he must reveal himself fully at this moment. And he does. His image is of the clinging mother: "You want me to be with you every moment mother, always, every day, every minute." The classical analysts would say surely it's a projection of the clinging child.

He is rehearsing a masochist image.

May 7, 1971

Every morning this week we go to the Saramenha School. We teach them our tricks and they learn faster than actors. They trust us now and work with quick enthusiasm.

We have worked out a complicated Rite of Adoration in which the mother and child and Paulo Augusto reading the child's dream pass through the houses of War, Law, Money (Work), Property (the Juggernaut), Time (in place of Death, a clock) and Love, where they are bound to the mothers.

Six times through this trance.

We sit up late into the night on the demystification. It is always easier to picture the fault than to suggest a revolutionary alternative.

With sounds and spinning we cover a multitude of unspoken things.

May 10, 1971

Nobody's left. Helene Weigel's dead.[5]

Julian thrusts the newspaper at me with the familiar figure of her *Courage* striding open-mouthed across the page captioned in an alien tongue. In Portuguese I read the obituary story of her life.

"Shut up, shut up, shut up," she cried when I first tried to praise her. Then she embraced me instead of responding.

Should I think of praise now? I think of shoes and of Jenny and of the Cantina and the praise. . .

Julian opens the "Antigone" *Modell*[6] to the picture and the caption that read:

"Und sie führten hinweg die dem Herscher die Stirne Geboten."

Which I put as: "And they led her away who dared to face up to the ruler."

Weigel's exit. . . .

May 14, 1971

We arrive in the workers' recreational hall. We lay out our pattern on the floor with tape. The symbols of the six points look daring in their clarity.

The heart, the clock, the house, the dollar sign, the scales of justice, the sword. . .

"Look," says Julian incredulously, "it is the *Connection* set." On the tiny stage, chairs and an upright piano, a sun in the center, like an eye. The Mother's Day programs are elaborate. An aged hand holding a rose.

Hundreds of women crowd in, maybe 500. They sit in two rows against the walls and stand filling the last space.

They are the miners' wives, the foundry workers' wives. Their faces are gaunt and anxious. Their faces are passive and resigned. Fear and strength mingle. They look tranced, abstracted.

The environment is difficult for them. They look 16 or 50. They age after the second or third child just as they leave their teens. There is no middle time of flowering, no womanhood. Child brides and old women.

The various classes play their songs and skits.

Poems and choral songs in praise of mothers.

Ivan says, "These are the Rites of Mystification."

Pink satin robed angels in paeans of praise.

I am formally presented with a rose. No one warns me as I stand next to Isha holding her hand as she sits on Birgit's lap. Five embarrassed girls present pink roses to five chosen mothers, singing a simple ditty. When they come to my name, singing *"Vem, Dona Judite,"* a shy black girl who is in "my box" in the play embraces me and gives me my honorary rose. Isha is delighted. Paulo Augusto comes under the scrutiny of 1,000 women's eyes and romantically sniffs the flowers with the same fine edge of sarcasm that he uses in the Rite of Adoration.

The mothers sit stock still, their ancient faces watch the plays impassively, without display of feeling. They are wearing their best clothes. They are wearing the good dress.

We call the piece: "A Critical Examination of Six Dreams about Mother."

Before it can begin we do the same door scenes that we have always had to do when the Living Theatre has toured or played theatres. "Let the people in," I insist. "But there's no room!" "There's plenty of room." There are 75 more mothers and children clamoring outside. Finally they are all let in because of course there is room. The 80 children who are to perform leave for our entrance.

We make the humming sound and enter in slow motion.

Slow motion and low sound trances.

We come in by land, sea and air, running, swimming, flying.

The plan laid out on the floor with masking tape looks like a board game.

The six mothers of the dreamers sit at the end of the corridor.

The sword points to the stage.

The scales of justice represent the Law or the State. The doll sign, like the *cruzeiro* sign, is Money and/or Work. The house is Property. A clock is Time, for the children do not yet speak of Death. And a heart for Love where they will be bound to their mothers.

And the children lie on their backs as in the Pontian Sea. They make a sea sound.

The faces of the mothers are stunned and passive. We form a line of our bodies along the corridor and waft the first dreamer up high on our upraised arms chanting *"o sonho"* and Paulo Augusto chants also the dreamer's name. Pamela and I hold the child's arms as the body is moved along the line through the sea's *materia prima* to the mother.

We join the sea as Paulo takes the child and the mother along the dream voyage.

Paulo Augusto, talented in an old-fashioned art, reads with a disturbing edge of irony the hyperbole of the children's dreams. He flavors each word with a bittersweet lilt. The mother—led like a bride down the aisle by her adoring child, the child's words of praise announced with fervent love by this long-haired stranger who speaks the Portuguese so romantically—is overwhelmed.

Shy as a bride, each walked aglow and ashamed. The

[5] In the late sixties, Judith directed and acted Antigone in her own version of Brecht's text. Weigel, Brecht's widow and known to be the finest of Brecht's actors, was at that time running the Berliner Ensemble which the Living Theatre visited.

[6] The Berliner Ensemble's *Modell* books of its productions combined photos and text.

children and we adults formed the barriers along the corridor. We acted out the battle of war, and child and mother were led through unharmed. We enacted the towers of the law, mercy and justice, and dreamer and mother circled them in an infinity sign.

They pass through the field of work which is the bitterness of the money sign. They encounter the juggernaut that eats all in the domain of property and they see it disperse. They circle the human clock though it tolls for them.

And reach the heart of love.

Paulo Augusto touchingly, climactically reaches the end of the dream. He takes the colorful crepe paper swathe on which Birgit has pinned flowers. He ties it around the waist of the mother. He ties it around the waist of the child. Children in the circle of the heart make a chord with the tolling of bells. The dreamer and the mother are led up onto the stage. The mother sits and the child winds its body up in the cord spinning toward her. The dreamer sits at her feet.

Six times we do this for six dreamers. Then Paulo Augusto turns and speaks the words that describe the punishing mother. His tone changes from a normal voice to a frenzied crescendo. Yet he manages like a clever actor not to exaggerate beyond what they can believe.

"When my mother punishes me, she is always right."

"We need to be punished. We need to be punished."

The Dream Mama enters. I am riding on Andy's shoulders. I hold a crepe paper switch. We are swathed in violet. A violet bandana in *Bahiana* style on my head. Crepe paper bands dangle from my wrists.

I look with disapproval on the free movements of the children. I switch and whip them into a spin. Till they are dizzy. They fall. They all fall. Then as she stands amidst them after the narrator has cried out his last "please, please forgive me," they make a rising sound, an uprising sound, and the Big Dream Mama is toppled by the children.

Fly they cry.

And the dreamers who are still bound to their mothers fly . . . and the cords snap in mid-air. We invite all the children to fly.

The principal tries to stop them after a while. There is some resentment. Her role is recognizable. But the children have already undone the program. The report cards were to be given out formally by the principal, but the atmosphere is too anarchistic. They are finally distributed among the thronging children and mothers.

The mothers are transfixed. They sensed the real meaning of the scene without analyzing it; their human natures understood everything. . . .

When Isha first saw Julian she called out "Juliao" but then she was quieted. But when Big Mama fell Isha cried because after all it was her own mama.

The trauma of every theatre child who learns about the make believe—often to unlearn it later.

The children are cheerful. But among the adults, the teachers and the mothers, there is an uneasiness mixed with enthusiasm. They are still in the dream. The children flow out of it.

The principal, a portly lady of some intellect, writes her interpretation of the six signs that we had drawn on the floor.

She has, of course, no idea that she is making a literary interpretation on categories by Sacher-Masoch.

We talk as much as we can with some of the mothers, and teachers.

We leave on the bus that runs day and night from Saramenha to Ouro Preto.

Day and night the *fabrica* belches its smoke. As we wait for the bus the smoke

rises like a pillar of fire, orange

against the black sky

Cain's fire unacceptable to God.

Rode back in a bus full of the women who were our audience. The wives of the miners, the oppressed of the oppressed.

Felt our force. Knew we had placed at least some doubt into the fatal illusion.

Knew that the changes come later.

Seeding.

Always back beyond the roots. We began here with gestation. Seeding now.

Chilean Arpillera

Anonymous Chilean woman (contemporary), *Courthouse. The Disappeared. Where are they? Why won't you tell us? Congress is abolished,* patchwork picture (*arpillera*). The *arpilleras* are social statements sewn from factory remnants by friends and relatives of political prisoners, "disappeared" persons and the unemployed in the *junta's* Chile. They are not only concrete expressions of the women's daily and political lives, their environment, struggles, and visions for a better life, but also a means of livelihood. There are *arpillera* workshops all over Chile.

Anti-Colonial Protest in Africa: A Female Strategy Reconsidered

by Susan G. Rogers

It is with a sense of immediate recognition and somewhat amused *déjà vu* that one first encounters Ibo and Ibibio women of southeastern Nigeria shouting their equivalent of "off the pigs" at northern Nigerian (Hausa) soldiers sent to break up their 1929 anti-tax demonstration. This recognition is reinforced when one learns of the Kom women in West Cameroon, who, during their mass protest against colonial agricultural regulations in 1958, barricaded a local African teacher, who supported the regulations, in an outdoor latrine. Moreover, who among us would not applaud the hundreds of Usangi women in present-day Tanzania, who in 1945 gathered *en masse* to demand that the British district officer impregnate them all because the new tax proposals totally disrupted normal family and agricultural life?

These incidents were not isolated acts. Wildness, aggressiveness and obscenity did not result from a breakdown of organization or from a few women "getting out of hand" or "going too far." This behavior constituted the women's central unifying strategy in expressing their resistance to colonial oppression.

In two of these cases, there was a clear tradition behind the female aggression; it was rooted in sanctioned ways of disciplining individual men for errant behavior. Among the Ibo, the institutionalized form of punishment known as "sitting on a man" was the "ultimate sanction available to women for enforcing their judgments."[1]

> To "sit on" or "make war on" a man involved gathering at his compound at a previously agreed-upon time, dancing, singing scurrilous songs detailing the women's grievances against him (and often insulting him along the way by calling his manhood into question), banging on his hut with the pestles used for pounding yams, and, in extreme cases, tearing up his hut (which usually meant pulling the roof off).[2]

Along with the use of existing, powerful women's organizations in Ibo and Ibibioland and extensive, firmly established female market networks, a behavioral strategy adopted from the practice of "sitting on a man" was instrumental in mobilizing large numbers of women during the "Women's War."[3] In 1929 an estimated 10,000 Ibo and Ibibio women sustained the only widespread rebellion against British authority to occur in the 15 years following the formal extension of indirect rule to southern Nigeria in 1914. Over a two-month period, these women destroyed 16 native courts; attacked banks, district offices and white-owned shops; raided jails and released prisoners; looted European trading factories; and physically assaulted warrant chiefs and other African functionaries in the British administration. For these actions, as well as for mass demonstrations and meetings, the women often simply wore wild creepers and other vegetation, or they went nude. Obscenity in gesture and speech was the order of the day.

The immediate catalyst for the protest was a rumor that direct taxation was about to be extended to women. But the uprising was also sparked off by the steady erosion of women's participation in palm oil production and trade under the colonial regime, and by Ibo and Ibibio women's loss of political rights and status in the community under British rule.[4]

The "Women's War" threatened the British to such an extent that 53 women were killed and scores left wounded by the colonial force mounted to restore "law and order." Largely in response to the "Women's War," the British instituted reforms in the native administration in 1933. But the women's specific demands were ignored, despite the fact that their protest had addressed deeply felt political and economic grievances. No attempt was made to adjust colonial political or economic institutions to accommodate women either collectively or as individuals.

The Ibo and Ibibio women were not treated as serious political actors. Their demands for women on the native courts and for female district officers were dismissed as "irrational" and "ridiculous." Their behavior was labeled "shocking," "obscene," "hostile" and "disrespectful" by

Susan G. Rogers is an anthropologist who teaches in the Department of Afro-American Studies and Women's Studies Program at the University of Minnesota.
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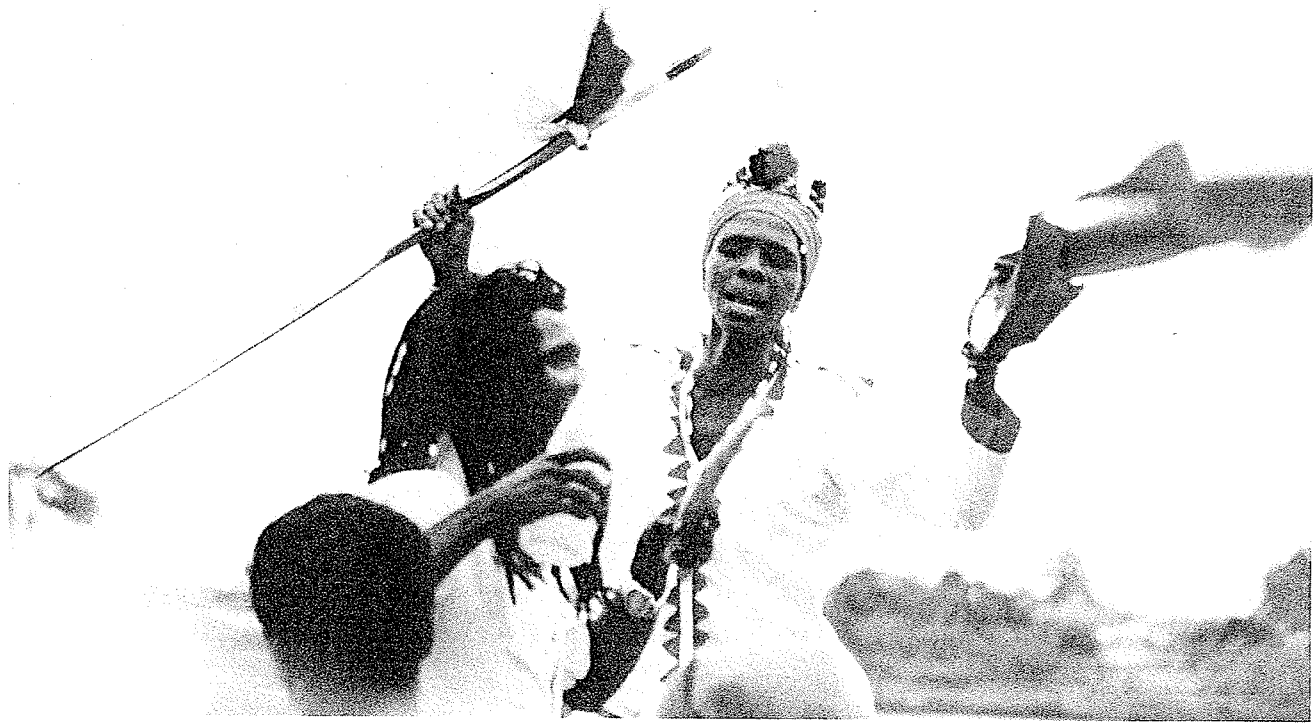

Sabine Jell-Bahlsen, *Eze Mmiri di Egwu! — The Queen of the Water is Great!*, April 1979. Eze mmiri, Mrs. Martha Mberekpe of Orsu-Obodo, Imo State, Nigeria, is the leader of Otu Eze Nwanyi, a water society. She is widely known for her divination and healing powers. Similar water societies (Mami Wata Worshippers) are found throughout Igbo-land. Both men and women are members, but the deities and leaders are predominantly women.

Sabine Jell-Bahlsen, born in Berlin, is currently working on her doctoral dissertation (on Ibo social integration) at the New School for Social Research, NYC. She did fieldwork among the Ibo of Nigeria in 1978-79.

Nigerian and European men.[5] Even through their use of the traditional "ultimate sanction," the women of southern Nigeria could not lay claim to a share of the increasingly male-dominated power structure.

Almost 30 years later, in 1958, some 7,000 Kom women agriculturalists from the mountainous Bamenda Province in West Cameroon organized a militant anti-colonial protest which lasted for more than a year.[6] At the time, independence was in sight and modern political parties were competing for power in what was otherwise, as in Nigeria and Tanganyika, a British colonial situation. The women focused their attack on European and African institutions and officials associated with the colonial presence, as well as on the Kameruns National Congress, which was responsible for enforcing odious agricultural and market regulations that directly affected women.

Like their Ibo/Ibibio sisters, the Kom women transformed a traditional technique used to punish and disgrace a man for offenses against women into a strategy for mass anti-colonial protest. This technique, known as *anlu*, sanctioned group action by women, which included wild dancing, dressing in vines and pieces of men's clothing, defecating and urinating in the compound of the offender, genital exhibition, and the use of breadfruit as a weapon or "pollutant" (it was thought to "dry up" anyone or anything contaminated by it). The offender was ostracized—an extreme form of punishment because it "kills and gives no new life"—until he repented and offered the demanded compensation. After this, he and his household were ritually purified, and the matter was considered closed.[7]

Kom society was agricultural, and the Kom women were farmers. They were responsible for producing, storing and preparing food for their families, and for selling the surplus in the local markets. In 1955, without consulting the women, the government introduced anti-erosion regulations requiring farmlands to be ridged horizontally rather than vertically on the mountain slopes. The Kom local government council (all male) was split in its attitude toward the regulations, but local teachers in the mission school favored them as instruments of modernization. The women, however, were united in total opposition, since horizontal ridging made their system of cooperative farming on vertically oriented fields unworkable. Their anger and animosity grew as more and more women were fined for refusing to comply. Finally two events, in July 1958, combined to trigger outright revolt.

First, an agricultural assistant uprooted some of the women's crops. Then a market sanitation inspector poured away liquor he considered tainted and destroyed "bad" food in the interests of hygiene. *Anlu* began on July 4 at a council meeting during a discussion about fining women. Mamma Abula emerged from a crowd of spectators and spat in the face of Teacher Chia, a council member who was known to support the agricultural regulations and the fines. A second woman quickly followed suit, and then a third, who after spitting, "doubled over and shrilled the 'Anlu' war cry which echoed and re-echoed in a widening circle" as it was taken up by more and more women.[8]

By that evening, a hill behind the local Mission House was "black with teeming thousands of women" planning their next moves.[9] In the months that followed, the women ruined property, closed schools, chased men from the markets and damaged market stalls; they set up their own court as well as a "demonstration farm" with vertical ridges in defiance of government regulations. Meetings, marches and demonstrations involved thousands of women who dressed in vines or in men's clothing and carried formidable sticks as weapons or staffs. In the face of existing male authority, the Kom women enforced their own authority. They not only translated *anlu* into a strategy for mass protest, but transformed it into a complex organization which acted as a "shadow government" for nearly a year.[10]

The effectiveness of *anlu* organization declined slowly over that year. The Kameruns National Democratic Party, supported by *anlu*, defeated the Kameruns National Congress in elections held in January 1959, and the *anlu* leader was given a seat on the Kom local council for a time. Yet there were few long-term political or economic payoffs for Kom women.

The aggressive verbal and physical behavior employed by the women of the Usangi region of the Pare Mountains in northeastern Tanzania bears comparison with the strategies used by the Ibo/Ibibio and Kom women.[11] It seems probable that among the Pare, as among the neighboring Chagga of Kilimanjaro, women could, and would under circumstances of extreme provocation, collectively degrade and berate established authority figures—usually chiefs—by singing suggestive songs and by pelting them with grass and soil to symbolize their disrespect. The Usangi women's protest, however, did not invoke a specific traditional sanction. Moreover, the Usangi women mobilized on behalf of an anti-tax protest already launched against the British colonial administration of Tanganyika by the men.

In 1945, the Usangi women marched 500 strong to the district headquarters. To protest the administration's determination to introduce a new graduated tax scheme, they voiced the symbolic demand that the district officer make them all pregnant. Later, provincial and territorial officials, escorted by some Pare chiefs, arrived in the Usangi subdistrict to collect evidence about the protest ringleaders. Hundreds of women, incensed by the official party's refusal to meet with them, stoned the officals' cars and forcibly detained one chief and a policeman. The following day, they surrounded the Usangi chief's home, singing and chanting, and later battled with 30 policemen sent to restore order. In the words of one participant:

> The D.O. said to us, "I give you two minutes . . . to think and if you are not prepared to go you will see something happen." A whistle was sounded and the soldiers started chasing us and beating us on our buttocks with the lower parts of their guns. Some of us had babies. . . . Sixty-four women got injured; three women were admitted in hospital.[12]

As in the Ibo/Ibibio "Women's War" and the Kom women's *anlu* protest, we are confronted with a paradox. The Usangi women's aggressive behavior was taken as a serious threat and contributed to the resolution of the crisis in 1947, when the concept of a graduated tax was dropped and "reforms in local government increased popular representation in district decision-making."[13] But Usangi women were not part of this process.[14]

It is clear that African women have been doubly oppressed; they have had to combat both the African and European male's perception of them. They have fought "two colonialisms."[15]

The advent of colonialism disrupted African society as a whole and profoundly affected the role and participation of women in the cultural, social and economic affairs of their communities. Colonialism entrenched male supremacy in Africa by importing its own brand of sexism and exacerbating the existing forms of sexism in African communities. The consequent asymmetry between African women and men served colonial expansion. "Divide and rule," a tactic common to all colonial practice, fostered the unequal treatment of African women. As the colonial period continued, the differential access to knowledge of colonial structures available to African men and women further divided the sexes, leaving the women considered here to fight on their own the excesses of colonialism that specifically affected them.

In fighting to stay the erosion of their social position and power, the Ibo/Ibibio and Kom women resorted to the use of a traditionally sanctioned means of expressing female grievances against men, and elevated it to a mass scale. In the pre-colonial period, this form of justice was integral to the culture. It had provided women with a viable public forum where sexism could be made visible. But the force of colonialism was sadly demonstrated by the fact that African men in positions of colonial-derived authority sided with their Europeam masters in dismissing the women's political and economic claims and denouncing their protest strategy. The cultural base for the women's action had disappeared.

The women's use of obscenity, wild behavior and aggression both embodied and parodied the established order's ideas about women. Women were perceived as "other," "unknown" and "unpredictable" by men. Their behavior was thus a witty inversion of male perceptions, making manifest the fears that men projected onto women. In addition, their behavior gained strategic force from its overt denial of male authority, and from its exposure of the fragility of any "man-made" social order.[16]

Through the transformation of a method used to curb individual men's abuses against women into an instrument of mass protest against the entire male-dominated colonial system, patriarchy and colonialism were equated. In the context of the women's fight, the meaning of the familiar form of protest stretched out to relate in a condensed way the personal to the political, the individual to the mass; it overlapped the structures of family, community and colonial state to expose the political thread linking them all. Just as the fragility of a totally "man-made" order was highlighted, so too was the patriarchal base of imperialism revealed.

These women's actions vividly demonstrate their vast potential as protagonists in history. They achieved startling visibility, evolved complex organizations and profoundly shook up the social system. Nevertheless, their actions against the colonialists were not, in the long run, effective in restoring their pre-colonial rights, in gaining access to decision-making positions or in dislodging the sexist wedge between African men and women planted by the colonialists.

The women's strategy did not take into account the changes brought by European overrule. In pre-colonial Africa, sanctioned collective action was meant to threaten and even *temporarily* challenge male-dominated institutions. Traditionally, for women to resume their "proper" submissive behavior and for male authority to be re-established, the man being disciplined had to admit fault and pay compensation. However, although the sanctioned behavior served to ventilate the women's aggression and frustration, resolution brought only a return to the *status quo ante*. It did not alter the power relations between women and men, nor did it assuage sexist identifications. Colonialism had forced a restructuring of African societies that was insensitive to and disruptive of African cultures and mores. Even the restoration of a *status quo ante* became an impossible goal, and to admit fault and pay compensation was far from the minds of colonialists bent on exploiting African resources and labor for their own capitalist needs.

The women's tactics carried over cultural assumptions into the fight against colonialism without confronting the harsh realities it had introduced. In practicing sanctioned behavior, the women perpetuated the symbolic connotations of that behavior. For their actions to have meaning and be effective, they had to be "sanctioned" by the very men to whom they were addressed. Men were to "fix the situation" (which of course did not happen in the anti-colonial protests described). The women did not believe that they themselves had the power to fundamentally change society and that they could assume long-term political responsibilities. In re-enacting their ambiguous position in human society, in still identifying themselves as essentially outside the political arena, in perpetuating male conceptual frameworks, these women created a disjunction between their goals, intentions, "image" and needs, thus allowing the male-dominated colonial institutions to exclude them from the decision-making process.

Because of their closer association with the mechanisms of colonial rule, more African men than women came to realize by the early decades of the 20th century that strategies of resistance and protest rooted in the sanction of "ancestral charters" were ineffective.[17] These men continued to invoke the charters for organizational and rallying purposes, but their greater familiarity with colonial struc-

tures gave them knowledge of new weapons: the petition, the deputation, Western education, the African Independent Church, the trade union, the strike, the political party and, where necessary, the gun.

African women were instrumental in the male-led nationalist struggles that eventually brought political independence to most of the continent between the late 1950s and the mid-1960s. They played and continue to play a role in the liberation wars that ended Portuguese rule in Southern Africa and will ultimately bring an end to white-minority rule in Zimbabwe-Rhodesia, Namibia and South Africa. Where liberation movements incorporated an ideology of thoroughgoing social and economic transformation, including the eradication of sexism, into their independence struggle, African women have achieved greater recognition as political and economic actors and leaders.

It seems to me that these African women's anti-colonial protests raise several important questions for feminists in search of effective strategies of change for the 1980s. The Ibo/Ibibio, Kom and Usangi women achieved mass mobilization by calls to action expressed in terms that struck an instant chord of recognition in the women to whom they were addressed. Imbedded in this collective consciousness was the understanding that an insult or injury to any woman affected *all* women. By conceptualizing colonial rule as male authority overstepping its bounds, African women could respond in strength within a framework for expressing grievances that was totally familiar to them. Surely a question for us to ask has to do with our need to tap an existing consciousness of oppression in a sexist society in order to mobilize and organize women who may lack direct experience in the broader political arena and who find more abstract analysis alienating.

Consciousness is a process. It seems likely that the consciousness of the Ibo/Ibibio, Kom and Usangi women changed as they confronted a colonial system that did not respond in the anticipated way to sanctioned behavior. The limitations of old assumptions are not self-evident; rather, incongruence is exposed in confrontation with new realities or conditions. Can our strategies reflect these understandings?

Then, too, these cases raise questions about the strengths and weaknesses of symbolic action. In particular, they suggest the need to question the construction of reality in which the symbols we use are rooted. If our symbolic actions derive their power or force from sexist stereotypes and perceptions of "female nature" rooted in dominant male ideology, do we not run the risk of reinforcing that ideology when we rely on them? And do we not run an additional and dangerous risk of providing the very grounds on which our concrete political and economic demands can be dismissed? If this is true, can we, as feminists, develop modes of symbolic action that strongly reflect how we perceive ourselves and wish to be perceived, and which are harmonious or congruent with our aims and objectives?

But perhaps the most significant questions derive from the extent to which we share, with African women and women throughout the world, the need to overcome double, indeed, multiple layers or levels of oppression. The situational ingredients and material conditions obviously vary historically and culturally for specific groups of women. But it is obvious that sexism does not exist in a vacuum and will find expression in interaction with racism, poverty, capitalism, underdevelopment, colonialism, homophobia or any combination of these. Are multiple strategies not required? As Charlotte Bunch has suggested, it would seem that we need to be able to move in and out of separatism, fueling and being fueled by collective women's space and consciousness, and taking that strength back into confrontation with and within the structures and institutions that are both cause and consequence of the many layers or levels of oppression in our society.

This paper has taken a variety of forms. Earlier versions or parts were presented at the Conference of Women's History held at the College of St. Catherine, St. Paul, Minnesota, October 1977; at the Spring Hill Conference on Feminist Perspectives, Wayzata, Minnesota, April 1978; and at the Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, Mount Holyoke, August 1978. I wish to thank Allen Isaacman and members of the Feminist Scholars' Colloquium at the University of Minnesota, especially Riv-Ellen Prell, for their support, criticism and suggestions at various stages. In addition, I wish to acknowledge the editorial efforts and suggestions of Janet Spector, Marion Cajori and Sue Heinemann—efforts that have made this version possible.

1. Juditn Van Allen, "Aba Riots or the Igbo 'Women's War': Ideology, Stratification and the Invisibility of Women," in *Women in Africa*, ed. Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), p. 62.
2. Ibid., p. 61.
3. My summary here is drawn from Van Allen's work and from: Caroline Ifeka-Moller, "Female Militancy and Colonial Revolt: The Women's War of 1929, Southeastern Nigeria," in *Perceiving Women*, ed. Shirley Ardener (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1975).
4. Ifeka-Moller, passim.
5. Ibid., pp. 20-26.
6. My summary here is drawn from: Shirley Ardener, "Sexual Insult and Female Militancy," in *Perceiving Women*, ed. Shirley Ardener (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1975).
7. R.E. Ritzenthaler, "Anlu: A Woman's Uprising in the British Cameroons," *African Studies*, vol. 19, no. 3 (1960), p. 152; and Ardener, pp. 36-37.
8. Ardener, p. 38.
9. Ibid., p. 39.
10. Ritzenthaler provides fascinating details on *anlu* organization and *anlu* law.
11. My summary of the Usangi women's protest is drawn from: Jean O'Barr, "Pare Women: A Case of Political Involvement," *Rural Africana*, no. 29 (1975-76); and from I.N. Kimambo, *MBIRU: Popular Protest in Colonial Tanzania* (Historical Association of Tanzania, Paper no. 9, 1971).
12. Kimambo, p. 20.
13. O'Barr, p. 127.
14. In the early 1970s, a higher percentage of women were elected to local positions in Usangi than in other Pare subdistricts. O'Barr attributes this to two factors: the Usangi women's political experience in 1945, and the high incidence of male absenteeism in Usangi due to labor migration (O'Barr, pp. 127-130). Yet only a significant reduction in labor migration over time would enable us to assess the relative importance of these two factors and to determine whether the Usangi women's political "visibility" is temporary or permanent.
15. The phrase is used frequently. Stephanie Urdang, a photojournalist who has twice visited Guinea-Bissau to interview women in the former liberation movement party, encountered it often during her discussion with PAIGC women. See Stephanie Urdang, *Fighting Two Colonialisms: Women in Guinea-Bissau* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979).
16. See Nicole-Claude Mathieu, "Man-Culture and Women-Nature?" *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, vol. 1 (1978), pp. 55-65.
17. Basil Davidson and Terence Ranger, among others, have demonstrated persuasively the role of "ancestral charters" in mobilizing early African resistance to the establishment of formal colonial rule. Thus, the spirit mediums of a particular group such as the Shona of present-day Zimbabwe-Rhodesia rallied the people against the "new evil" of settler expansion and colonial administration as they had rallied earlier generations against the older evils confronted in the past. Similarly, it was not unusual for anti-colonial protest to take the form of witchcraft eradication movements well into the 20th century. See, for example: Basil Davidson, *The African Genius: An Introduction to African Social and Cultural History* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1969), pp. 250-275; T.O. Ranger, "Connexions Between 'Primary Resistance' Movements and Modern Mass Nationalism in East and Central Africa, Part I," *Journal of African History*, vol. 9, no. 3 (1968), pp. 437-453, and "Part II," *Journal of African History*, vol. 9, no. 4 (1968), 631-641.

from "Female and Male Body Language..."

by Marianne Wex

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VW-Chef
Nordhoff
Spiegel 28/1973
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Konkret Dez. 1975
Foto: Stefan Moses
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Werbung für Aspirin von

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Julie Christie
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Werbung für Bronco Jeans

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Mann in Reykjavik
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Werbung für Bronco Jeans
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Christa Siems,
Schauspielerin,
Conti Press,
Hamburger Abendblatt 20./21.3.1976

Marianne Wex, a West German artist, writes that her interest in female and male body language encompasses "all bodily movements that we perform in our everyday lives, from how we walk, sit, stand, lie, to our facial expressions. I see these mostly unconscious movements as essential elements of our communication." In compiling more than 2,000 photographs of people in public places, along with images from the media and the history of sculpture, "I had no criteria. I photographed everything that I found because I didn't want my work restricted." Wex arranges the photographs of men on top, with the women below, "because [this order] mirrors the patriarchal hierarchy." She describes the most common body posture of women as: "legs held narrowly together straight or slightly inwardly turned feet, arms held close to the body . . . i.e., the woman above all diminishes herself; she claims little space. The most general characteristics of the body postures of men are: legs placed widely apart, feet pointed outwards, arms held at a distance from the body . . . i.e., the man makes himself large and generally claims more space than the woman. . . . I take for granted that women and men learn to move differently from an early age and that this female and male body language relates to other female and male role assignments. This also means that body language relates to the characteristics and conditioning of weak and strong genders and thereby reinforces the stabilization of the man/woman hierarchy."

The photographs and quotations are excerpted from Marianne Wex's book *"Weibliche" und "mannliche" Korpersprache als Folge patriarchalischer Machtverhaltnisse* (Hamburg: Verlag Marianne Wex, 1979), which is available from B. Lupke, c/o "Sappho," Luxemburgstrasse 2,6200 Wiesbaden, West Germany (Postfach 5266).

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Developing A Feminist Media Strategy

by Leslie Labowitz

A flow of destructive symbolic messages about women pervades the mass media which creates and controls our culture. Women are portrayed as sexual objects and willing victims. Women become targets for male aggression and extreme violence. A false connection between sexuality and violence is transmitted in virtually all forms of mass communication, from advertising and entertainment to news broadcasting. The media are controlled by men invested in the perpetuation of a patriarchal and capitalistic system. If feminists are to bring about permanent social and cultural change, it is crucial that we gain access to mass communication channels, alter the symbols that make up the old order, and replace them with new images imbued with a feminist consciousness.

As feminist artists who are particularly aware of the effects of images and symbols on individuals and mass consciousness, we have formed Ariadne—a communication/information-sharing network of women in the arts, politics, media and women's community. Ariadne sponsors and produces public events addressing social issues relevant to women's lives. Through Ariadne, we are developing a media strategy that is carefully planned, concrete, action-oriented and easily available to all women. For the past three years, we have collaboratively produced large-scale public performance events in Los Angeles, San Francisco and Las Vegas on the issues of rape and the violent images of women in record advertising, news and pornography. These events are based on intricate media and political strategies, community-organizing techniques and image-making processes. They are documented by videotapes, graphics and handbooks. Ariadne's projects fall into two categories: (1) the "media performance" and (2) the "public informational campaign." The first is a one-time event designed specifically for TV newscasts and aimed at controlling the content of the event as it is distributed through the media. The second is a series of connected events taking place over about a three-week period. In *Three Weeks in May,* for instance, the events radiated out from a map of Los Angeles, placed in the City Hall Mall. Rapes were recorded daily, as they were reported to the police, by stamping the map with the word RAPE in bold red letters at the location where the rape occurred. During the three weeks, self-defense classes, street performances, a public speak-out, guerrilla actions and other art events occurred all over the city.

Such a campaign builds public interest; it educates and organizes the community. The media strategy involves radio interviews, talkshows, TV newscasts and feature articles in newspapers and magazines. Our audience, for both the media performances and public campaigns, is the broad public reached through the popular mass media. Our intention is to interrupt the consistent flow of media images and messages that perpetuate the myth of woman as victim. Yet a single event or even a few events is clearly not enough. Our strategy will gain in effectiveness when women everywhere begin to create a working media strategy. To help make this possible we have extracted the elements of a successful "media action." We urge you to use them and join us in the growing movement of feminist media-strategy workers/artists.

1 **BEGIN WITH YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE** of the effect of violent images of women and believe in your right to speak out about them. Our identification with all women and our anger about images of victimization motivate us to work together toward change.

2 **COME TOGETHER WITH WOMEN WHO FEEL AS YOU DO.** Several existing organizations deal directly with these issues, such as Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) and Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media. They have already proved their effectiveness and connecting with them will speed up your education about the impact of images. You will be aligning yourself with a strong network forming all over the country.

3 **EXPAND YOUR ALLIANCES** with women outside the feminist community. Violence concerns *all women,* and they are eager to know what can be done about it. Create broad coalitions with women in the media system, in political office, in the art community and elsewhere. Alliances with women in media will prove particularly valuable as resources for information on how to get coverage. Although the professional stance of newsreporters in general is to remain "objective" and impartial, sympathetic women reporters can apply pressure to cover your events.

(Through our "media actions" we have developed an ongoing relationship with women on the city council of Los Angeles. They trust us to respect their public image and their official positions. It is important to understand the limits of professional women working in the system so as not to endanger their jobs.)

Leslie Labowitz is an artist/activist who has worked collaboratively with Suzanne Lacy in Los Angeles since 1977. She is now coordinating the "Incest Awareness Project" for Ariadne.
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4 **LEARN ABOUT IMAGES** and how the messages one gets from them depend on the arrangement of color, form and content. Once you have demystified the image-making process, you will be able to respond more objectively and critically to the bombardment of visual media in your daily life. You will be able to control the images entering your psyche and how they affect you. *This is a crucial process.* It includes analysis of how sexual stereotypes of women are used to sell products, to entertain and to promote violence against women—even violence against men. An overview of woman's image throughout history helps us grasp the deep-rooted acceptance of women's victimization in this society.

(For example, 18th- and 19th-century American posters show blond young white women being attacked by Black men, or mothers and children being killed by Indians. From a contemporary viewpoint, the racism and violence promoted against Blacks and Native Americans are obvious Yet even today it is difficult for our culture to recognize the sexism and misogyny inherent in these same images. The image of woman as victim is a "natural" element in entertainment and advertising, while it would be impossible to get away with, say, record covers showing lynchings or massacres.)

5 **THINK ABOUT ACTION TO CHANGE THESE IMAGES.** Know your opposition. Learn everything you can about radio and TV stations and the press in your community. Find out what their politics are, who funds them and how accessible they are to the public. Know the personal lives of those in control. (If, for example, the daughter of a TV executive has been raped, go directly to him or her.) Cable TV is usually a good place to gain experience and is more accessible than the major commercial networks.

6 **USE EXISTING MEDIA FORMS** in which women can speak out on issues—talkshows, radio interviews, women's columns. Use the alternative media systems. Create educational packets for schools, universities and community organizations. Slideshows, videotapes and even performances can find receptive audiences all over your community.

7 **DOCUMENT YOUR ACTIONS** with slides, photos, film or video so you can show issues and methodologies to other media-action groups. Some museums and cable stations provide free or low-cost public access to equipment. If there is no one in your group who can handle film or video, make contacts with a university broadcasting department, where there are often women who welcome a connection with a broader political network.

8 **BEGIN TO PLAN THE ACTUAL EVENT OR CAMPAIGN.** First, answer these questions: Have we chosen an issue that is currently being heavily publicized in the media? What do we want to say about it? Can we say it in language a broad audience will understand? Are our political goals appropriate to the action? What media form is our target? Is it best suited to our event? How much will it cost? What are our resources? Where can we raise funds? How can we expand participation to include women from the media, politics and art? Will it be a one-time "media performance" or a "public informational campaign"? When and where should it take place? Is the setting right? Time of day? What are the images we want to project?

9 **SELECT THE KEY IMAGES AND MESSAGE** in the coordinating committee of your group. At least one member should be an artist who can facilitate, design a format and create the visual images. Hold brainstorming sessions to come up with images that will accurately express the direct political and the more personal content. Your first images will probably reflect clichés we've all accumulated from popular culture. Keep exploring your consciousness until strong and original images begin to form that will profoundly affect your audience. If you need a push, look at mythological images of women in books. Find the ones that represent positive symbols for women, even though they may have acquired negative connotations in *this* culture, and research them thoroughly. These are the images we need to reclaim, to transform their meaning.

(For instance, in In Mourning and in Rage, *we took the images of women as mourners, trivialized in this culture, and transformed them into powerful seven-foot tall figures demanding an end to violence against women. In another event, produced by the staff of the Woman's Building in Los Angeles, Kate Millett's sculpture* Naked Lady*—an image celebrating strength, women of large dimensions [even fat]—was raised to the roof of the Woman's Building and placed over the entrance as a protective and threatening goddess. Ariadne also designed a float for the "Take Back the Night" march in San Francisco [part of the 1978 Feminist National Conference on Pornography]. A richly dressed Madonna on the front side became, on the back side, the carcass of a lamb, spewing out pornographic images from Christian religious rituals, Greek mythology and medieval lore. The float visualized the split between the virgin and the whore, or the good girl/bad girl dichotomy we believe to be at the cultural roots of contemporary pornography.)*

10 **BE SURE YOU DO NOT MERELY CREATE A MEDIA GIMMICK.** Superficial images that don't go deep into the cultural symbols of a society have less impact. Remember that by distributing *your* images through the mass media you are competing with sophisticated image-makers and with high-impact images—namely, those of women being attacked and violated. News media people react negatively to gimmicks or cute tricks designed to entertain and obtain coverage. The media can choose to manipulate, but they don't like to *be* manipulated. Gimmicks do not transform consciousness, and the ultimate goal of our actions is such a transformation. Events designed to express gut-level feelings and real community concerns do not come across as manipulative. A large amount of obvious preparation for an event is a sign of its seriousness. Participants in the action will experience a sense of collective and political expression. When this is communicated, the media will keep coming out, and your audience will grow.

11 **CONTROL THE MEDIA'S INTERPRETATION** of your images and information. The press release, the first step in informing the media of your plans, frames perception of your action. It is an art form in itself. It must be written simply, with enticing descriptions of the visuals and a clear political perspective on the issue addressed. It should include names of participating government officials and celebrities and must give the impression that your action is the most important event of the day.

(For example, the press release headline for the hoisting of The Naked Lady *at the Woman's Building read: "The Naked Lady of L.A. Takes on a New Image." The contrast between the stereotypical image of a naked woman and our sculpture was so extreme that the event was covered by major network TV news and made the front page of the* L.A. Times. *This was a real coup for media action in Los Angeles.)*

In a longer-lasting public informational campaign, the strategy is somewhat different. You need more detailed information—a press kit containing a general description, a schedule of events, press releases for each event and several photos. This information packet is sent out to contacts in the media, government and community six weeks before the project begins, providing material for feature articles. Separate press releases are sent out several days before each individual event to TV news desks, radio and newspapers. To ensure coverage, phone calls should be made on the day of an important action. If coverage is still not confirmed, ask to speak to the station manager. Persist until you know *at least two* news teams are coming out. If they don't show up, reconsider your strategy, then make complaints to stations by phone or letter.

12 **TIMING IS VERY IMPORTANT** in controlling the effectiveness of your action. It is infinitely easier to get coverage for a one-time event if it takes place at a time when the public is being consistently exposed to an issue concerning women. This almost always guarantees full coverage with little effort.

(In Mourning and in Rage *took place during the Hillside Strangler rape/murders in L.A. The media's dramatization of the murders ensured coverage of our memorial performance by newscasters all over the country—even in France!—and we were asked to appear on TV talkshows to discuss our alternatives to the media's highly sensationalized coverage of the murders.)*

The day of the week and the time of day are also important. In Los Angeles, early on a Tuesday or Wednesday is considered to be the best time to call an event or press conference. Weekend news has already broken and there is a better chance of getting on the evening news that same day. If you "study your opposition," you can find out the best times in your community.

13 **PICK YOUR LOCATION STRATEGICALLY** to enhance the impact of your images. Seemingly insignificant details to aid reporters—like parking spaces, electrical outlets and familiarity with the location—add to potential coverage.

(For instance, Record Companies Drag Their Feet, *an event done with WAVAW in 1977, attempted to connect real-life violence against women with the images of women on record covers. It took place in a parking lot on Sunset Boulevard, in the heart of the recording industry, right under an offensive billboard of the rock group KISS. The media performance* Myths About Rape, *an event in the larger campaign called* From Reverence to Rape to Respect, *took place in the desert near the outskirts of Las Vegas, in front of a large billboard designed by a participating artist. The desolate area created an ominous atmosphere that contrasted dramatically with the neon, brassy quality of the town itself. The billboard backdrop had RAPE IS EVERYBODY'S CONCERN printed in large red letters on a black ground; the props and costumes for the performance were red, black and white. Los Angeles City Hall was chosen for* In Mourning and in Rage *because of its direct connection to the political demands we were presenting to members of the city council; we also knew the media would be covering the council's meeting that day.)*

14 **TAILOR YOUR EVENT TO MAKE NEWS COVERAGE EASY.** Analyze TV newscasts: find out who the reporters are, how much time is allotted to women's issues and—most important—how they edit their news footage. How long is the average news slot? Does the newscaster stand in front of the image in a narrative format? What is the ratio of verbal to visual information? The success of media actions is determined by how well they are interpreted by the newsreporter. Keep records of the footage to analyze later. (All of our events are designed in the format of a newscast in order to control its coverage as much as possible.)

Keep several essential points in mind: The event shouldn't last longer than 20 minutes and it should have at least one high-impact visual image that is emblematic of your message. Both words and images should be in easily understood language. Anything ambiguous must be clarified by a speech in the performance or by the press release. The performance should be confined to a limited area so that the camera can frame the whole set without losing information. Its sequences should be broken down into eight to ten parts composed of elements containing enough information so that the whole message is clear in each sequence. Parts of it can and should be repeated like choruses. It is okay to make small mistakes, as they will be edited out by the news anyway. Make sure at least one speaker represents a feminist viewpoint. Her speech should be planned as an integral part of the event's structure so it is sure to be included in the newscast.

15 **THE ACTION SHOULD HAVE TWO DIRECTORS**: one for the performance and the other for the media. Since the performers in these events are usually not professional actresses, but concerned women, the director should be an artist who can supportively guide them through the entire piece. The media director greets reporters when they arrive, signs them in, hands out press kits and press statements, and gives shot sheets to the camerapeople. The press statement explains the symbolism of each image in the performance. The shot sheet is the sequences' breakdown in the order they occur. The media director is responsible for keeping the media at the site for the entire event. She does not give interviews until the press conference scheduled

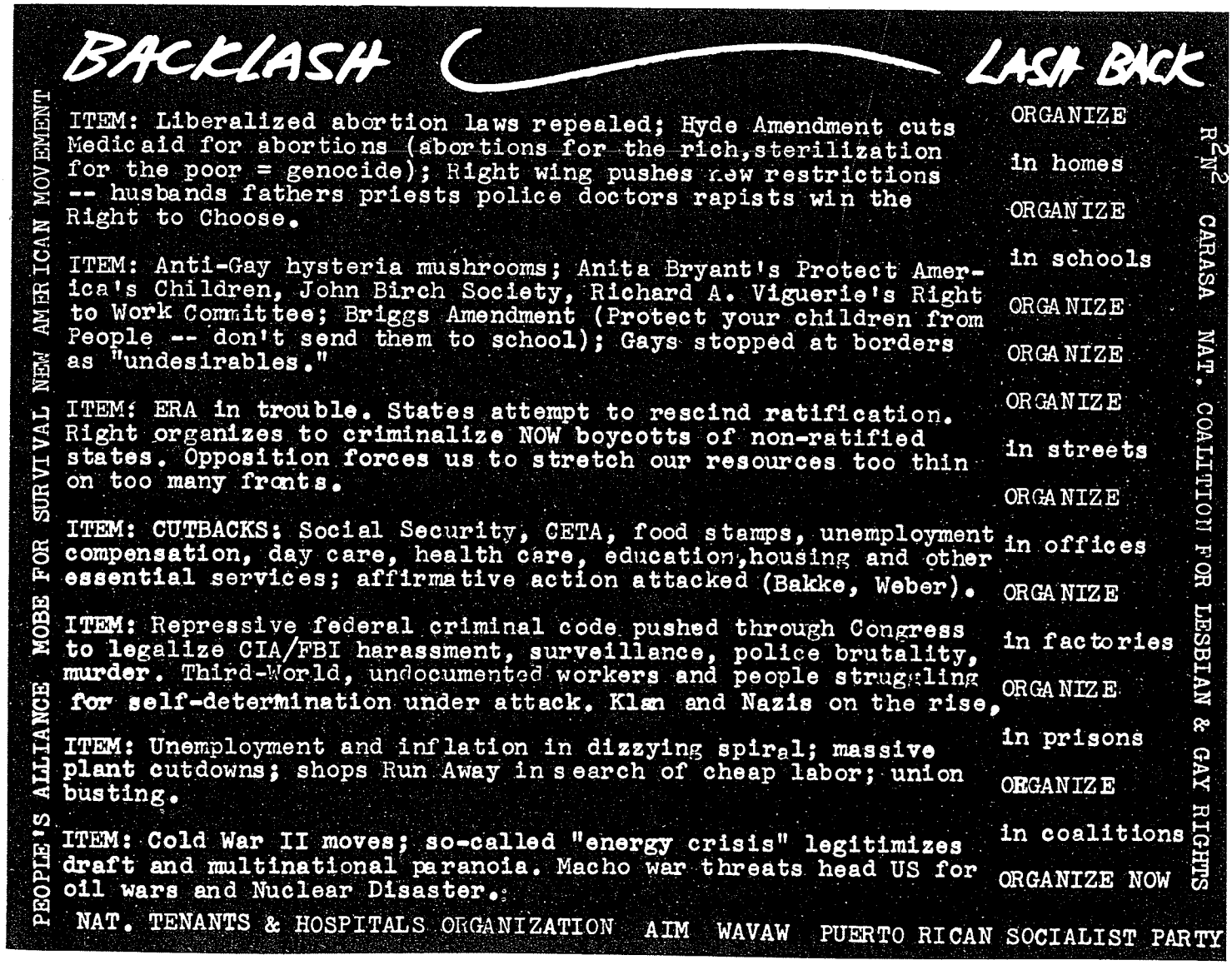
after the performance. (In fact, it should be agreed upon by all participants not to give out information before the performance.) The media director also takes charge of documenting the action. This can include slides, black and white photos, video and, later, news footage taken from TV.

16 PEOPLE WHO GO ON RADIO AND TV SHOULD BE SUFFICIENTLY TRAINED IN PUBLIC SPEAKING and well prepared to present your point of view. In the public informational campaigns, talkshows, radio interviews and news features are an important part of the strategy. Moderators have many ways of steering a dialogue in their own direction. Your representative must also know how to control the situation. The best approach is to ask the moderator before the show what questions will be discussed and to prepare your answers. Prepare for negative as well as positive situations. Know what you want to say and say it. Turn every question to your advantage by knowing exactly what it is you want the public to know.

The feminist perspective is rarely aired and it is crucial to talk to the millions of isolated women watching in their homes in a language they will understand. Speaking publicly out of your experience as a woman is a very courageous act, and the women who do it need emotional support from the whole group. It is a good idea to go in pairs to these situations. Allow as many women as are willing to do these public interviews. This gives us a sense of personal power and avoids the media's tendency to create stars.

When these actions are successful, they become in effect mass public rituals. Since the beginning of the Women's Liberation Movement, feminist artists have been doing rituals, most of which have been private or enacted for a small community. Now that we are speaking out on issues important to all of our lives, public ritual offers a feminist approach to larger audiences. Positive and active images of women challenge existing images, which rarely portray real people positively interacting. A different attitude can be communicated on the TV screen and can become a rich shared experience that creates dialogue, asks questions and demands change.

For more detailed information on the performance events executed by Leslie Labowitz and Suzanne Lacy, which form the basis for this article, see their "Evolution of a Feminist Art" in *Heresies* No. 6 (On Women and Violence), 1978, p. 78 ff.



Organizing with Music: Blazing Star

by Eileen Willenborg

Culture is a force in our lives that is both abstract and concrete. It can move people to action while it helps them cope with and, better still, challenge inequities in their lives. Women's music serves both functions. It lyrically depicts the oppression of women in direct, simple terms, and it supports those women who fight to change their lives. Music has traditionally been the most popular and accessible cultural form, and feminist music is immensely effective as a tool for both consciousness-raising and organizing—the perfect vehicle for the message of women's liberation. Blazing Star, a lesbian socialist feminist collective in Chicago, has used concerts along with its newspaper as integral elements in an outreach program since 1977.

Blazing Star began in early 1974 as a lesbian workshop of the Chicago Women's Liberation Union (CWLU). Our long-term goal was to mobilize members of the racially and economically diverse lesbian community to become politically active and to join a citywide lesbian rights organization (separate from the CWLU), which would also address issues of race and class. From 1974 to 1977 our three bases were:

(1) the newspaper *Blazing Star*, covering local and national women's and gay issues and distributed free throughout the lesbian community, as well as to feminist, left and gay organizations and businesses;

(2) ten-week rap groups on "The Lesbian Experience," designed to create positive images of the gay lifestyle, provide a social/political outlet for gay women outside the bars, and bring together lesbians who had just come out and more experienced gay women;

(3) playing on the teams (usually sponsored by the lesbian bars) that competed in the Chicago Park District's Neighborhood Women's Sports Leagues.

Our first three years were devoted to experimentation and base-building. With the dissolution of the CWLU in April 1977, we began to work in several new areas. Former members of the CWLU joined us to organize support for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment in Illinois' 17th electoral district, along the industrial corridor of Chicago's northwest side. By leafletting, running petition drives, holding neighborhood coffees and working with community groups, we were able to raise feminist issues to a largely working-class constituency. The Blazing Star collective now had heterosexual, bisexual and lesbian members. After negotiating with several organizations, we opted to become an all-woman chapter of the New American Movement (NAM). We also became involved in the mixed gay community when we helped organize the Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Metropolitan Chicago and worked with the Gay Rights Taskforce of the Alliance to End Repression, which concentrated on gay rights legislation on city and state levels. These new affiliations expanded our scope and put us in contact with new networks.

In 1976-77, Blazing Star had begun to sponsor educationals, movies and other cultural events. We needed social outlets to raise political issues that would integrate the lesbian, feminist, gay, left and working-class communities in which we worked. We began with an educational in February 1976, featuring Elaine Noble (D. Mass.) speaking on "Gays in the Legislative Process." The second one, in March, was a slideshow called "Gay People/Straight Healthcare," developed by the Gay Nurses Association. These programs attracted the gay and lesbian communities, and to a lesser degree a feminist and leftist audience, but they did not appeal to the broader public we also sought.

In the spring of 1977, motivated by the events in Dade County, Florida, and Anita Bryant's successful attack on the Miami sexual-preference ordinances, we decided that cultural events were the best strategy by which to bill ourselves as reliable, human-rights-oriented lesbians, respected by a broad spectrum of Chicago groups, including politically nonaffiliated straight people. To date, Blazing Star has sponsored five concerts, both as fundraisers for the paper and as forums to communicate our political message to the widest possible audience.

The Blazing Star productions had a definite political flavor. We opened each set with a brief rap about our organizing work, encouraging women to come to potluck suppers to find out more about us and how they could work on our projects. We talked about gay politics and socialism as well as the ERA. We always had a "Grande Bazaar Politique" in the basement of the concert hall, where women's bookstores, artisans, restaurant collectives, other feminist and gay service/political organizations, Third World, anti-nuke and other socialist groups set up tables and sold their wares. The musicians also raised political issues during the concerts. Their raps added to the impact of their lyrics. Politics from the stage and from the basement coalesced to produce an atmosphere combining culture, socialist feminism and other left issues.

When women and men come to cultural events featuring feminist musicians, it is often the first time they have ever heard women sung to and about in nonsexist, nonobjectifying ways. Feminist concerts are often intense experiences for those new to feminism, challenging women to think about their oppression. Our work on the ERA also allowed us to bring to our concerts many people who had never heard of feminism, much less feminist culture. We always asked the audience to take petitions and make financial contributions, and other ERA groups have commented on our effectiveness in putting the issue before a mass audience. One indication that we were reaching new people was the state of the women's room after concerts. The residue of makeup application and primping—lipstick-stained kleenexes, powder sprinkled near the mirrors, ruined hose left behind—were signs that we had moved beyond the lesbian (and maybe the feminist) crowd.

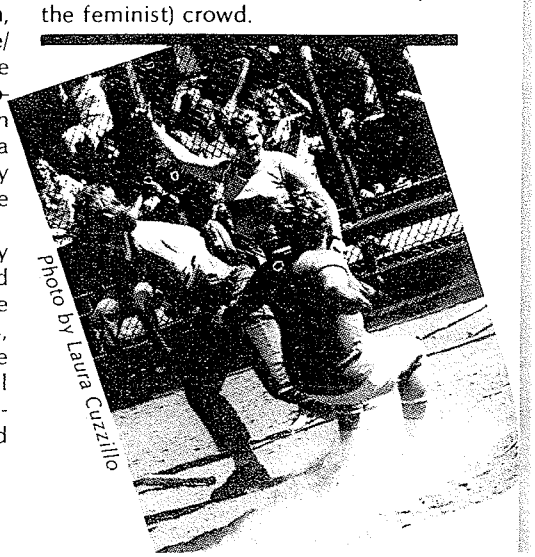


Photo by Laura Cuzzillo

Eileen Willenborg was a founding member of Blazing Star and a former partner in Women in Music/Chicago. She is currently working for Seven Days *in NYC.*

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In spite of the fact that *Blazing Star* is a lesbian newspaper published by a socialist feminist collective, many non-political women risked attending the concerts. They came for many reasons—curiosity, encouragement from a friend, or even expecting some kinky experience. But the concerts changed them. Our feedback and evaluation sheets consistently raved about the warmth of the atmosphere, the energy transmitted both from the stage and the audience, the feeling of real-life sisterhood, and other goodies taken home by first-time feminist concert goers. Ironically, the older, more traditional lesbians were the hardest segment of the community for us younger, "political" lesbians to reach. The Holly Near/Mary Watkins concert in September 1977 did more to recommend Blazing Star and our work to them than anything we had done in three years. One extremely successful and closeted lesbian lawyer told me that if someone offered her season tickets to both the Chicago Symphony and the Lyric Opera, she would exchange them for the women's music series.

The same concert also paid us off for our hours of hanging out, as pool sharks and two-fisted drinkers at the women's bars. We had been spending time at Augie's Club since the beginning, and one of our first projects had been to organize an Augie's basketball team. (These teams brought us into direct contact with heterosexual women in the league. For many of these working-class women, this was their first encounter with open lesbians. Shyly at first, and then more comfortably, they would stop by Augie's Club for a drink after the game, and these first contacts became positive experiences.) Augie's was always a ticket outlet and publicity target for our events and Augie's customers eagerly awaited each issue of *Blazing Star*. The bar was always our first distribution point to sell out. In fact, our first concert—with Jeanne Mackey and Penny Rosenwasser—was held there and was a sell-out. Olga, the owner, gave us the space free and afterward donated the money she made selling drinks to Blazing Star.

Yet Olga, like many older lesbians, never came to any of our films or educationals. Because of the phenomenal ticket sales for the Near and Watkins concert, she and a dozen of her cronies, many of them old-style, pre-1969 dykes, unexpectedly showed up at the door. They got excellent seats on the first floor, and Olga was amazed at the number of exuberant gays, lesbians and straight people. After the concert, she greeted me with a big hug and said this was the proudest day of her 25 years as a dyke, to see a lesbian newspaper sponsoring such an event. She told me she had never felt such pride to be a lesbian and a woman as she did when Holly talked from the stage about her sexuality.

Feminist music addresses a wide range of topics centered on women's lives and experiences. For example, "The Rock Will Wear Away" by Meg Christian and Holly Near deals with problems faced by women in three different stages of life: a teenager's first experience with sexual harassment and rape; a young mother pregnant once too often and hungry for freedom; and an old woman who knows the silence of loneliness. The song offers hope. Its theme is: as water can wear away rock, so feminist support and determination can wear away oppression. Cris Williamson's "Waterfall" is about filling up and spilling over with change, about the good forces released by transformation. Holly Near's "Fight Back" commands women to take control of their lives, not to "live in cages" created by societal restrictions or fear of attack. Her "*Hay una mujer desaperecida*" calls for support for seven Chilean women who have disappeared and, if still alive, are presumably held captive by the fascist junta. Sweet Honey in the Rock, an *a capella* group led by Bernice Reagon, recalls black women's heritage by combining African music, gospel, rhythm and blues and jazz with a contemporary message. "Fannie Lou Hamer" is their salute to the real-life heroine of the Civil Rights Movement, while "B'lieve I'll Run on Down. . . See What the End's Gonna Be" decries the possibility of a nuclear holocaust, based on a spiritual about the Deluge in the Old Testament. Willie Tyson, perhaps the most satirical of feminist lyricists, equates a "Debutante Ball" and a cattle auction.

The cumulative effect of Blazing Star's five productions has been most encouraging. The newspaper's circulation has grown from the initial 750 mimeographed copies (mostly enjoyed by mice at the bars) to a press-run of 7,500, with a web-fed tabloid format averaging 12 pages, that is snatched up as soon as it appears. Our distribution has expanded from the original 15 outlets, where we asked apologetically if we could leave our papers, to over 100 outlets in Chicago and 30 out of town. In the beginning, we used to sit for hours in the bars, poring over copies we had written ourselves, hoping to encourage others to pick up *Blazing Star*. Now we get calls asking when the next issue will be published because customers have been looking for it. We are edging toward a monthly, then a biweekly publication schedule.

Another intangible benefit of the concerts was the publicity they gave the newspaper. Distribution of a poster somehow legitimizes a sponsoring group. Producing a cultural event instead of yet another meeting or rally creates a different image for a political organization. Once we began to hold concerts, we got noticed in a new way. Other activists, and even the press, started using *Blazing Star* as a resource on local and national gay issues. We were asked more frequently to speak to college students, to church and civic groups, and to be guests on local radio talkshows. We had spoken publicly since the beginning, but the requests increased appreciably after our first two concerts.

Photo of Holly Near by Laura Cuzzillo

Producing a stage concert also provides an opportunity to integrate new members or utilize short-term volunteers, since it involves a multitude of task-oriented projects with clearly defined goals. New or peripheral members of the group are encouraged to take responsibility for technical arrangements, advance ticket sales, postering, mailings, recruiting and managing house and stage crews. Working under the supervision of an overall producer, new members and volunteers can take on a lot of responsibility for the production.

It is important for grass-roots organizing groups to continue to use culture as a conscious strategy for outreach. Women's music has succeeded in reaching out to the broadest sectors of the lesbian and feminist communities, but reaching Third World, Hispanic, working- and middle-class audiences has proved more difficult. Culture is present in all our daily lives, but too often it oppresses rather than supports us. Utilizing culture to express a political vision is not a new concept, but Blazing Star's experience provides an example of how culture does organize. As political activists, we must continually search for new expressions of radical culture which, like women's music, will sustain and move people to new awareness and action.

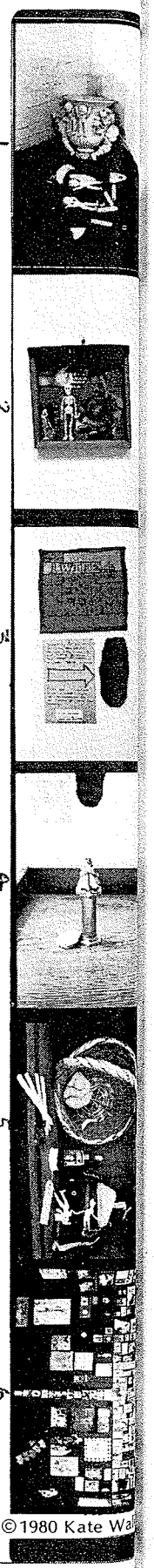
Blazing Star can be reached at PO Box 7892, Chicago, Ill. 60680 (Tel: 312-248-9800).

SUBJECT

FEMINISTO: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Housewife

TECHNICAL DATA

BY KATE WALKER

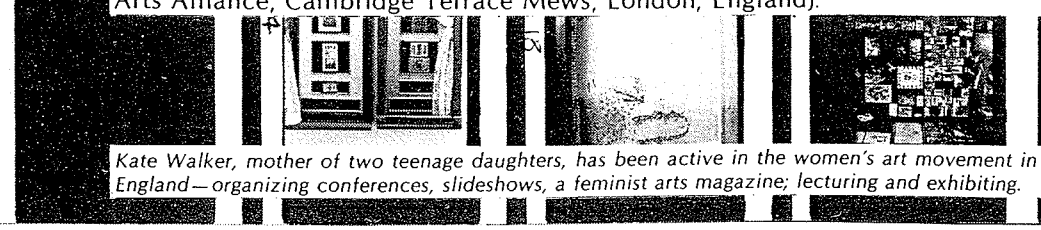


This British "Postal Event" is a constantly changing and growing body of portable, mailable works. It began early in 1975, when Kate Walker's friend and neighbor Sally Gollop moved out of South London. Both women were artists and mothers and housewives and had participated in other feminist collaborations—marches and "A Woman's Place" (influenced by the Cal Arts *Womanhouse).* As they began to exchange objects and pictures through the mails, they realized this was a new way "to develop a visual language accessible to women, corresponding with our own experiences and breaking down our isolation." They spread the word, involving women who were and were not artists and feminists, women of different ages, ideologies and marital status, most of whom did not know each other. In May 1976, the first exhibition was held in Manchester; it consisted of nearly 300 works. Since then, the show has been to Liverpool, Birmingham (twice), Edinburgh, London, Melbourne and Berlin. Each time, the installations differ as local groups cope with a basic contradiction: how to place effectively these expressions of domestic isolation and frustration—this anger against the prevailing male "artocracy"—within the white-walled neutral spaces intended for a very different kind of art. At the ICA in London, for instance, the challenge was met by building a house pastiche which broke the space up into intimate rooms.

The aim of the "Postal Event" is communication: "We are attempting to create our own image-language; to sew a cloth of identity that other women may recognize. Our creativity derives from non-prestigious folk traditions. It is diverse and integrated into our lives; it is cooked and eaten, washed and worn." Certain images surface frequently: views from kitchen windows, candy boxes, make-up kits, media collages, crocheted and knitted objects—many venting a real rage. Some of the women see themselves "vomiting all our hangups" and "getting rid of all the shit before our own images can be born." Press and public sometimes respond in kind: "Unsuitable for children," said *Northwest Arts* (about work created in the kitchens and sewing corners of all these mothers). "Pornographic." "Tatty." "Self-pitying." "You're bitter and twisted; you just want to make other people as bitter as yourselves." And, from a man: "I don't see what all the fuss is about."

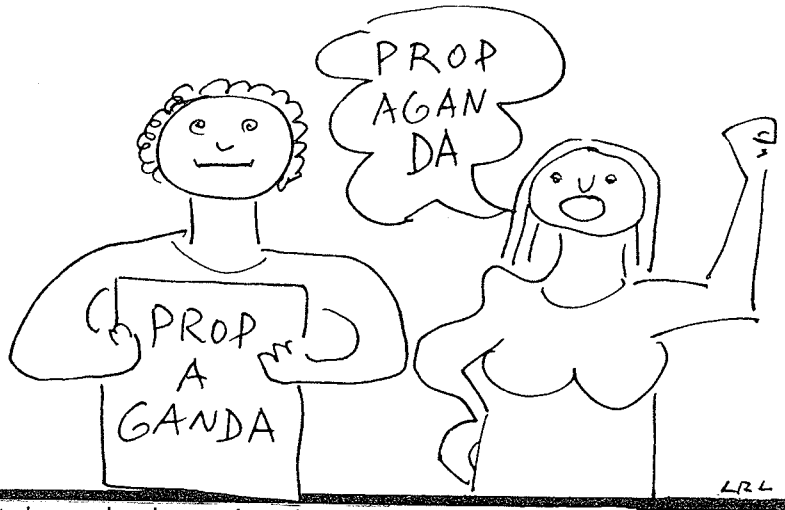
Some women simply hoped to find solace in creativity, while others were seeking "a feminist perspective to put art into a directly political sphere," as participant Monica Ross wrote. "The contemporary art scene is just another sphere where women have taken second place. Its elite and obscure nature has developed in the interest of capital. False standards, ethics, and competition combine to isolate all artists and to inhibit the development of meaningful communication." In the "Postal Event," "We don't compete. We share images and experiences. The posting of one piece of work from one woman to another makes ownership ambiguous."

The "Postal Event" continues, and anyone wishing to participate should contact the Birmingham Art Group, c/o Tricia Davies, 79 Blenheim Road, Mosely, Birmingham, England. Four of the participants are also working on a new group work called Feministo Phoenix, which combines consciousness-raising and artmaking (for information, contact Kate Walker, c/o the Women's Arts Alliance, Cambridge Terrace Mews, London, England).



Kate Walker, mother of two teenage daughters, has been active in the women's art movement in England—organizing conferences, slideshows, a feminist arts magazine; lecturing and exhibiting.

©1980 Kate Wa



Some Propaganda For Propaganda

by Lucy R. Lippard

A picture is supposed to be worth a thousand words, but it turns out that a picture plus ten or a hundred words may be worthiest of all. With few exceptions, most effective social/political art (propaganda) being done today consists of a combination of words and images. I'm not just talking about "conceptual art" or paintings with words on them, but also about writing that integrates photographs (and vice versa), about comic strips, photo-novels, slideshows, film, TV and posters—even about advertisements and fashion propaganda. In the last decade or so, visual artists have had to begin to think about problems of narrative, detachment, drama, rhetoric, involvement—*styles of communication*—which hitherto seemed to belong to other aesthetic domains. And in order to deal with these issues, they have had to overcome the modernist taboo against "literary art," which encompasses virtually all art with political/social intentions.

"Literary art" either uses words or, through visual puns and other means, calls up content more specific and pointed than that promulgated by modernist doctrines. It is a short jump from *specific* to "obvious," "heavy-handed," "crowd-pleasing," "sloganeering," and other epithets most often aimed by the art-for-art's-sake establishment at Dada's and Surrealism's recent progeny—pop art, conceptual art, narrative art, performance and video art. Even the most conventional kinds of representational art come in for some sneers, as though *images* were by definition literary. God forbid, the taboo seems to be saying, that the content of art be accessible to its audience. And god forbid that content mean something in social terms. Because if it did, that audience might expand, and art itself might escape from the ivory tower, from the clutches of the ruling/corporate class that releases and interprets it to the rest of the world. Art might become "mere propaganda" for *us*, instead of for *them*.

Because we have to keep in the back of our minds at all times that we wouldn't have to use the denigrated word "propaganda" for what is, in fact, *education*, if it weren't consistently used against us. "Quality" in art, like "objectivity" and "neutrality," belongs to *them*. The only way to combat the "normal" taken-for-granted propaganda that surrounds us daily is to question *their* version of the truth as publicly and clearly as possible. Yet in the artworld today, clarity is a taboo: "If you want to send a message, call Western Union"...but don't make art. This notion has become an implicit element of American art education and an effective barrier against artists' conscious communication, the reintegration of art into life.

After at least two decades in which the medium has been used primarily to subvert the message, the very word "message" has degenerated into a euphemism for commercial interruptions. So what's left of the avant-garde, rather naturally, rejects the notion of a didactic or "utilitarian" or "political" art, and socialist artists working in a context dominated by various empty fads and formalisms tend to agonize about the relationship between their art and their politics. "Formalism" (in the Greenbergian, not the Russian sense) is denied them; it has been co-opted by those invested in the idea that if art communicates at all, what it communicates had better be so vague as to be virtually incommunicable, or it won't be "good art." This leaves the disenfranchised formalist (or "socialist formalist," as one artist has called himself in an attempt to reclaim the term) on a tightrope between acceptance for her/his formal capacities alone and rejection for her/his need to "use" these capacities to convey social content.

Feminists, on the other hand, should be better equipped to cope with this dilemma. Women artists' historical isolation has prepared them to resist taboos. Our lives have not been separate from our arts, as they are in the dominant culture. "Utilitarian," after all, is what women's work has always been. For instance, many women artists today are rehabilitating the stitch-like mark, swaddling and wrapping, the techniques and materials of women's traditional art and work. Feminist art (and feminist propaganda) expands these sources to include what we learn from our own lived ex-

Lucy R. Lippard writes art criticism and fiction. She is member of the Heresies Collective and gives "dramatic readings" called "Propaganda Fictions."

©1980 Lucy R. Lippard

perience as women, from our sense of our bodies, from our subcultural lives as a "vertical class."

True, the feminist creed "the personal is the political" has been interpreted far too widely and self-indulgently in the liberal vein of "my art is my politics," "all art is political," "everything a woman artist does is feminist art," and so forth. The "I" is not necessarily universal. The personal is only political when the individual is also seen as a member of the social whole. There is a plethora of a certain kind of "feminist art" which, like other prevailing avant-garde styles, looks into the mirror without also focusing on the meaning of the mirror itself—on the perimeter, the periphery which forms the images (form as veil; form as barrier; form as diversionary tactic). Yet despite all this, feminism has potentially changed the terms of propaganda as art by being unashamed of its obsessions and political needs, and by confirming the bonds between individual and social experience.

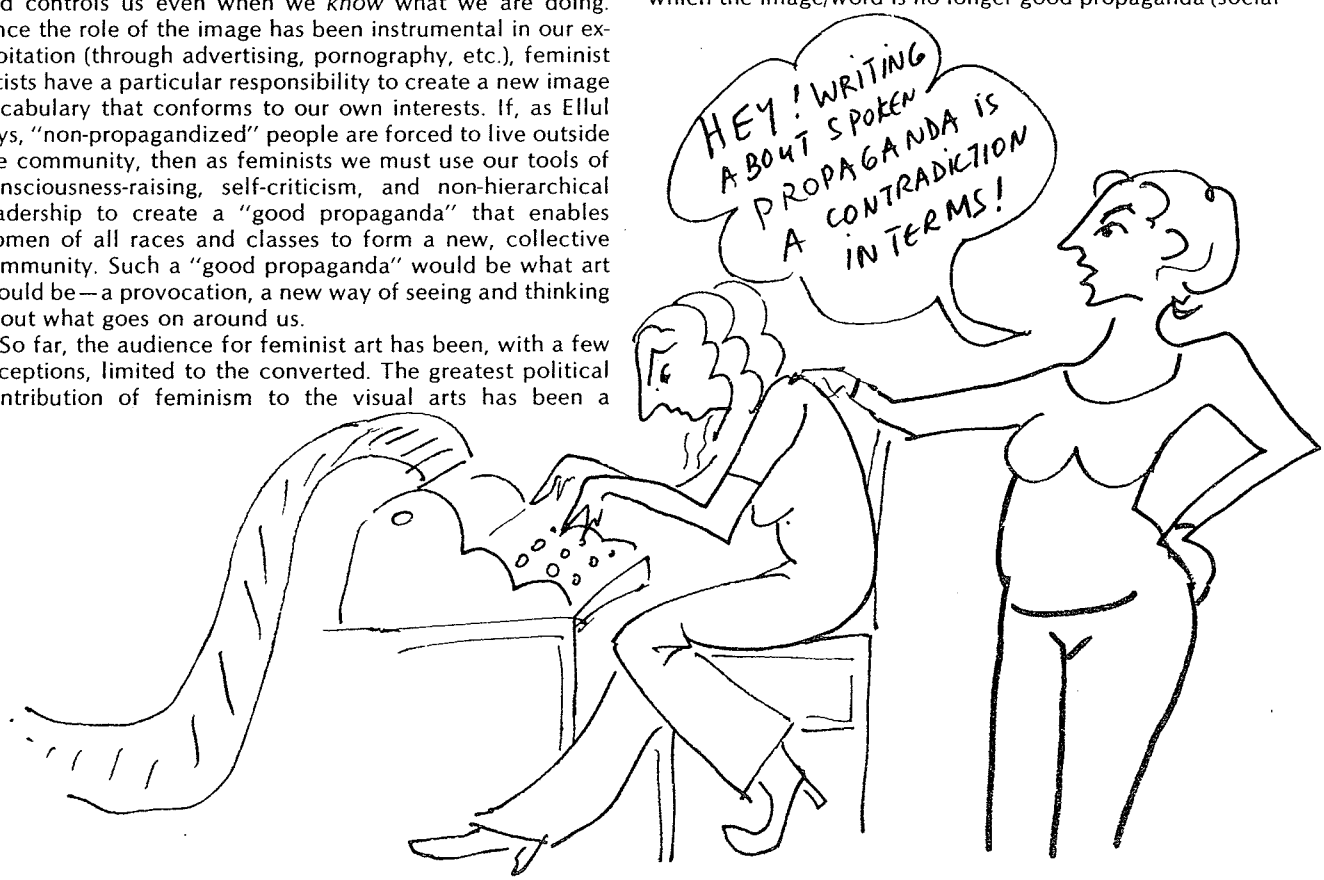
Jacques Ellul (in *Propaganda,* Knopf, New York 1965) sees propaganda as totally dangerous, as a sop, a substitute for some loftier appetites, a false cure for loneliness and alienation. He reduces to propaganda all of our needs for shared belief, for a community of values. Feminists may be able to see it differently. The dictionary definition of the word is "propagating, multiplying, disseminating principles by organized effort"; it acquired its negative connotation in a colonializing male culture, e.g., the Roman Catholic Church. In its positive sense the word "propaganda" can be connected to women's classic role as synthesizer. Our culture of consumption draws women to the market, which, as Batya Weinbaum and Amy Bridges have shown, "provides the setting for the reconciliation of private production and socially determined need" ("The Other Side of the Paycheck," *Monthly Review,* July-August, 1976). Similarly, women artists, few of whom have escaped traditional women's roles, might understand and clarify a viewpoint rarely if ever expressed in the arts, and create new images to validate that viewpoint.

The goal of feminist propaganda is to spread the word and provide the organizational structures through which all women can resist the patriarchal propaganda that denigrates and controls us even when we *know* what we are doing. Since the role of the image has been instrumental in our exploitation (through advertising, pornography, etc.), feminist artists have a particular responsibility to create a new image vocabulary that conforms to our own interests. If, as Ellul says, "non-propagandized" people are forced to live outside the community, then as feminists we must use our tools of consciousness-raising, self-criticism, and non-hierarchical leadership to create a "good propaganda" that enables women of all races and classes to form a new, collective community. Such a "good propaganda" would be what art should be—a provocation, a new way of seeing and thinking about what goes on around us.

So far, the audience for feminist art has been, with a few exceptions, limited to the converted. The greatest political contribution of feminism to the visual arts has been a necessary first step—the introduction and expansion of the notion of autobiography and narrative, ritual and performance, women's history and women's work as ways to retrieve content without giving up form. This has involved the interweaving of photography and words and sometimes music, journal entries and imitations thereof, and the instigation of a dialogue that is particularly appropriate to video, film or performance art. For instance, while so much "narrative art" is simply a superficial and facetious juxtaposition of words and images, it can, when informed by a politically feminist consciousness, open a dialogue between the artist and the viewer: Look at my life. Now look at yours. What do you like/hate about me/my life? What do you hate/like about you/yours? Have you ever looked at your oppression or your accomplishments in quite this way? Is this what happened to you in a similar situation? And so forth, hopefully leading to: Why? What to do? How to organize to do it?

In a literate (but anti-literary) society, the words attached to art, even as mere titles, may have more effect on the way that art is perceived than some of the strongest images do. As a public we (but especially the docilely educated middle class) look to be told by the experts what we are seeing/thinking/feeling. We are told, taught or commanded mainly in words. Not just criticism, but written captions, titles, accompanying texts, soundtracks, taped dialogues, voiceovers all play major roles in clarifying the artist's intent—or in mystifying it. A title, for instance, can be the clue to the image, a hook pulling in a string of associations or providing a punch line. It can also be obfuscating, unrelated, contradictory or even a politically offensive publicity gimmick whereby the artist so vaguely identifies with some fashionable cause that the meaning is turned back on itself. (See *Heresies* No. 8 for the Coalition Against Racism in the Arts' position on just such a situation.)

At what point, then, does the word overwhelm the image, the combination become "just a political cartoon"? Still more important, at what point does visual or verbal rhetoric take over and either authoritarianism or an insidiously persuasive vacuity overwhelm dialogue? *This* is the point at which the image/word is no longer good propaganda (social-



ly and aesthetically aware provocation) but bad propaganda (an exploitative and oppressive economic control mechanism). Authoritarian written art is basically unpopular with all except the most invested and/or specialized audiences. Feminists too are more likely to be swayed and moved to tears or rage by music, novels, films and theatre than by visual art, which is still popularly associated with imposed duty and elitist good taste, with gold frames and marble pedestals. Yet the feminist influence on the art of the seventies is evident in the prevalence of art open to dialogue—performance, video, film, music, poetry readings, panels and even *meetings*. It not only suggests a merger of art and entertainment (with Brechtian overtones) but also suggests that speaking is the best way we know to get the message across while offering at least the illusion of direct content and dialogue. It also implies that the combination of images and *spoken* words is often more effective that the combination of images and *written* words, especially in this day of planned obsolescence, instant recycling and anti-object art.

Although most of the propaganda that survives is written, it tends to get diluted by time, misunderstandings and objectification. The spoken word is realer to most people than the written word. Though more easily forgotten in its specifics, it is more easily absorbed psychologically. The spoken word is connected with the things most people focus on almost exclusively—the stuff of daily life and the kind of personal relationships everyone longs for in an alienated society. It takes place *between* people, with eye contact, human confusion and pictures (memory). It takes place in dialogues with friends, family, acquaintances, day after day. So one's intake of spoken propaganda is in fact the sum of daily communication.

This more intimate kind of propaganda seems to me to be inherently feminist. It might be seen as gossip, in the word's original sense: "Godsib" meant godparent, then sponsor and advocate; then it became a relative, then a woman friend, then a woman "who delights in idle talk," "groundless rumor" and "tattle." Now it means malicious and unfounded tales told by women about other people. All this happened through the increased power of patriarchal propaganda, through men gossiping about women and about each other on a grand scale (history). Thus, in the old sense, spoken propaganda, or gossip, means *relating*—a feminized style of communication either way.

Over my desk hangs a postcard showing a little black girl holding an open book and grinning broadly. The caption reads: "Forge simple words that even the children can understand." This postcard nags at me daily. As a writer who makes her living mostly through talking (one-night stands, not full-time teaching), I am very much aware that writing and speaking are two entirely different mediums, and that they translate badly back and forth. For instance, you can imitate writing by speaking, as anyone knows who has dozed through the presentation of an academic "paper" spoken from a podium. Or you can imitate speaking by writing, as anyone knows who has read the self-conscious chitchat favored by many newspaper columnists. The best way of dealing with speaking seems to be to skip, suggest, associate, charm and perform with passion, while referring your audience back to the written word for more complex information and analysis.

Holding people's attention while they are reading is not so easy. Like "modern art," the thoughtful essay has had a bad press. Popular magazines imitate speech by avoiding intimidating or didactic authoritarian associations with the text-filled page and by breaking the page with pictures, anecdotes or intimate "asides." Right and Left depend equally on colloquialism to reach and convince a broad audience. Popular dislike of overtly superior or educated authority is reflected, for instance, in an anti-feminist characterization of "most women's Lib books" as "cumbersome university theses." The visual/verbal counterparts of long-running TV soap operas are the comic book and the photo-novel, which, significantly, are the closest possible imitations of speaking in writing, as well as the cheapest way of combining "spoken" words with images. As a middle-class college-educated propagandist, I rack my brain for ways to communicate with working-class women. I've had fantasies about peddling socialist feminist art comics on Lower East Side street corners, even of making it into the supermarkets (though it would be difficult to compete with the plastically slick and colorful prettiness of the propaganda already ensconced there). But this vision of "forging simple words" also has a matronizing aspect. I was taken aback at a recent meeting when a young working-class woman who did not go to college stood up for a difficult language and complex Marxist terminology. Her point was that this terminology had been forged to communicate difficult conceptions and there was no need to throw the baby out with the bathwater because of some notion that the working class wasn't capable of developing its minds. "We can look up the words we don't know," she said, "but people want to *grow*."

So are my comic book fantasies simply classist? Should I stick to the subtleties of four syllable words? Both of us seemed to be leaning over backwards to counteract our own

class backgrounds. A similar conflict was expressed by Cuban Nelson Herrera Ysla in a poem called "Colloquialism" (*Canto Libro*, vol. 3, no.1, 1979):

> "Forgive me, defender of images and symbols:
> I forgive you, too.
> Forgive me, hermetic poets for whom I have boundless admiration.
> but we have so many things left to say
> in a way that everyone understands as clearly as possible,
> the immense majority about to discover the miracle of language.
> Forgive me, but I keep thinking that Fidel has taught us dialogue and that this, my dear poets,
> has been a decisive literary influence.
> Thank you.

Such conflicts between high art and communication have recently been raised in the visual arts by public feminist performance art, by Judy Chicago's cooperatively executed *The Dinner Party* and by the community mural movement—the visual counterparts of verbal colloquialism in their clear images and outreach goals. But how much conventional visual art in fact has been successful as propaganda? From the 20th century we think of a few posters: "Uncle Sam Wants *You*;" "War Is Not Good for Children and Other Growing Things;" "And Babies?" (this last one, protesting the My Lai massacre, was actually designed collectively by a group of "fine artists" from the now defunct Art Workers Coalition). And we think of a few modern artists—the Mexican muralists and, ironically, several Germans: the Berlin Dadas, Heartfield, Kollwitz, Staeck, Beuys, Haacke. Compare this lackluster record with the less brutal consciousness raised by songs (those in which the musical foreground doesn't overwhelm or neutralize the lyrics). And compare it with the kind of historical consciousness-raising offered through oral history, accompanied by old photographs, letters, memories of one's own grandparents' stories. We keep coming back to words. And not just to words, but to words set in visual frameworks that are emotionally as well as intellectually stimulating.

My own preference is for an art that uses words and images so integrally interwoven that even narrative elements are not seen as "captions" and even realistic images are not seen as "illustrations." Yet I have to admit I'm constantly disheartened by the content of art using the "new mediums" as vehicles not for communication or social awareness, but simply for unfocused form and fashion. Effective propaganda obviously has to be aimed at a specific audience, not just shot into the air to fall to earth we know not where. (This should hardly be anathema to an art already, if often unconsciously and involuntarily, aimed at a very limited audience of curators, critics, collectors and other artists.) Targeting one's audience is very different from finding one's audience—the former having to do with marketing and the latter with strategy. If we assume that *moving* a large and varied audience is at the heart of the matter, perhaps we should spend our energies making art for TV, where information can be communicated in a manner that is simultaneously intimate and detached, and where there might be some hope of turning that huge passive, consuming audience into a huge, active, critical, potentially revolutionary audience. And *if* (a monstrous if) we were ever to succeed in wresting TV time from 100% corporate control, would this lead to solid alliances, or to a wishy-washy pluralism? And where would artists come in?

Most "art video" (as opposed to documentary, real-time political video) is still limited to art audiences and is, or would be, rejected by people accustomed to a kind of entertainment most avant-garde artists are not skillful enough to produce, even if they did decide to stop boring their audiences to death. Most artists prefer not to move out of the competetive, incestuous, but comprehensible art context into the unwelcoming Big Time of the real world. In the late sixties, a few conceptual artists did make newspaper pieces, but they were usually artworld "in" jokes or rhetorical arguments plunked down with no attempt to adapt to the new medium, becoming in the process another kind of ineffectual cultural colonialism. (Ellul says that ineffective propaganda is simply *not* propaganda.) Despite its idealistic beginnings, most book art is now a pale imitation of gallery art, the page becoming a miniature wall instead of something to be *read* (i.e., understood). In turn, written art hung on gallery walls is difficult to read and arrogant in its enlargement from the book form it imitates. There have been some genuine and successful attempts to integrate art into street and community life, and others to analyze and compete with public advertising in the form of posters and rubber-stamp commentaries, but for all the theoretical acumen of some of this work, it tends to be visually indistinguishable from the mass media it parodies.

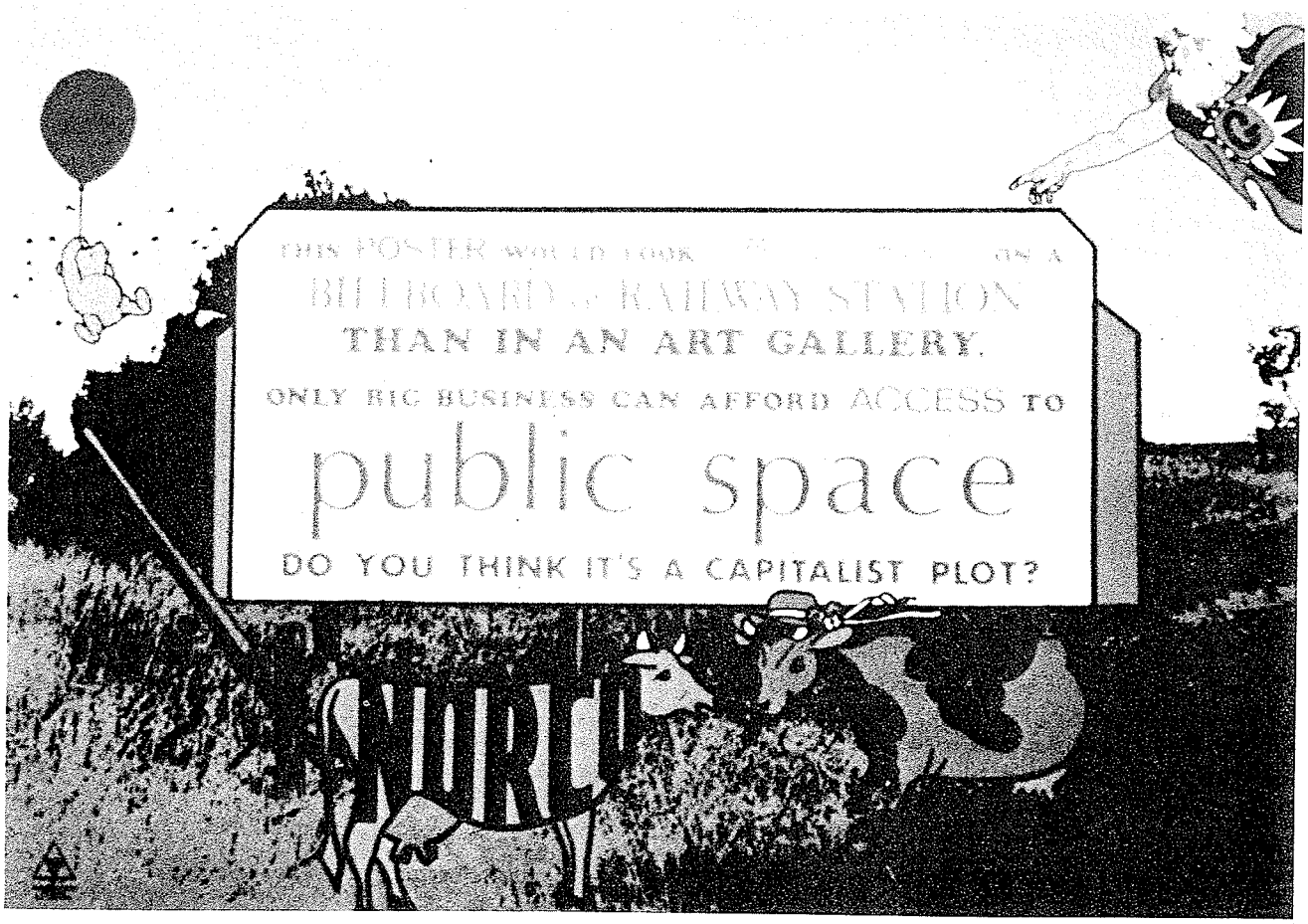
This opens a can of worms about satires and "parodies" that aren't comprehensible if one isn't in the know. Ambiguity is chic *and* modernist, lending itself to esoteric theories that inflate the art and deflate any possible messages. A left-wing film, for instance, might be a "parody" of macho fantasy films of violence, but in fact uses parody as an excuse to wallow in just that "politically incorrect" imagery. This happens often in feminist art and performance too. When women artists use their own nude bodies, made-up faces, "hooker costumes," etc., it is all too often difficult to tell which direction the art is coming from. Is this barebreasted woman mugging in black stockings and garter belt a swipe at feminist "prudery" and in agreement with right-wing propaganda that feminism denies femininity? Is it a gesture of solidarity with prostitutes? Is it a parody of the ways in which fashion and media exploit and degrade women? Is it an angry satirical commentary on pornography? Or does it approve of pornography? Much so-called "punk art" (politically aware at one point in Britain, although almost never in the U.S.) raises these questions in a framework of neutral passivity masquerading as deadpan passion. Similarly, a work might cleverly pretend to espouse the opposite of what it does in fact believe, as a means of emphasizing the contradictions involved. But how are we to know? Are we just to be embarrassed when the artist says, "But I didn't mean it that way. How naive, how paranoid and moralistic of you to see it that way. You must be really out of it..."? Are we to back down

because it is, after all, art, which isn't supposed to be comprehensible and isn't just about appearances? Or can we demand to know why the artist hasn't asked her/himself what kind of context this work needs to be seen "right" or "not taken seriously"—to be seen as the satire it really is?

Women are always assumed by the patriarchy to be suckers for propaganda—less educated, less worldly, more submissive, more emotional than men. Looking at it a different way, acknowledging the edge we have in empathy, feminist consciousness of communication, narrative, intimate scale and outreach networks, why aren't women artists taking the lead in inventing, say, a new kind of magazine art that transforms a legitimate avant-garde direction into propaganda with an aesthetic character of its own? Why aren't many women artists making imaginative public art focused on feminist issues? Why do the Right-to-Lifers have more compelling demonstration skits, poster and pamphlet images than the Pro-Choice movement? (One reason, of course, is that the right wing has money and CARASA doesn't. But surely there are enough economically comfortable women artists to lend some time and talents and aesthetic energy to causes they believe in?) Why does *Heresies* receive so few pertinent visual pieces? Why have the few artists committed to such work often found it easier to use words than images? And how can we get more visibility for those word and word/image pieces that do tackle this problem? Some crucial factor is lacking in our strategies for making memorable images or emblems that will move, affect and provoke a larger group of women. Some crucial breakdown in confidence or commitment, or caring energy, seems to occur when an artworld-trained artist is confronted with the possibility of making "useful" art. I could make a lot of psychological guesses why (fear of the real world, fear of being used by the powers that be, of being misunderstood and misperceived, fear of humiliation and lack of support...) but I'm more interested in encouraging artists to move into such situations so we can see what happens then.

A lot of these questions and problems may be the result of our own misunderstanding of propaganda turning back on us. No one on the Left would deny the importance of propaganda. Yet it is a rare left-wing feminist who is interested in or even aware of the resources visual artists could bring to the struggle. The current lack of sparks between art and propaganda is due to a fundamental polarity that is in the best interests of those who decide these things for us. There are very effective pressures in the artworld to keep the two separate, to make artists see political concern and aesthetic quality as mutually exclusive and basically incompatible; to make us see our commitment to social change as a result of our own human weaknesses, our own lack of talent and success. This imposed polarity keeps people (artists) unsure and bewildered amid a chaos of "information" and conflicting signals produced by the media, the marketplace, and those who manipulate them and us. It keeps us desperate to be sophisticated, cool, plugged in, and competitively ahead of the game (other women artists, that is). It makes us impatient with criticism and questions. It deprives us of tools with which to understand the way we exploit ourselves as artists. It makes us forget that words and images working together can create those sparks between daily life and the political world instead of hovering in a ghostly realm of their own, which is the predicament of the visual arts right now. It keeps us from forming the alliances we need to begin to make our own lives whole.

This article owes a great deal to dialogues with the *Heresies* No. 9 collective and in the New York Socialist Feminists, and especially to those with Joan Braderman in both groups.



Toni Robertson, *This Poster Would Look Much Better on a Bilboard or Railway Station. . . ,* 1977. *Toni Robertson is an Australian artist who has concentrated on silkscreen political posters. She works out of the Sydney University Art Workshop.* ©1980 Toni Robertson

Taking Art to the

Art as propaganda All art can be placed somewhere along a political spectrum, supporting one set of class interests or another, actively or passively, at the very least supporting existing conditions by ignoring other possibilities, silence giving consent.

Art as not propaganda The meaning of art cannot be reduced to propaganda; it deals with many other things in addition to those revealed by class and sociological analysis.

Both definitions are true; they are not opposites, but ways of measuring different properties.

Philistinism Fear of art. Unclarity of meaning, inability to demonstrate immediate social usefulness, difficulties of definition and standards make art seem untrustworthy to the philistine mind (which may be highly trained in other areas of culture). An activity that encourages emotion and individuality, that permits eccentricity and obsession, is necessarily suspect. But art is not subject to social engineering—in this sense: there is no formula for artmaking; art schools do not produce artists (in any positive numerical ratio); high morals do not produce art; effective propaganda does not constitute a definition of art. (Witness art produced under Soviet control.)

That art is amorphous and infinitely variable is one of the properties that defines it and gives it value: here is one area of life where dreams and passions can work out their meanings. That which we feel is worth devoting one's life to and whose value cannot be proven, that is art. Artists create spirit traps, forms to catch our minds and spirits in. These forms may be two- or three-dimensional, of long or short duration, planned or spontaneous. They may engender social action (in delayed time or unforeseen ways) or not. Only a philistine mind could imagine an art accessible to all, accountable to social and political needs, and unconcerned with the hunger for beauty (for color, for tactility, for sensation) and transcendence.

A didactic art, aimed at instructing and organizing the working class, is one possibility for art. It may be that the deepening economic crisis and the crisis of culture in our time demand an art that focuses on just how effective the tools of art can be when applied to specific social needs. This in no way validates either 1) acceptance *as art* of activities and products that are exclusively socially useful, or 2) denigration of art that functions as meditation, cartharsis, emotional/aesthetic experience.

To the philistine, the aesthetic experience is either trivial or non-existent. Philistine criticism of art is often a species of puritanism; it is equivalent to criticism of sexuality by the impotent or the non-orgasmic.

But the aesthetic experience is important—across class, age or sex. People unintimidated by class or fashion have a sure sense of style—in their lives, their clothes, their language and what they put on their walls. Social thinkers who see non-intellectuals as a *mass* have little awareness of everyone's sense of and need for art. But people grow and arrange flowers; choose objects, this one over that one; put "useless" things on walls, shelves, mantelpieces, automobile dashboards and locker doors. These are aesthetic objects, reminders of what one cares about, dreams of, needs to stir one's feelings—through visual codes. Whether it is movie star or sports hero, pin-up or sad-eyed cocker spaniel, the sacred heart of Jesus, sunset or sunflower, the Piéta in the Italian barbershop or the ruffled doily in the back of the Hispanic automobile—people need and love "useless objects," art of their own choosing, culturally defined, educationally conditioned. The problem is not with people's taste (often called "kitsch" by superior minds) but with defining art as one thing only. Art is that which functions as aesthetic experience, for you. If a certain art works that way for enough people, there is consensus; that becomes art. For a while.

The clipping on my wall (a news event that has aesthetic meaning for me; a face, a body that moves me) is as much art as the O'Keeffe iris and the Cunningham magnolia or the Ellsworth Kelly black and white shaped canvas that I see in the museums/galleries and whose replicas in media reproductions I also pin to my wall. I must assume I share with "ordinary," "unsophisticated," "less educated" people the same need for a quality of life that includes beauty as *I, for myself, define it,* as *they, for themselves, define it.* To make any other assumption, for example, that "art" as it has existed is of no interest to them and that art for them should be my definition of what will "raise" them or "free" them, is contemptuous. Honesty requires that I admit my tastes and that I respect theirs. To see people as totally media-brainwashed and culturally deprived is to ignore ethnic, racial and gender-based traditions; and the way we all become immune to propaganda after a while. The TV runs all day perhaps, but we make phone calls, fry an egg, make grocery lists, do homework or tax returns, play cards or chat with a neighbor over the clamor. Conversation is sprinkled with "As long as you're up, get me a Grant's" and "Please don't squeeze the Charmin'," but the mockery is apparent. Sometimes I think we forget how smart our parents were, how sharp our kids are, how the guy who pumps gas on the corner and the woman who sells yard goods on Main Street are shrewd, shrewd, shrewd, never taken in in any graspable situation. Their "conservatism" is more realistic than our "radicalism" until social situations make change practicable, programs for action are organized in ways that actually relate to people's lives, and "radicals" stop thinking they know so much more than the people they want to help and stop being overimpressed with McLuhanism and technologism.

New ideas, new art, new situations do not displace history; they modify it. They create a new dialectic. It is our job as

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May Stevens is a painter and author of the artist's book Ordinary. Extraordinary. Rosa Luxemburg and Alice Stevens.

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by May Stevens

Revolution

people who care to sort out the contradictions, to integrate new with old. We have to, as Adrienne Rich said, dive into the wreck to find what is salvageable. We have spent too much time killing our mothers and our fathers. Let's pick their brains instead, subject their knowledge (our heritage) to analysis based on what we need and want.

Theory A proposed pattern to understand the world by. We look for patterns (meaning) in the world. When we think we see one that works (fits our experience), we apply it for as long as it holds up. But when it begins not to fit, we re-examine the pattern, correct it, refine it—if it is salvageable. Mystification of theory prevents its organic development; anti-individualism prevents users of mystified theory from matching it to their own experience. Theory is for *us*, not the other way round. Example: The Women's Liberation Movement causes socialists to re-think the words *liberation, class, family, sexuality*. Socialist theory must meet the feminist challenge or give way to a fuller theory, a fairer practice. Similarly, feminists must meet the challenge of the economic theory of class.

Individualism The society we want to build will be composed of politically sophisticated women and men, conscious of history, of their own needs, of social responsibility, and of sharing, learning and growing together. We can become that kind of human by practicing and developing those skills along the way. The pluralism of the "hundred flowers" impulse, the patience to go slow and not force compliance, the concern for process and feeling—these are the things women can bring to socialist practice, attitudes so badly needed, so shockingly absent. The relation of means to ends is still the sticky problem socialists have always understood it to be (at least they have sometimes understood it in theory). But the solutions given have too often been expedient. We must go slow if we do not want to go alone. To win is not enough—if it means jettisoning the things we need when we get there. We want to like who we become.

Feeling The touchstone. Our theory must fit our feeling. Puritanism, "should" and "ought" won't work, won't—ultimately—help. We have to deal with the individual and with feeling, sensitively, not condescendingly. If we are not attuned to feeling, our own and others', the theory will not hold. It will not have taken into account powerful forces that will drag it down and eventually defeat it—as indeed it must be when it is one-sided (indifferent to women, indifferent to individual conscience, to personal feeling).

Relation between feeling and theory Theory cuts off its roots, loses its connection to reality when it ignores feeling; feeling needs structuring, a means of evaluating between conflicting feelings. A *balancing act* where contempt has no place since it is not theoretical and is not a feeling that can exist between equals.

Saints with hatchets in their heads, or carrying their two eyes on a twig, or Christ's own face wiped onto a handkerchief, Noah drunk, Adam and Eve embarrassed, sinners smitten or knocked down by a great light, kings carrying pots of ointment to the baby king. Lessons all of them. From another time and place and way of thinking that exists for us only as history or fairy tale or fairy tales on history told by a man who (whatever his own perceptions may have been) was paid by a richer man to assuage conscience, impress friends, outdo rivals.

But seeing in contradiction one of the meanings of art, we examine Masaccio's *Expulsion from the Garden* for more than its Christian propaganda. On one hand it proposes institutional and cultural control of sexuality. It demonstrates pain and loss as punishment for breaking law. It marks intellectual curiosity and sexual gratification as cardinal sins, thus preserving the church's power over mind and body.

At the same time it speaks to and of human consciousness, in a profound way. The woman and the man, their clumsy bodies clearly not intended to be seen, stumble into nakedness, into knowledge of difference, of otherness from the orders of animal that surrounded them in the preconscious garden. They stumble, bent, under the weight of unbearable knowledge; they must justify themselves. They are sentenced to harshest labor (production and reproduction) to the end of their days and to the end of the days of their kind. Their painted bodies have the look of flesh without decency of pelt: they are upright, uncovered, aware, condemned. Masaccio has found a metaphor for the essential in the myth. He shows us humanness newly self-aware.

Workers with words and images create and propagate myths, re-form and re-interpret them (feeling using theory, theory using feeling). Myths live because they carry usable answers (or so it seems). They sustain; for a while they nourish. The Judeo-Christian myths, like the myths of all religions, embody concepts that function as armature for civilization, as method and goal for socialism (love and sharing, equality and dignity through works). We use myths (partial truths, temporary understandings) to criticize myths. We measure achievement against dream, the myth made up of both. We shuck off the non-nourishing parts of myth as we grow and change, as we see how myths are also *used* by those who would control us—used to delude us, to quiet us.

The myth of art itself confounds with notions of elitism, of mystification, of commodity fetishism. But equal is not same, mystery is not mystification, and its objecthood is not the aspect which makes a work of art a work of art. Questions of audience are instructive but not the sole criteria. Art in its propaganda aspect must speak to audiences through form accessible (culturally, geographically) to that audience. Art will speak effective working-class propaganda only when members of that class are 1) conscious of being working class and 2) not alienated or fragmented by the frictions within the working class.

Art as propaganda must help to bring about the conditions under which it can achieve its fullest propaganda function.

This means propagation of respect for art, respect which can help bridge the gap between art of the highest order and working-class experience. When Mary Kelly makes art out of baby nappies and documents her child's development with Lacanian theory, she attempts to integrate the artifacts of a woman's daily reality, charged with complex emotional affect (Marxist/feminist/artist/mother raising a male child on the edge of the working class), with the keenest contemporary intellectual analysis she can bring to bear. This art swings between the nursery and the tower and shows again the way we are split—worker from knowledge, woman from science.

Political theory, like aesthetic theory, can produce an art which disdains aesthetics as trivial ("retinals" à la Duchamp) or redefines aesthetics as a scientific uncovering of art's esssential nature (à la Greenberg). But this reduces sensory input which might have given pleasure and substitutes an intellectual austerity totally inaccessible and uninteresting to the working class, which thus becomes objectified.

Rosa Luxemburg said about her major theoretical work *The Accumulation of Capital* that not a half-dozen readers were able to appreciate it scientifically:

> My work is from this standpoint truly a luxury product and might just as well be printed on handmade paper.

And she was not even making art; she was writing theory. By utilitarian views of culture, the question of audience would disqualify her work.

What of art which does not have communication as its primary intention, or knows it will communicate with only a half-dozen? And this, as with Luxemburg's work, not a deliberate choice, but a simple concomitant of the level (area, discipline, issue) where one chooses, or is chosen, to work. Luxemburg addresses herself to working-class culture:

> The working class will not be in a position to create a science and an art of its own until it has been fully emancipated from its present class position.
>
> The utmost it can do today is to safeguard bourgeois culture from the vandalism of bourgeois reaction, to create the social conditions requisite for a free cultural development. Even along these lines, the workers, within the extant form of society, can only advance in so far as they can create for themselves the intellectual weapons needed in their struggle for liberation.

Now, sixty years after Luxemburg wrote, we would probably prefer to speak of all oppressed people, including the working class. Notice the value she assigns to bourgeois culture and the refusal to substitute a non-existent working-class culture for it.

In our contemporary museums and galleries we can find 1) art which ignores social questions, 2) art which directly supports reaction, and 3) art which informs/agitates for justice. All three hang on museum walls although formalists (those who advocate the primacy of form over content) have seen to it that 3) is rare, and 2) often masquerades as 1). In 1934 Isamu Noguchi exhibited a bronze figure representing a lynched black man hanging from a piece of rope. Critic Henry McBride wrote in the *New York Herald Tribune* that this was "just a little Japanese mistake." Noguchi (now an internationally known abstract sculptor) did not exhibit again for fourteen years. A culture hostile to protest art makes its position known in both obvious and subtle ways. A tradition of strong protest work needs time and attention to develop; it needs the support in its adolescence that allows critical exchange among artists (who are always their own first audience) to bring out the deeper layers of expression.

The formalist rule in the U.S. has effectively prevented most contemporary critics (with the exception of Lucy Lippard and Max Kozloff, who were themselves committed activists) and historians from acknowledging, much less documenting, the body of anti-war art produced by a wide range of artists throughout the sixties. For them, somehow, the work never had enough intellectual rigor, formal purity, or piquancy to make its way up. Where are the art critics and historians interested in examining its failure—if such it was? Or, better, whose was the failure?

When Honore Sharrer's *Workers and Paintings* and Ben Shahn's *Sacco and Vanzetti* hang at the Museum of Modern Art, do they lose their meaning? Museums are still places where hundreds of schoolchildren, retired persons and working-class people spend an afternoon, people who do not go to galleries or read an art magazine. (In fact, I wonder if the imposition of admission fees cannot be related to, in addition to financial difficulties, the feeling expressed in the *New York Times* by Hilton Kramer that so many people attend museums nowadays that it makes it hard for the cognoscenti to enjoy the art; and related to, in the case of the Ben Shahn retrospective at the Jewish Museum, Kramer's remark that the kind of people who attend the exhibition respond to it uncritically.)

These enthusiastic—and outraged—museumgoers buy postcards of works they want to remember. The golden lion in Rousseau's *Sleeping Gypsy,* Meret Oppenheim's *Fur Lined Teacup,* Boccioni's city rising, the great water lily room, *Guernica*'s running woman and Maillol's falling woman play

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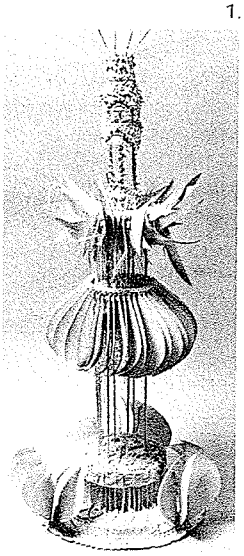

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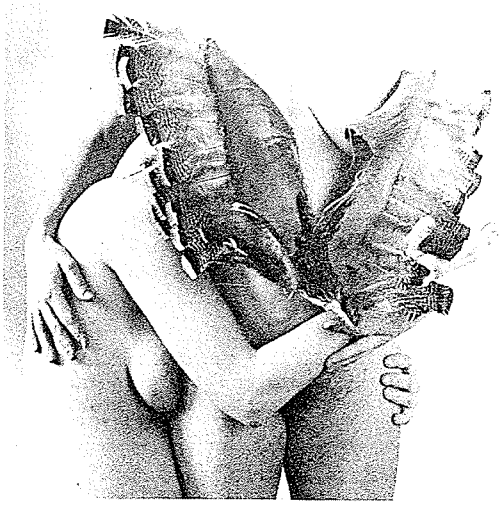

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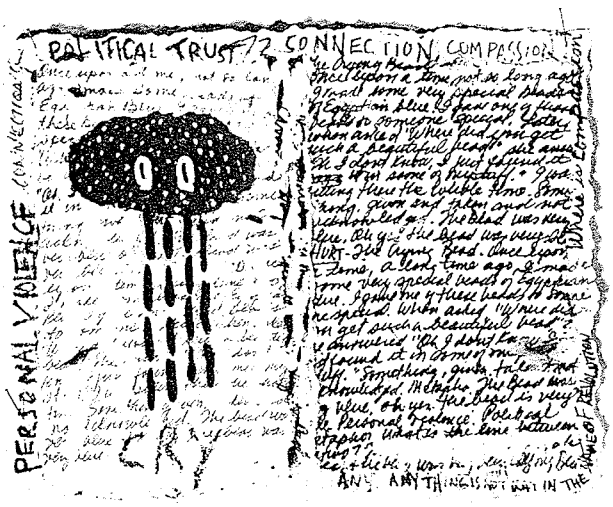

creative roles in their fantasies along with Annie Hall and the Rolling Stones. (Substitute your own choices.)

In a filmed version of Zola's *Nana*, a French family has trundled all its many members, from oldest to youngest, to skitter from side to side, moving as a rag-edged group, to thrill to the paintings in their heavy frames lining the long Louvre gallery. They burst from painting to painting, tittering, exclaiming, saying things like, "OOOH! With a swan! Don't let the children see!"

I do not think the meaning of the effort for social change implicit or explicit in the works of social realism, surrealism, futurism, neo-plasticism, conceptual art, black art and feminist art is negated by hanging these works in galleries and museums. Until the intent is realized, they hang like unopened letters, unanswered invitations. They will look different when those battles are won—more formalist, I suppose. They testify to capitalism's appetite for sensation. They testify that art is not a gun; a manifesto is not a military command. They also testify that *possibility* lives in art, like weeds in an untended lot.

Art from any of these three categories may challenge us to think and feel and analyze. And complexity allows that art may give us feasts for unprudish sensibilities while, at the same time, it lets in women and other groups on the edge of traditional white male western culture in dribblings calculated to pique bored tastes and whet market appetites. But these motivations *cannot taint the art so used*, any more than oil paint poisons the content of art expressed by its physical means (a possibility suggested by John Berger and emphasized by his cruder disciples), any more than the promotion of abstract expressionism by U.S. imperialism as flagbearer of American power and culture expresses the true and only meaning of the work of Pollock, de Kooning, Joan Mitchell, Rothko, and the rest.

Utilitarianism—defining things by use, or excluding things by measuring their purposefulness and effectiveness for certain specific aims—may be a great way to bake a cake. It is hardly adequate as an attitude for making or judging art, art being one of the more complicated, layered and resonant areas of human work. It is true that one makes art by asking *Is that form (color, shape, word) useful in this context?* This is not the same as saying (by implication or omission) that art must move the revolution forward as directly, as forcefully as possible, now (because people are indeed suffering and dying now under oppression), or be classed as part of the oppression. We must take art with us to the revolution—all kinds of art, including that which is funny, beautiful, puzzling, provocative, problematic. Think of it like music, or writing. Will we leave out that which doesn't give us instruction on how to get to our destination, or provide us with marching beat?

Art often deals with unclarities, looking for new understanding true to feeling—the basic measure—and to theory, which is to say fitted correctly to the artist's concept (a part of her/his larger world-view). Murkiness allows germination. Since it is not all knowable, plannable, and the nature of being is explored in the nature of art. The nature and praxis of art must be seen as reflexive, as well as reflective.

Bonnard's shimmering bathroom with Parisian housewife dappled in light refracted from water, tile and skin is a moment of health and cleanliness, sensuality incorporating woman into nature experienced as urban, indoor, gentled and domesticated. This experience of water, sun and skin partaking of each other, generating actual warmth, wetness and rainbows of vibrating light, is part of contemporary life, life in the bourgeois era—less dramatic perhaps than woman and nature visualized or hypothesized as cave and moor, dolmen and megalith, but more accessible and more significant to most of us. This does not negate the power and the wildness of the older, more primitive image. I don't have to choose between them. Fortunately, art provides us with both.

Art *is* political. But one also has to understand that the uses to which it is put are not its meaning. Its status as object and commodity is not its meaning: there are many objects and commodities. They are not all art. What makes art different? Exactly the ways in which it is not an object, can never in its nature be a commodity. (Humans can be sold as slaves: to be human is essentially not to be a slave, in one's nature.)

A socialist and feminist analysis of culture must be as careful as it is angry—fierce *and* responsible.

1. Pat Lasch, *Chris Wedding Tower,* 1974, wood, paper, paint, needles and metallic thread, 24" high
2. Betsy Damon, *Body Mask,* 1976, bark and feathers, 2' high. Photo by Su Friedrich
3. Harmony Hammond, *Personal Violence/Political Trust?* From *Ballad of the Crying Bead,* 1978, mixed media, 9x12"
4. May Stevens, *Alice,* 1978, photocollage, 6x9". From *Ordinary. Extraordinary.* (artist's book)
5. Miriam Schapiro, *Golden Robe,* 1979, acrylic and fabric, 60x50"
6. Patricia Guerresi, *Apollo and Daphne,* 1978, photograph, 210x160 cm.

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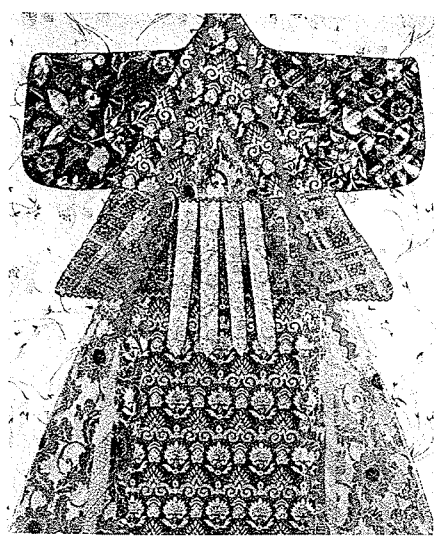

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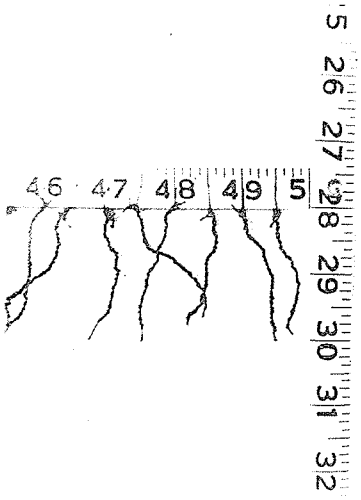
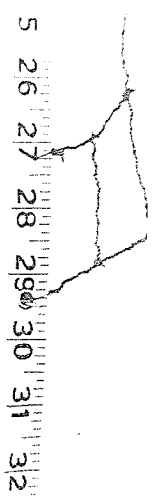
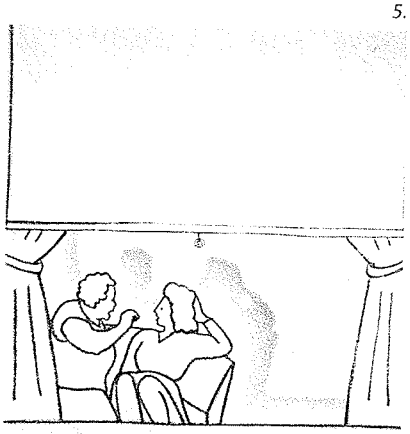
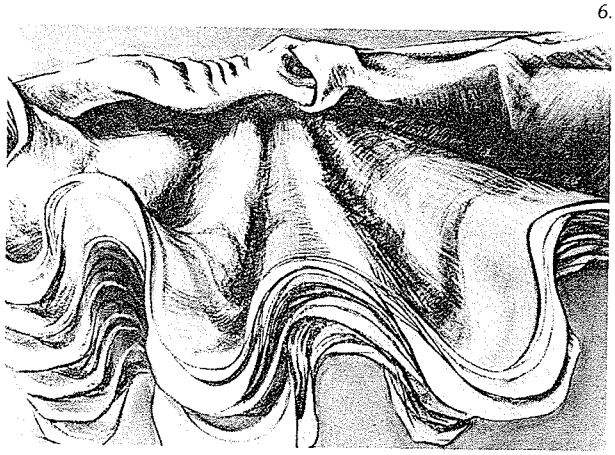
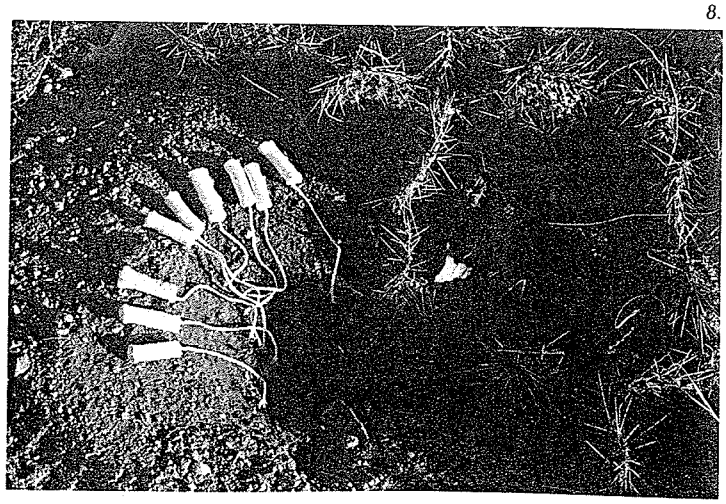








1. Mimi Smith, *Bed,* 1973 (detail of bedspread fringe), knotted threads (29 knots per inch), tapemeasures, 6x5'
2. Carol Nordgren, *Metro Canyon,* 1979, wall mural art, 12 and F Streets, Washington, D.C. Photo: Margaret Paris Stevenson
3. Carla Tardi, *Her Eyes Are Like the Water,* August 1979, acrylic on paper, 38"
4. Sylvia Sleigh, *Stones from Southold,* August 1969, watercolor on paper,4x5¼"
5. Ida Applebroog, *You'll See,* 1979, from Dyspepsia Works. Roplex and ink on vellum, 11x12x1" (one panel of seven)
6. Shirley Bernstein, *Fluted Clam,* 1978, pastel and compressed charcoal on paper, 29x41"
7. Irene B. Terronez, one of ten paintings collectively titled *Reflections of a Mexican Heritage*
8. Barbara de Genevieve, *Nine small white objects purported to have carcinogenic and hemotropic properties found casually arranged in a vacant lot near some cactus.* From the *Small White Object* series. Photograph, 6x9"



Horseblinders

by Harmony Hammond

In 1980, there is still pressure to answer the question, "What *exactly* is feminist art?" This does not reflect an interest in the function and concerns of art by feminists, or in what issues feminist art might address, but rather an obsessive need for a rigid definition of what a "politically correct" feminist art *should* look like. Curators, dealers, critics and artists—male and female—who come from the male-centered art world, as well as, unfortunately, many feminist artists and/or political activists—all have an investment in such a stylistic definition of feminist art. No matter where this fixation comes from, I find it equally disturbing in its narrow and dogmatic attitudes, its focus on the objectness of art, its distraction from the creative process and its avoidance of true critical discussion.

The main problem is that both the art establishment and the feminist community approach feminism as an aesthetic or a style. But feminism is not an aesthetic. It is the political analysis of the experience of being woman in patriarchal culture. This analysis becomes a state of mind, a way of being and thinking when it is reflected in one's life. It can be articulated in art, and the art itself can in turn contribute to the process of analysis and consciousness. If art and life are connected, and if one is a feminist, then one must be a feminist artist—that is, one must make art that reflects a political consciousness of what it means to be a woman in patriarchal culture. The visual form this consciousness takes varies from artist to artist.

Thus art and feminism are not totally separate, nor are they the same thing. If this is not understood, if we view feminist art as an aesthetic represented by one correct style, then anything unexpected or unfamiliar is excluded. Art not derived from the white middle class is excluded. Radical new forms are excluded. The history of the patriarchal art world is and always has been the history of definitions and boundaries—the history of who has been excluded. To continue defining art according to this tradition affects the creative freedom and possibilities of those feminists making art and affects the possible roles of the art itself. Isn't this part of what we hope to change?

The male-dominated art establishment has a need to qualify feminist art as just another style. I heard one well-meaning male critic, Carter Ratcliff, refer to it as "the avant garde of the modernist tradition."[1] While I believe he was referring to the power and innovative energy of feminist art, he reduced it to the latest development in a linear progression of inner art dialogue, where styles are bought, copied and subverted, resold and dismissed as "past art movements." This attitude also implies that those women who are "good artists" will outgrow their feminist phase.

In 1976, Lawrence Alloway made a similar statement in his patronizing progress report on feminist art, where he informed us how we were doing, where our critical problems lay (in having no comprehensive theory of feminist art and no manifesto to state this theory), and what we now had to work for.[2] At the same time that he criticized feminist artists for the discrepancy between their work and his theory, he attacked those very women who were out there actively creating work and developing theory. Since in his eyes no one woman's ideas were comprehensive enough to stand for the whole movement, he discredited them all. In fact he saw the richness of diverse philosophies and aesthetics as divisionary rather than as the basis of feminism itself. In the end, Alloway's report was an attempt to foster competition among women artists (as they strove for his critical approval).

The newest updated version of this patronizing intellectualization of women's experience reflected in art is by Donald Kuspit, who, like Alloway, claims to speak for feminists since he apparently doesn't think that we are yet capable of speaking for ourselves.[3] He states that the "aggressive," "revolutionary" feminist "critical intention" (the critical relationship to the existing order? to the masculine?) has nearly been lost because of "authoritarian," "cosmetic,"

Harmony Hammond's wrapped sculptures have recently been shown in NYC and the Hague. She was a founding member of A.I.R. Gallery and is an associate member of the Heresies Collective.

©1980 Harmony Hammond

"transcendental" feminism, epitomized at its worst by those women artists dealing with pattern and decoration in their work. This "authoritarian feminist art" arises from a "willful exercise of power—an attempt to achieve dominance, or at least prominence in the art world." Kuspit makes no mention of the many hundreds of male and female artists all across the United States who are also working with these issues, nor does he mention the role the art market has played in the visibility of these works. I agree that no one style should dictate what other feminist artists should do. That is what I am writing about. But that is hardly what feminist pattern painters are attempting. Kuspit superimposes his *own* authoritarian position onto feminist art and then turns around and tells us that "authoritarian feminism in fact signals a split in the feminist camp."

I say he is trying to split and divert us. Just what is the "old," "revolutionary" feminist critical intention? Transcendental feminism? Authoritarian feminism? I have been a part of the feminist art movement since its beginnings, and have been around the national and international feminist communities quite a bit more than Mr. Kuspit, and I have never heard either of such a split or of these feminist categories. They do not exist merely because he says so. He assumes they do because he cannot imagine a feminist art that is not authoritarian, or part of a linear progression.

Women do not think about feminist art this way. Such short-sighted thinking and language do not encompass the most unique and powerful aspects of feminist art. While obviously influenced by modernism, feminist art in its very diversity of content, style, form, media and technique proves that it is outside of and separate from that linear tradition.

However, the patriarchy *has* directly and indirectly affected feminist artists by defining, institutionalizing and marketing feminism. The pressure to weave a definable feminist art can only be exerted with capitalist threads attached. There is recognition and money to be made by men and women off of the commodity status of a standardized feminist art object. While women don't seem to need or want such a thing, many are invested in spreading or popularizing a look that approaches their own. Unfortunately this too encourages distractions and competition: who did what first, who is a feminist artist and who isn't (who is and who isn't "politically correct"), and a subtle but important shift of focus from the work to the person. In some instances, the artist herself is marketed or markets herself within the male art world or the feminist community. This feminist art community, which is a loose network of many communities, galleries, organizations, support groups and individuals across the country, competes within itself as a marketplace for feminist art, artists, art schools and art magazines.

Additional pressure on feminist artists with a political consciousness to define a feminist art style comes from within the movement, from feminist activists who have bought the old belief that art is across the board apolitical and elitist. Unfortunately many women (frequently Marxists, lesbian separatists and anarchists) still feel that to be nonelitist, art must be overtly political in imagery. Here they fall into the reactionary anti-art trap, espousing simplistic notions about what is "political" and politically correct—*only* posters, buttons, murals, guerrilla theatre, graffiti, media art and representational painting, sculpture, film and photography—certainly nothing abstract.

Such narrow definitions only provide new limitations in place of the old. Political limitations instead of aesthetic ones. Instead of bringing their political consciousness to art and examining the ways art can have political impact, many women take the easy way out. As a result, those feminist artists who are struggling to integrate their art and their politics are supported neither by the art world nor by their own social and political communities. For instance, in our desire to dissolve hierarchies, we have been quick to develop the unspoken belief that collective means better, and many women fail to validate individual expression. But I think it is important to see that even collective art comes in many forms: a performance piece conceived and directed with input from all the participants, a community mural conceived and painted by neighborhood residents, the "benevolent hierarchy" of Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*, or an individual artist collaging materials given to her by her friends or her grandmother.

It is ironic that in consciousness-raising we validate the individual experience as representative of all women's experiences and then at other times we turn around and criticize an individual if she does anything on her own, as if that would somehow threaten the cohesiveness of the group. Because collectives are made up of individuals, and individuals are nourished by the collective spirit, we need to validate all these ways of working. One way is not more correct than another. The group and the individual experience can be supported and connected. However, when this does not happen, we find ourselves pressured to choose between the two. We end up guilt-tripping individuals who are trying to do both rather than creating a place where the two can coexist. Women are forced to choose when they shouldn't have to.

We do need to develop a social conscience about art—its effect on people, especially on women. But to do this we

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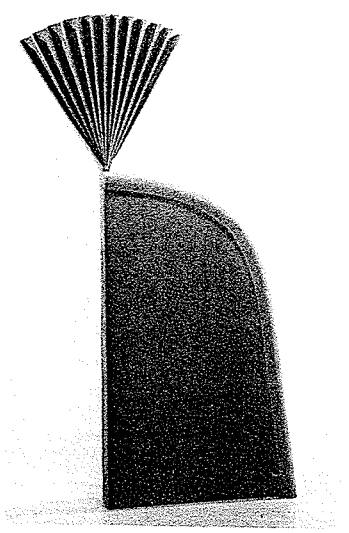

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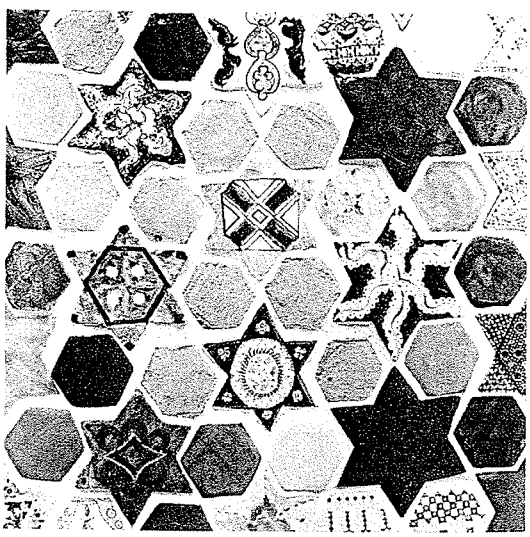

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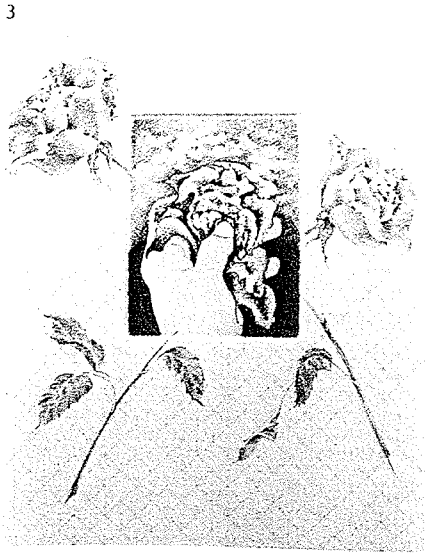

must go deeper than the surface. We must examine the potentials of different mediums and contexts, rejecting all pressures to limit our forms and ways of working so that they fit preconceived notions of "good art" or "politically correct art." I want feminist art to fit both of these categories, but I also want it to go far beyond them.

I have met many women who—perhaps because they are desperate from long-time exclusion, perhaps because they have been trained by art schools to imitate successful art-world styles, or perhaps in response to criticism that they are not political enough, or perhaps because they need to attach themselves to something powerful—are copying some preconceived notion of feminist art. This is different from working with common concerns, being genuinely influenced by other women's work, or finding similarities because they come from shared female experience. That is not what I am talking about. But we should question where these notions come from. Any piece of fabric pushpinned to the wall doesn't make it as art. The materials have to be transformed. Too much women's work looks like what we think feminist art should look like. The essence of the creative process, the why and how we make art, is bypassed in the attempt to make acceptable or politically correct feminist art. Too often the result is an empty copy. A shell. And looks it. One of the essential lessons of feminism as applied to artmaking has been missed—that is, how the artmaking process functions for us as we make art and how this becomes part of the communicative sense of the piece. If you merely copy the "look" of an art object, whether it is feminist or not, you sidestep the importance of making art.

A feminist visual rhetoric can be as dogmatic and dangerous as any political rhetoric. It is not politically correct nor necessarily good art to paint fruit, flowers, goddesses or women showing physical affection for each other, or to use the color pink, or to work with fabric and sewing techniques merely because they have been used traditionally by women. Rather, it is our right and our choice to draw on these subjects, sources, materials and techniques if we wish to, if they aid expression, give layers of meaning to our work, and create a context for communication. But if we set out to make something that fits a predetermined concept of feminist art, we are only making something without substance, without passion, without presence. Likewise, if we as artists and viewers dismiss work by others because it does not fit into narrow definitions, we are just repeating what the boys have been doing for centuries, and we are likely to miss some real and moving statements about women's lives and experiences that are different from our own.

I want us to push ourselves. There was a time in the late sixties and early seventies when we needed to support any work done by a woman. But that time is past. It is no longer enough. We deserve better, and we owe it to each other to make the best possible work and to develop and offer each other criticism—political and aesthetic (not that they are separate!). Anything is not okay in the name of feminism, just as it is not okay in the name of art. Honest criticism goes further than dishonest support.

As feminists, we can participate in the development of a criticism aimed at helping each other make art with meaning. Energy need not be wasted in defending the very right to content. We can help each other to say what we want to say in the clearest, most effective way. That done, we can then hold ourselves accountable for the work—for what it is about and how it affects women.

An honest criticism would bring art and politics together, helping us to understand their relationship, and furthering their mutual development. We need to develop criteria through a critical practice of our own, to hold each other accountable without censoring our creative imagination. Criticism must be integrated into the artmaking process, and vice versa. Feminist art criticism evolves as our art evolves, where women have the passion and honesty to articulate what we believe and know, to admit what we do not know, to question each other and ourselves, and to hear the answers we offer.

1. Carter Ratcliff at "The Personal and the Public in Women's Art," panel discussion at the Brooklyn Museum, 1977.
2. Lawrence Alloway, "Women's Art in the 70's," *Art in America*, May-June 1976.
3. Donald B. Kuspit, "Betraying the Feminist Intention: The Case Against Feminist Decorative Art," *Arts Magazine*, November 1979.

1. Barbara Zucker, *Under the Bride,* 1978, steel, sheetmetal and flocking, 28½x7½"
2. Joyce Kozloff, *Floor* (detail), 1977-80, tiles, grout, plywood, 10½x14½'
3. Jane Abrams, *Untitled,* intaglio, silkscreen, watercolor
4. Stephanie Brody Lederman, *Walking on Eggs is Bad for the Heart,* 1978, mixed media on paper, 13x9" (piece #7 of 8 pieces)
5. Marion Lerner Levine, *Swan Scenes,* 1977, oil on canvas, 52x40"
6. Janet Cooling, *Untitled,* 1979, pencil on paper, 40x22"

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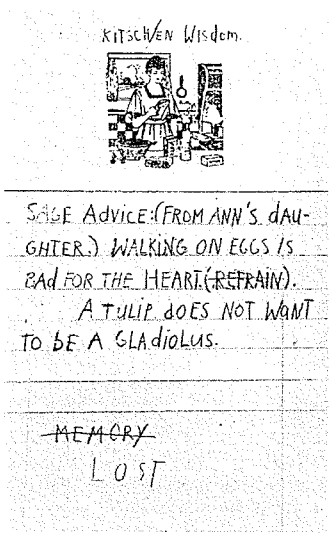

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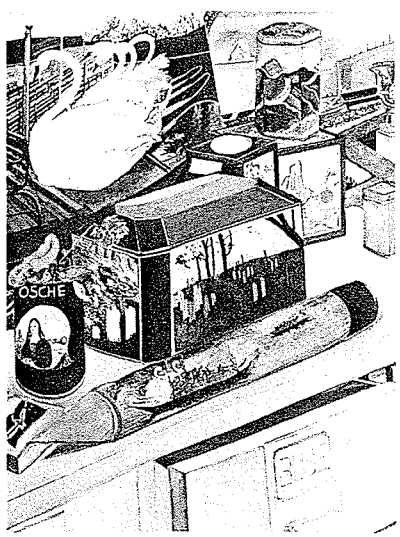

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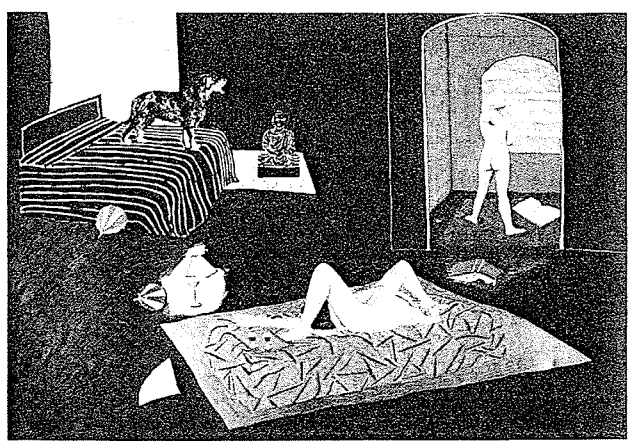


Journal Entries

Always the Ideas Carry Themselves Forward

by Karen Brodine

January, 78

my parents floated somewhere on the left.
I visualized the left as a wide mysterious plain drifting
beyond my left cheekbone. I knew I was left-handed
but what else did I inherit?
hints and whispers of 'commie' over the phone.
my grandmother stubbornly mute in some kind of 'hearing'
so when Mr. Bant, my 7th grade teacher decided to spend
a special week on the 'red menace,' I was anxious.
Mr. Bant had a birthmark that mapped out a red scar
on his cheek and neck. he twisted his mouth and
talked at us. I sat and sneered to myself in the tone
of my father ("liar, capitalist, son of a gun").
I held still, my bones in tight, elbows close to body.
one day Mr. Bant shouted at me, "if you don't wipe
that look off your face, you can leave!"
I wish I'd had the courage to walk out, instead
my face flushed with misery, and his scar reddened,
spread to a mist in my eyes.

March, 78

at work I typeset for a shipliner's ad, "try the best. travel better
than first class. travel world class."

at work I have to let the brutality of language turned against us
flow thru my hands — typing, "a relatively senseless robot will
be marketed under the name, 'the Helen Keller robot.' "

. . . .

when you put the two together, socialist and feminist, divided only
by a hyphen, people often turn away, for one word or the other.

when we meet we build something.
everything shows — energy, doubt, joy
the agenda is a long list scribbled.
we sit in chairs or on the floor with our shoes off.
we try to argue.
controversy charges like a skittish cat
into the room, electrifies the rug.

it is hard to talk directly about this.

sometimes I am carried to the next meeting by habit.
plans are like cracking eggs and the yolk doesn't drop till later,
just hangs there dripping with resolution and minute details.

even though I say the word revolution
it is hard to imagine it
we go to work
buy food
prices keep rising
we are tired
we read the news, that is like a story
which keeps getting closer to our door.
revolution has always meant capes in winter and the chill breath
of wind and shouts in a country far away, and fur hats blown off.
it is hard to imagine it, to really picture it here.

June, 78

considering what it means
to call myself a socialist, a feminist.
a collection of ideas, tiny steel shavings that stream
toward one pole or another. the dream of my grandmother
speaking, her words coming up clearer and stronger
until the walls ripple into flames
and we rush her along on our shoulders.
always the ideas carry themselves forward
in my understanding on the shoulders of images.
images that thud against my forehead at work, on the bus.
when I look at identical rows of flimsy houses,
at headlines slumped over men asleep on market st.
being a marxist means you have to believe
things won't always be the same.
that streets flow into rivers.
that the bank of america is turning to sand.
that women walk out of the shadows
into themselves.

last night I dreamt every open space was owned, built up.
you put your foot in that soft stretch of grass, and when
you turn around, the ground's scraped bare, ready
for concrete to stop it breathing. they keep side-swiping
my car from an angle, as if they want to reshape it, shave it.
hit and run speculators nail my cat in under the porch.
her face collects itself in the darkness and at a certain instant,
appears, particles of light glancing back from round
green eyes.
I take a step and my elbow hits a wall, I shift my weight
and my knees bang into a table, they are 'cutting the fat'
from hospitals and schools, they say I cannot teach
if I touch a woman with love.

"it's like being sick all the time," I think, coming home
from work,
"sick in that low-grade continuous way that makes you forget
what it's like to feel well. we have never known in our lives
what it is to be well. what if I were coming home," I think,
"from doing work that I loved and that was for us all, what
if I looked at the houses and the air and the streets, knowing
they were in accord, not set against us, what if we knew
the powers
of this country moved to provide for us and for all people —
how would that be — how would we feel and think
and what would we create?"

Karen Brodine is a typesetter, part-time teacher of creative writing and member of Radical Women and the Women Writers' Union. Her third book of poems is Illegal Assembly *(Hanging Loose Press).*

©1980 Karen Brodine

Women's Work at Celso Maragota

by Inger Holt-Seeland

The Celso Maragota cooperative is a little more than 125 miles from Havana in Pinar del Rio, Cuba's westernmost province. It was formed in September 1977, after Prime Minister Fidel Castro declared at the Fifth Congress of the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP) that new forms of agricultural production should be introduced.

The 45 women and 49 men on the cooperative are in a sense experimenters; most Cuban peasants continue to farm their land individually, although they are very interested in the progress of groups like the Celso Maragota cooperators that have voluntarily agreed to pool their land. These 460 acres of rich soil are devoted primarily to tobacco, considered the best in the world. . . .

Elena's house is a typical Cuban *bohio*, with walls made of palm tree planks and ceilings of palm leaves skillfully woven and supported by hardwood tree trunks. The living room, kitchen and two bedrooms are separated by low partitions; instead of doors they have curtains, which provide little privacy but allow air to circulate so that the *bohío* is cool and comfortable in the warm Cuban afternoons. The kitchen opens onto a large patio with a wooden trough for washing clothes in the shade of a sprawling tree. Ducks, turkeys and chickens raise a constant chorus as they waddle and rush under the large mango, orange, lemon, guava and coconut trees. Somewhat further off, amid the high grass near the old fence, lies the "privileged spot," the outhouse, made of rough, unpainted boards.

Only the front of the *bohío* has recently received a coat of paint, a bright blue. The rest, weatherworn, is quite unlike the cheerful facade—a contrast common in the cities as well as among the peasants. "The facade is important, the rest can get by if there is no alternative," the Cubans say. A little garden of roses and a variety of other flowers grows beneath Elena's front porch, furnished with rough-hewn rocking chairs. . . .

The wood furniture is old, but painted in brilliant colors. The usual ornament adorns the coffee table: a vase with artificial flowers. A 21-inch Soviet TV is topped by a rubber doll in a wedding gown. On the shelves are rough plaster figures, plastic dolls and more paper flowers. The floor is cement, brilliantly clean despite the wandering chickens which everyone ignores.

The coffee is served Cuban style, in little cups, black and very sweet. When only the male leaders of the cooperative have arrived, Elena remains standing in the back, silently, smiling only when something amusing occurs. The men discuss the cooperative, tobacco and baseball, the national sport.

The conversation changes when the women come. There are five on the thirteen-member cooperative board. "Now pay is the same for all cooperators whatever their occupation or sex," explains one of the women in response to a question. . . .

Pablo, a tall, strong Black, getting on in years, is in charge of production. "It isn't that I consider women inferior so I want to protect them. Better let's say that I consider them delicate, that they have to be protected."

The men laugh and applaud, but Pastora, his wife, as large and strong as he is, looks at him ironically and says, "Remember that when it's time to feed the pigs.". . . .

"What is a woman without the support of a man?" asks one woman, her cheeks coloring.

"And a man without a woman?" responds another. "Have you ever seen anyone sadder than a man accustomed to a woman when he's left by himself?"

"Mine never lights the stove to heat up his food the few times I'm out," comments a third. "Imagine, when I was in the hospital for two weeks he didn't eat unless the neighbors invited him in. And I know he isn't the exception: the majority here are like that."

"Do they help in the home?" I ask. "Do they obey the Family Code?" [Passed in 1968 after extensive public discussion, the Family Code lists the rights and responsibilities of children, wives, and husbands.]

Pastora declares that the men of Celso Maragota work more than eight hours a day and the women rarely more than half time, so "it wouldn't be right to apply the Code as far as work in the house is concerned. It can't be enforced mechanically," she concludes, gesturing with her rough hands. Like the great majority of Cuban women, she has long, painted nails.

"From now on they ought to help in something, to get used to it for the time when we work all day," asserts a younger woman.

"Good, they always help in something," interjects another young woman. "The problem is that it stays that way; some who help, you have to thank as if it's a favor, while the responsibility remains the woman's."

"Of course," puts in Elena, "there has been a very important change. The change in the attitude toward women. If the men don't help, at least they've recognized that they ought to and excuse themselves by saying they aren't used to it, they don't know how to do these things. They're aware of the discrimination and exploitation men have always practiced, including the man of today who calls himself a revolutionary, but many of them are sleeping in the comfort of 'custom' and that's not right. I believe that the new men are in an internal struggle between comfort and consciousness. Before they had no consciousness either of being exploiters of women or of being exploited by the big landowners. He who had the power abused it; it was his right. Since the woman was weaker, it was natural that the man exploited her."

"No man on the cooperative would stop his wife from working or going to school," argues Amali, a woman of about forty, still beautiful despite her lack of teeth. "My hus-

Inger Holt-Seeland has lived in Cuba since before the revolution. These are two excerpts from a book she is writing on Cuban women.
©1980 Inger Holt-Seeland

Judy Janda, *Visiting Day at La Amada, Tobacco Farm for Work-Study Students,* Guira, 1979. Photograph from series "Days in the Lives of Cuban Women, 1979." ©1980 Judy Janda

band came one day when the cooperative was being formed and told me he had put me down as a member. It was the happiest day of my life."

"He didn't ask if you wanted to join?"

"No. He knew very well that I always wanted to work outside the house. Why should he bother asking me? Furthermore, he is used to making decisions by himself—I don't say he's never consulted me about anything.". . .

"A woman just won't put up with a man a fraction of the way she used to. That's why nowadays in Cuba it's almost always the wife who asks for the divorce, at least among the new generation.". . .

A scant 300 meters separate Elena's house from the tobacco barn; as we walk she explains briefly how the tobacco leaf is manipulated before selling it to the factories and says, "In this season we pull tobacco every morning while it's still soft."

When one enters the aromatic shade of the barn, one has to readjust one's eyes from the morning brilliance to the semidarkness inside. The sun's rays filter through thin slits between the boards of the walls, streaming through multiple little openings, losing intensity until they stop on the barriers formed by the thousands of bunches hanging from the beams, with millions of leaves—soft, fragrant, delicate.

Happy voices of women talking and laughing stop to greet us and lift again in flight while skillful hands strip the stalks, changing the leaves into rolls that pile up in the center of the barn. From here on, packing the tobacco into bundles of 100 pounds or more, with a covering of palm leaf, is "men's work," the men carrying it on their backs and placing it in a corner ready for delivery.

It is also masculine work to climb to the top of the beams to lower the bunches. Two men are assigned to these tasks; they help the ten or twelve women who, with rhythm, skill and steadiness, are pulling out the leaves, making the rolls, taking advantage of the coolness which maintains the softness from the nighttime dampness, so the leaves are less liable to break.

"Do you climb up? It doesn't look difficult or dangerous."

"Sometimes, but it's not the regular practice—there are always men here to do the heaviest work. This doesn't mean that they're the ones who give the orders. The head of this brigade is Elda and the men all obey her."

"But this business of always giving the man the worst job, doesn't that limit you when it comes time to demand equal rights? There ought to also be equality in the duties, no?"

"I'll start climbing, you hear, when Raul starts keeping the house clean and picked up, with the meal ready at lunch hour"—breaks in a voice from among the leaves—"but as long as all this is up to me, I don't see why I have to clamber up there if there are men who can do it."

Elena explains, "We have four retired old men who still want to help. They can roll up the tobacco and do those jobs that aren't so heavy. Look at Shorty"—she points to a man in his thirties, small, muscular—"he's perched up on that plank, he's got diabetes. When he was a small farmer he carried out all the jobs; here we don't let him, and we see that the tasks he does don't worsen his condition."

At that moment she remembers the beans she left on the stove and goes back to the house. She has to make lunch and in the afternoon go with her brigade to pick peppers.

Without stopping their work, the other women continue a lively discussion about when or how they should integrate themselves with the men in the harder tasks.

"Shorty," from on high, is laughing so hard he's about to fall.

The old man tightens the rope around the bundle mutter-

ing, "Who would have believed we would come to this?. . . . Women have no more respect." Nobody pays attention to his protest.

Elda Lorenzo is the *responsable* [person in charge] of the brigade. She is twenty, a member of the Communist Youth; she is also in basic secondary school and has taken courses in accounting. She tells me that a short time ago she received a good job offer from an enterprise in Piñar del Rio, 12 kilometers from her home, but that the "Kid" had asked her not to accept it because he was counting on her to do the accounting for the cooperative as soon as the next harvest started. She agreed. Now she had to wait a few months before starting her new task in which she was going to earn a little less than in that offered by the enterprise.

"Why did you accept?"

"Because I like it. I was brought up here. I've been in the cooperative since it was founded; my parents and my brother too—why, the whole family, you could say. Around here we are all related in one way or another, and those that aren't get along as though they were." Lowering her voice: "Also I don't think that young people from the country ought to go away to the cities—of course, when they have to—but, me? No. I do have a job—why go away for a few pesos more?"

"Isn't it boring for young people to live far from the amusements of the city?"

"No way! Here we've got our own: outdoor movies, many beaches nearby where we go in groups for swims, to catch crabs or to fish. Other times there are dances and meetings in the Social Circle or in that of another co-op nearby—and we go there in a wagon pulled by the tractor. What a time we have! You know we have a budget for sports and recreation with which we pay for the gasoline, the salary of the musicians and other things like that. Here everybody visits everybody; they slaughter pigs on Sundays and without having to give out invitations to anybody, because we don't do that. They come, eat; drink beer and have a good time with *décimas* that any of the helpers improvise. No . . . there isn't time to get bored. And I haven't even talked about those who study at night, about the Federation meetings, the CDR,* and so on, and even though the mass meetings aren't entertainment, they prevent 'dead time.'"

"Do you have a boyfriend?"

"No. . . .

"So pretty and no boyfriend. Aren't there any young bachelors here?"

"Sure there are," she laughs. "Yes there are, there are."

By the way she repeats, and from the light in her eyes, you can tell she's thinking of someone in particular.

We return to the subject of tobacco. The women are proud of the harvest and of the quality of the leaves. They make me touch them, smell them, admire their color, size, smoothness. Tobacco has been part of their lives from birth; only now, with the creation of the cooperative, it has taken on new dimensions: stable work center, utilities, maternity leave, pension and others.

The sun has been rising; it is ten and the softness is over. But before the women disperse and return to their *bohíos* to fix lunch, I am invited to visit their homes, meet their families, eat with them. Some talk of slaughtering pigs to celebrate this visit; others of killing turkeys, hens—in vain I explain that I would rather try their usual fare and not burden their budgets.

*The Federation is the Federation of Cuban Women. CDR stands for Committee to Defend the Revolution. These groups exist on blocks, in neighborhoods and towns all over Cuba as the basic political unit of grass-roots democracy, local protection and control.

The first part of this article is excerpted from *Seven Days*, Oct. 26, 1979, pp. 17-19; the translation from the Spanish is by Jon Steinberg. The second part is translated by Susana Torre and Geoffrey Fox.

Woman in a Tobacco Factory

by Nancy Morejón

A woman in a tobacco factory wrote
a poem to death. Between the smoke
and the twisted leaves on the racks
she said she saw the world in Cuba.
It was 1999. . . . In her poem
she touched flowers
weaving a magic carpet
that flew over Revolution Square.
In her poem, this woman
touched tomorrow's days.
In her poem there were no shadows but powerful lamps.
In her poem, friends, Miami wasn't there nor split families,
neither was misery
nor ruin
nor violations of the labor law.
There wasn't any interest in the Stock Exchange,
no usury.
In her poem there was militant wisdom, languid
intelligence.
Discipline and assemblies were there in her poem,
blood boiling out of the past,
livers and hearts.
Her poem was a treatise in people's economy.
In it were all the desires and all the anxiety
of any revolutionary, her contemporaries.
A woman in a tobacco factory
wrote a poem to the agony of capitalism. Yes sir.
But neither her comrades nor her neighbors
guessed the essence of her life. And they never knew
about the poem.
She had hidden it, surely and delicately,
along with some *caña santa* and *cañamo* leaves
between the pages of a leather-bound volume
of José Marti.

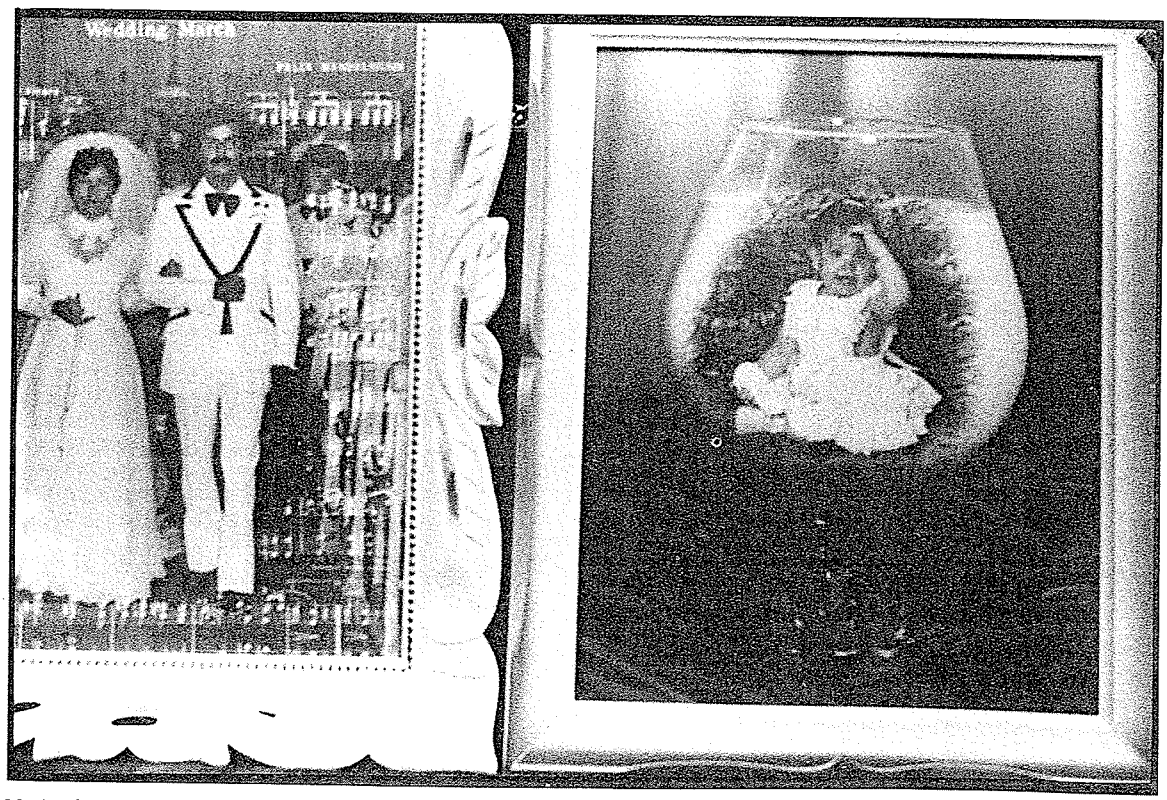
(translation: Margaret Randall)
©1980 Nancy Morejón

Nancy Morejón lives in Havana and works at UNEAC. She is a translator and has published several of her own books. This poem will be included in Margaret Randall's forthcoming anthology of Cuban women's poetry.

Judy Janda is a free-lance photographer from Brooklyn, NY. She has been to Cuba twice and will have a photographic essay in Margaret Randall's book Women in Cuba Twenty Years Later *(Pella, 1980).*

Cuba/Chicago

Los vecinos esperan toda la noche para recibirnos; despues de comida, Roxana les regala una canción. The neighbors waited all night to welcome us. After dinner, Roxana gave us a song. 2:00 A.M., Holgin, Cuba (no flash).



Matrimonio. Marriage. Division Street, Chicago.

Nereyda Garcia, a Cuban-born photographer, lives and works in the Latino community of Chicago.

Photographs by Nereyda Garcia

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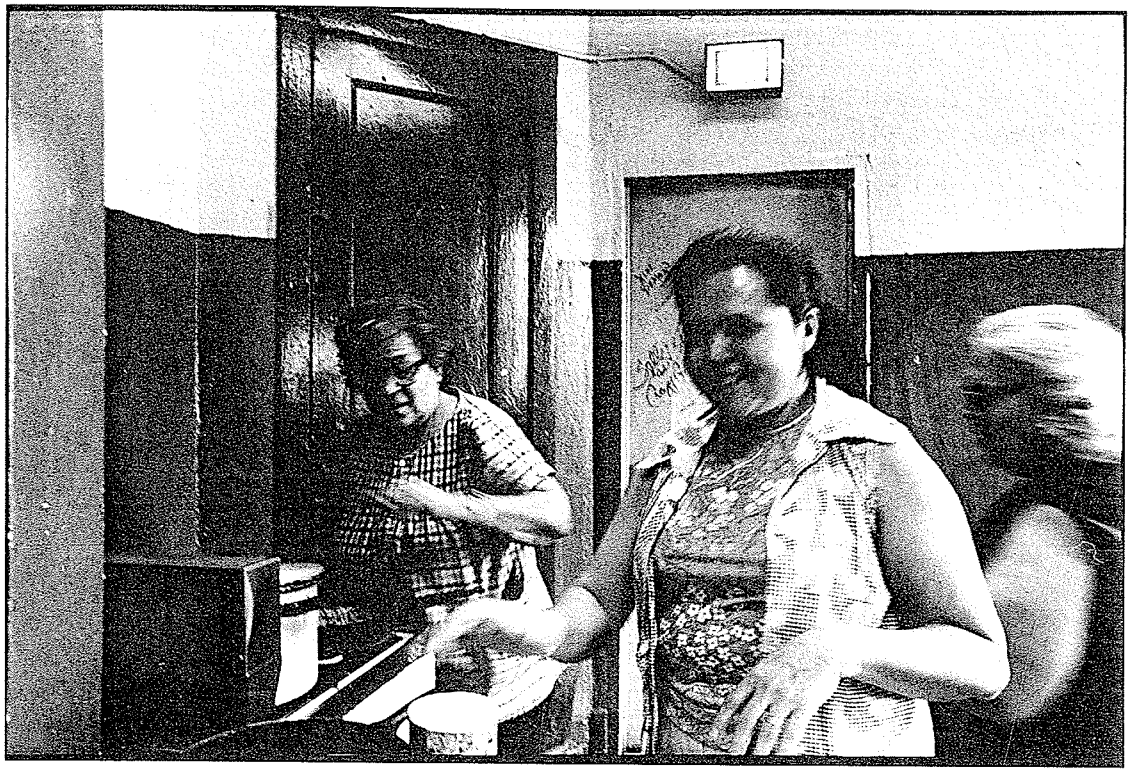
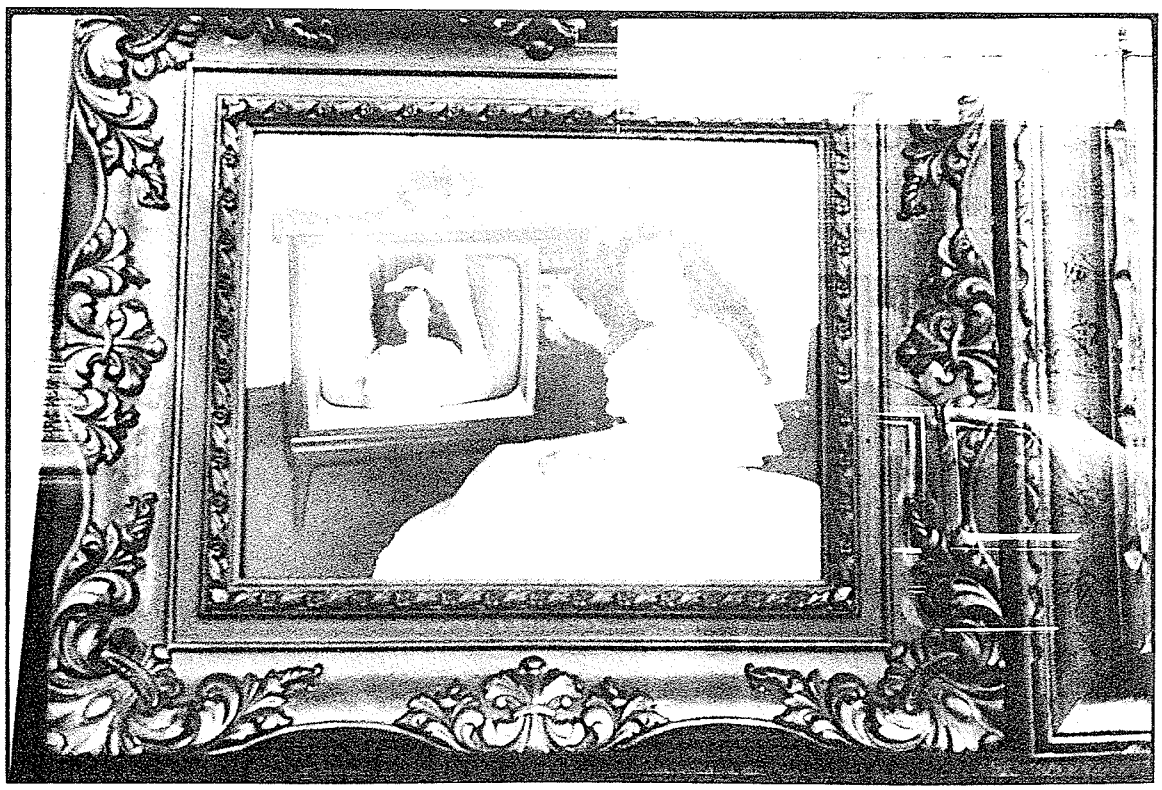


Las mujeres de Casa Aztlan preparando desayuno para los trabajadores indocumentados. The women of Casa Aztlan preparing breakfast for undocumented workers. Pilsen community, Chicago.



Quiceañera, un rito. Framing the illusion; becoming fifteen. Division Street, Chicago.

Letter to a Young Artist

Guwatsi,

I am writing this because an amazing woman from, of all places, New York City suggested I do so. I feel a bit foolish trying to tell you what writing is about, what problems you will face, and how difficult it is to develop an audience that can understand what you are doing. Yet I agree that it is a good idea to do so, and I hope you will understand that I speak as your mother or one of your aunts (who I just might be, after all) and that I'd just like to acquaint you with what being a writer and a Laguna is about.

As soon as you begin to write and let others know you are doing so, you'll start receiving a lot of flak. This will come from every side; the folks at home will say that you're lazy, that you're wasting your time, that you mustn't write about things connected with Laguna, that you're giving bad impressions to outsiders, that you ought to concentrate on important things like making tamales and getting a "useful" education so you can serve your people as a lawyer, teacher, social service worker or health-care professional.

If you're like many of us, these comments will be very painful. What importance is a poem, after all, compared to all the things people need? What good is a poem going to do a suicidal nine-year-old? How is it going to meet the medical needs of the old people? How can one painting cure an alcoholic relative? Then, too, how can you write about the things you are doing, the things you remember, the dances, feasts, "goings-on" around Laguna, when the folks around you feel that to do so is to violate sacred things, or to present bad images of them?

I do not honestly know the answers to these questions, though I have spent long agonized hours trying to come up with answers that would satisfy me. All I can say about this is that if you are a poet or an artist, if you are a storyteller, these questions will not stop you. For an artist, a poet, will do her work regardless of how people feel about it, regardless of what they say. She might do it crying the while, but she will do it. And it is important work. We have always given our children things from the world of imagination, of the earth, of human values. That is the most important part of our long heritage, I think. And those of us who create are only following the example of Spider Woman, she who creates through the power of thought. Maybe thinking about this will make it better for you.

Another trial you might experience is the way non-Indians will respond to your work. For the most part teachers and other writers and artists will find much that you do incomprehensible. The closer you keep to your true vision, the less likely they will be to understand it. You might find yourself trying to do like they do, to write the kind of poems they write, to do the kind of art they do, to please them. If you do try, you'll probably learn a lot about your own work. But don't expect to sound like them. You can't. Either you will quit writing or working on your art, or you will come to a time when you'll understand that either you have to do it your way or not at all and will choose to do it your way. That's when you'll know you're "hooked," that you really are a poet/artist, regardless of what anyone says. You may be an unpublished poet and an unshown artist, but that's not as important as what you are doing in your work.

People will say really strange things to you; they will get upset if you're not "Indian" enough (as they see it) or will wonder how you manage to live away from the reservation if you find yourself in places like Albuquerque, San Francisco and New York. They will tend to relate more to your exotic qualities (as they see them) and to ignore the importance of what you're doing. This can also be very painful. Lagunas are raised to be very conscious of the opinions of others.

I remember one time when I was very small and we were at Feast, something happened that upset me. I don't remember what it was, but I think the older children wouldn't let me play with them or something. Anyway, I remember my great grandmother pinching me hard and saying, "Don't let them see you cry. Don't let them know." It was years before I recovered that memory, and I know that it had and still has an enormous impact on me. At the same time I was taught to hide my upset, I somehow picked up the idea that it was important to keep others from being upset with me. Not all Lagunas feel this way, of course, but most of us do. Watch people around you for awhile; I think you'll see what I mean. This is a long-standing attitude that goes back a very long way. It is expressed in day-to-day exchanges, in formal greetings, in mealtime manners, in countless small ways that we don't really notice but that have an indelible effect on us.

The thing about artists is that they must be very sensitive to impressions of things around them. This makes functioning very difficult when you are programmed to keep people around you from knowing how you feel, and from getting too angry at you. I guess you have to grow a thick skin, or you have to learn to live with the situation. One thing about it, you know that the people around you, your people, are in the same boat. That makes it easier, I think, to put up with.

When it gets to be too much, go home. Walk outside, in the mountains or by the river. Try to avoid Paguate (even if you live there) at such times; the mines are very depressing. And keep in mind that art and literature are the soul of the people; even when they look more white than Indian, they are embedded in the culture of Laguna since "time immemorial." That ought to count for a lot. And don't worry too much if you're not "Laguna" enough, if you were raised in California or in the Army; I was raised in Cubero. I don't speak Laguna particularly well (though I'm learning it now). The thought of the Laguna people is your thought—maybe you don't know it yet, but as you work you will discover how true that statement can be.

Paula Gunn Allen

© 1980 Paula Gunn Allen

Paula Gunn Allen has published two collections of poems: Coyote's Daylight Trip and The Blind Lion. Currently she is working as an advocate coordinator at the Albuquerque Rape Crisis Center.

Photograph by Abigail Adler

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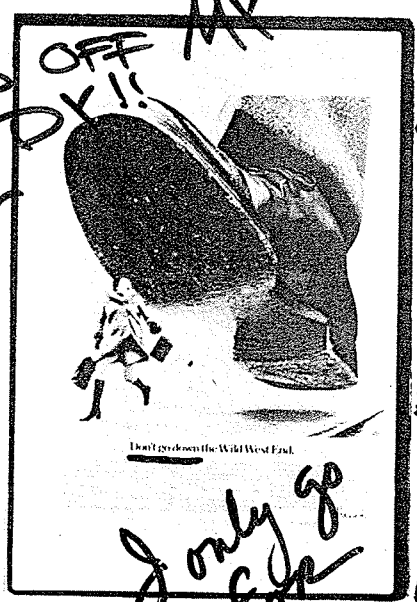
Roberta Blackgoat marches to save her home in the Navajo-Hopi Joint Use Area, 1978.

Abigail Adler is a photographer living in Corales, New Mexico. A recent exhibition, "Navajo Matriachs and Other Daughters of Changing Woman," was sponsored by the Barnard Women's Center in NYC.

THE 80's
EQUAL RIGHTS
TO WHAT??
TO FIGHT OIL WARS??
TO BE #
BOUGHT
+
SOLD ??
#

TOKEN WOMEN!

KEEP YOUR
LAWS
OFF
MY
BODY!!



Don't go down the Wild West End.

RE-PLANT THE HEAD ON ITS BODY. RESTORE THE BODY POLITIC!!!

YOU GO OUT FIRST IN THE 80's! DIG IT.

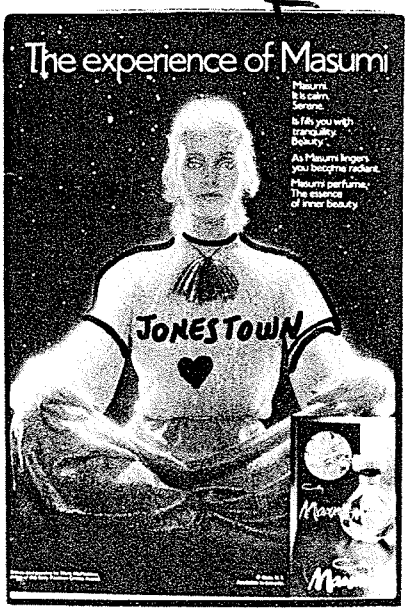
I only go down for love
9.B. 79.

Fuck SELL-OUT
ME-FIRST FEMINISM!
yeah
SOCIALIST-FEMINIST
REVOLUTION

RE-HYPHENATE SOCIALIST-FEMINISM

"LIBERATED" WOMEN USE THEIR "SISTERS" AS MAIDS.

"My Mother was a Saint" Richard Nixon.



may be dangerous to your health=
(COLLECTIVE SUICIDE)

Supervoman is a dangerous drug—

CHARLIES CHICKS CLIMB TO THE BANK OVER THE BODY(PA OF THEIR SISTERS !!!

That's not blood, it's Pepsi...

TO LOSE BUT... THIS SHI

Being a woman I can sure make a MAN outta you! (WHEW)

10/20/79 JO ANNA I.

But we know anything about them and they know nothing about us! Clam Bow 3/1978

Cancer cures Smoking

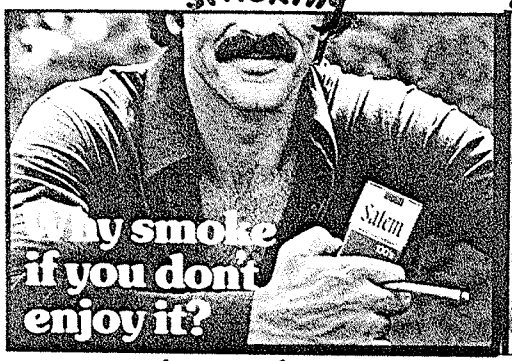
ORGANIZE FIGHT BACK FIGHT BACK

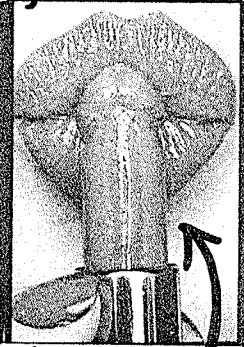
I CAN'T BE FREE TIL EVERY BODY ELSE IS

Corporate Consumer Democracy or—How They Vote You Through Dollar Self Government

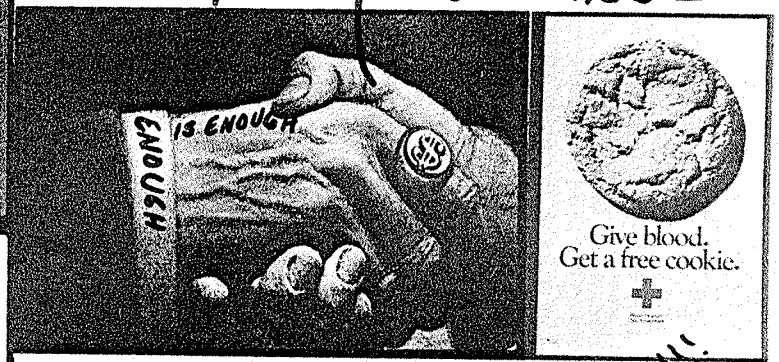
$ $ $

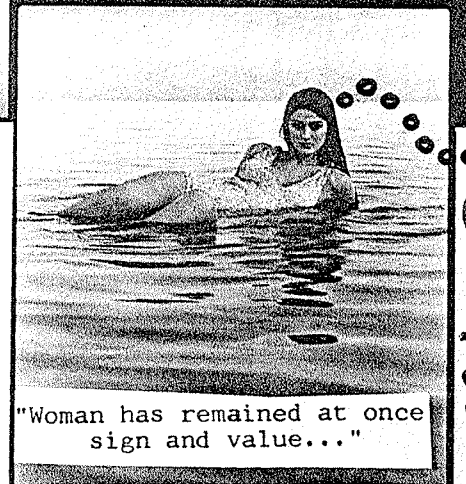
Exchange Value Uber Alles





This act insults lungs.





Kiss me, I'm not a virgin anymore

Then what's it about? HARD TIMES

WHEN WOMEN TALK, THEY CALL IT GOSSIP— WHEN MEN TALK, IT'S CALLED HISTORY

Sexuality = Love + Politics

Down With False Dichotomies!!!

BLACK ↔ WHITE
FEMINIST ↔ SOCIALIST
INDIVIDUAL ↔ WORK GROUP
LOVE ↔ WORK
MANUAL LABOR ↔ MENTAL
LABOR ↔ REPRODUCTION
BODY ↔ HEAD
GAY ↔ STRAIGHT
ACTION ↔ FACT

LYN-HOT STUFF 387-0140

FREE LOVE IS A FULL-TIME JOB

Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley 2/2/1835

Women, Work and Politics in

I would like to say first that I'm not going to confuse you by denying that I'm a Marxist. I am a Marxist and I try to be a good one. Secondly, I'm not going to confuse you by trying to use a lot of Marxist terminology without also trying to break it down relative to the everyday lived experience of people; because if Marxism can't do that it can't do anything. Third, I'd like to say that I understand the frustration that everyone is feeling. While the issues we're dealing with ought to be fundamental to how we live the rest of our lives, the context in which we're discussing liberation is distorted. We don't make the most fundamental decisions of our lives sitting around in comfortable rooms making light conversation. Even Rogers and Hammerstein took 80 days to go around the world. We're trying to do it in 20-minute segments. We understand those frustrations and distortions and I hope we'll be generous with each other in adjusting to them.

In taking this opportunity to reflect on sexism in American society, I would like to raise issues in four areas: (1) the economic context in which women exist in the present-day world; (2) patterns of women's incorporation into the social division of labor, both internationally and domestically; (3) problems of consciousness among women in this country deriving from the conditions of our work lives; and (4) the relationship of the U.S. women's movement as we now know it to all of these things.

Javier Iguiñez has outlined the rise of imperialism in a very useful way and pinpointed one of the most significant aspects of capitalist social relations: uneven and combined development. He indicates that the basic characteristic of underdevelopment is the maintenance of historically previous forms of oppression under new social systems. We currently exist in a world where approximately four centuries of production relations coexist. Often they come into direct conflict with one another, as do the people whose lives are conditioned by them. It is also in this context that sexism must be analyzed—as a set of social relations which predate the hegemony of commodity exchange, but which are tied in their origins directly to private property and today are fundamentally conditioned by capitalist social relations.

Taking our analysis of underdevelopment one step further, I would like to emphasize that in addition to creating an affluent national center based on the private appropriation of socially produced wealth, and consequently, a poor and pillaged periphery internationally, international monopoly capital reproduces conditions of underdevelopment even at the national center. What are Appalachia or 12th Street in Detroit, if not the periphery here at home?

It is common these days for those of us who understand the operation of global corporations to writhe with indignation at development patterns in places like Brazil where, for example, cane harvesters were earning 60¢ a day. With mechanization on one plantation, we learn from the *Wall Street Journal* that 7,000 people lost those jobs at one sweep. We are sensitive to the structural displacement of a 60-year-old woman who, after working 20 years on such a plantation, was reduced to earning $6.50 a month washing clothes. But we don't need to look that far. Go five miles south of Greenville, Mississippi. Black women there are paid $3.00 a day to clear the fields. When interviewed, one woman worker in such a situation said, "Now the man pays $3.00 a day. I don't know how much the children get, but he says something, maybe 60¢ a day, maybe more. We need the work and he pays more than most people. Across there," and she pointed to a plantation on the far side of the highway, "the man pays $2.00 a day." And she went on: ". . . there used to be a whole lot more people on the plantations than there are now when the machines started back in '53, '54, then every year they began to get more and more and that cut people down out of the pickin." Poison sprays and crop-dusting machines have ended the demand for cotton choppers. Mechanical cotton pickers have replaced hand pickers, except at the end of the rows where the picker makes its turn and cannot reap cleanly for a stretch about 15 feet deep. Here, the women and children still get a few sacks.

At the same time that such leveling of economic conditions is happening to

Michele G. Russell is an artist, writer, teacher and political strategist based in Detroit. She is active in DARE (Detroit Alliance for a Rational Economy).

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women in Brazil and women in the U.S. who are being structurally replaced by agricultural mechanization, a process of vertical integration of labor is also occurring: across job categories, industries and national boundaries. A 14-year-old girl assembling transistors in a Hong Kong factory, a German waitress in a hotel, a typing instructor in Mexico and a senior accountant commuting from Westport, Connecticut—four women—all work for the same company. One thing that this illustrates is the existence of new and higher levels of economic coordination and interdependency, controlled and defined by the global corporation. Another thing it represents is an economic range in the market value of

the U.S. by Michele G. Russell

women's labor from 30¢ an hour for 14 hours of work a day to over $30,000 a year plus fringe benefits and no time clock—all legitimized within the operations of a single corporate entity. This interdependency does not mean equality. It does not necessarily result in solidarity. *Ms.* magazine notwithstanding, sisterhood is an ideology that just isn't powerful enough to bridge that distance.

In terms of annual sales vis-a-vis the gross national product, General Motors has become bigger than Switzerland, Pakistan and South Africa combined; Royal Dutch Shell is bigger than Saudi Arabia. General Instruments Corporation is perfectly capable of closing down its New England operations and idling 3,000 workers there while creating 5,000 jobs in Taiwan at 1/5 the wages. The availability of cheap female and child labor is a central factor in these considerations.

The ability of these and other conglomerates to organize production and a division of labor on a worldwide scale without regard to the political sovereignty of nation-states has created tremendous ferment. In addition to greater possibilities for capital accumulation and profits, it has led to conditions producing workers' struggles in France, in West Germany, Italy, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Argentina, Chile, Alaska, parts of Africa, as well as in parts of the U.S. such as Montana, West Virginia, Washington, California and New York.

As the need for investment outlets grows, the insanity of the capitalist solution becomes more apparent. All the issues involving the increased oppression of the proletariat which Marx hypothesized now receive clear expression internationally through the dynamics of runaway shops, rising structural unemployment and displacement. Even in the most advanced sectors of the world capitalist system, environmental destruction, so-called overpopulation and wage differentials within industries, across national boundaries and between national minorities predominate. Among the most traditionally stable sections of the U.S. economy, industrial manufacturing for instance, the working class in the last five years experienced declines in real wages, rising unemployment, increased state intervention in the economy to produce service-sector jobs and to sustain capitalist equilibrium. Now, even that remedy is in question as thousands upon thousands of city employees across the country are laid off in major metropolitan areas because private industry refuses to bail urban centers out of fiscal crisis.

Javier Iguiñez spoke of the increased marginalization of Third World countries. The same situation is developing domestically in terms of the work force, though it is hidden through disaccumulative investment. In using the phrase "disaccumulative investment," I mean the nonproductive investment of capital. I'm speaking here not only of the warfare state. but of all those sectors of the economy partially or wholly subsidized by the state and which are non-commodity-producing. We have to talk about public services such as transportation, hospitals, schools, the postal service. We have to talk about the advertising and marketing industry, and media jobs whose only purpose in the economy is to mirror the dominant ideology and rationalize commodity consumption at ever greater levels both domestically and internationally. Disaccumulative investment is capitalism's way of dealing with the social surplus short of wars or socialist planning. I concentrate on these areas in the U.S. economy because that is where employment is growing and also where women wage earners are concentrated.

In the international social division of labor produced by the global corporations, women are often a majority of the work force in traditional industries such as textiles and food processing. We are also the semi-skilled white-collar work force underpinning the new computerized management systems and financial bureaucracies. Our economic desperation continues to make us those employed at the lowest pay rates in rapidly expanding labor-intensive industries in the Third World, such as electronics. Biologically, women are the ultimate source of human regeneration. We are the direct recipients of the global corporations' population control schemes as well as of genetic experiments and consumer marketing strategies in the U.S. and the Third World, promulgated by organizations such as IBEC (International Basic Economic Corporation). In rural areas, capitalism's introduction of monoculture—cultivation of a single product to the exclusion of other possible uses of the land—as the solution to food shortages has radically altered patterns of women's agricultural labor. Every aspect of our lives as women has been conditioned and penetrated by the organization of these corporations. They have given us jobs, a society of relationships outside the home and an environment of social disruption so profound that our consciousness as a group is only at the first stages of formation. We have learned that through our labor we hold up half the sky and our history has taught us the eloquence of speaking bitterness. But the complicated texture of our lives remains hidden from history.

The privatization of women's lives has been broken down to a considerable extent by the organization of those corporations. But what has the public arena of capitalism offered? In the U.S. we find ourselves concentrated in the disaccumulative sectors of the economy, which on the one hand are the public institutionalized extensions of long-standing domestic roles: waitresses, laundresses, nurses, cooks, sales clerks, seamstresses, teachers, maids, producers of nondurable consumer goods. (You know that list. It's lengthy and no matter how much you multiply and mystify titles, all we're seeing is the work force mirroring those jobs we've always done in the home.) On the other side are the new communications, data-processing, marketing, management systems which almost by remote control keep the financial and industrial empire humming: clerk typists in lower echelons, keypunch operators, computer

analysts, administrative assistants in higher echelons, file clerks, telephone operators, market researchers, copy readers, even commercial artists and fashion designers. Unequal pay, high turnover and a low degree of unionization compound our vulnerability in all these jobs.

Often, when women involved in feminist concerns struggle for equal rights, celebrate "new careers," even raise the demand of "pay for housework," feminist vision focuses on money. In the absence of any ideology other than economism, tremendous energy is expended on compiling masses of empirical data which only measure progress in a bourgeois context: the accumulation of individual advantages. Even in the arena of parliamentary rights, congresswomen and public appointees are counted as if that guaranteed representation and were an adequate substitute for a mass program.

Now, while money and body counts are important, I think that one of the things that Vietnam taught us is that they may divert our attention from the real motion of people, may act as a smoke screen blinding us to deeper political and economic and social realities. Statistics can be manipulated. However, an understanding of the specific structural profile of women's participation in the economy can shed some light on patterns of family life and the institutionalization of patriarchal values within a capitalist work context. It can also enrich our appreciation of the particular mentality with which many women in America struggle for self-determination, for liberation from psychological oppression and for the alleviation of a whole range of injustices that are part of a much greater reality.

Whether we women are engaged in all the jobs I've just described in the home or outside of it, our legitimate social function in our "down time" is to be professional consumers, protecting the equilibrium of capitalist commodity production and enhancing the social prestige of our families through our purchases. Keep consuming. This is what it means for women to be good Americans, North and South. As Isabel Larguia reminds us in an article in *Obrero En Marcha*:

> The working-class woman who cannot afford the latest consumer goods is no less a prisoner of the mass media than the middle-class woman. . . . Glorifying the role of the housewife through the mass media, consumer society pushes her to buy TVs, refrigerators, mixers and so on. Capitalizing on both roles, advertising has joined the two ideas: the beautiful, fashionable woman (be lovely, retain your husband), and the good housewife firmly anchored in the kitchen. This media woman suffers from a contradiction which can be resolved only through the acquisition of costly household appliances, since she must provide her family with a high level of consumption without ever having the appearance of a worker.

Ready cash is not the issue. That's why credit was invented. Lay-away. Time payments. The names themselves tell the story. One way or another, indebtedness to the system gets built into survival. Couple this with the additional institutions capitalist ideology has supported (such as sororities) in order to mystify women's position as a part of the working class, and it is easy to understand some of the problems our movement is having developing a mass political consciousness with revolutionary potential.

In trying to analyze the full implications of the underdevelopment of political ideology in the U.S. women's movement, however, we must turn to women's work lives outside the home, where we are told our "future" lies. Look at the ideological structure of work in the social services. What are social workers? What are nurses? What are teachers? At their most benign they are big sisters, cleaner-uppers, friendly helpers, domestics, looking after others. What consciousness does that ideology produce, if not simply a reinforcement of all those patriarchal values which family life trains us to justify?

In the religious communities women enter to find associations and opportunities beyond the home (whether they be Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, the various Protestant denominations or Judaism), my contention is that we will only find more ideological support for the mentality of the friendly helper or the domestic. Volunteer labor. Consider, for instance, the way in which the female religious communities of the Roman Catholic Church are used as escape valves by working-class women. On the positive side, they are sanctuaries from the very brutal economic and psychological realities of Catholic blue-collar marriage. These women choose to be sisters rather than mothers. They may even be trying to create a utopian community of women, bound together in spiritual unity and collective work, safe from the grosser forms of exploitation rampant in the secular world. But it is a medieval accommodation. The women in these communities have renounced commodity culture only to become commodities themselves. We understand that the Church as an institution would not find it useful for these communities to exist even for propaganda's

sake if the women in them were not a captive cheap labor force. Any pursuit of theology from the feminist viewpoint which doesn't deal with that feature of the exploitation of women in religious communities is not getting at the heart of the problem.

Now, let's take a step further and talk about the mentality encouraged in white-collar administrative positions, whether they're the flunky positions of the army of typists and the clerks in operations like Blue Cross/Blue Shield, or the chic appointment secretaries of executives. Is there any difference between them? Is their work being proletarianized? Is their outlook the same?

On the lower levels, plush office furnishings are used to soften the realization that women are in dead-end jobs. No matter how many clothes they buy, no matter how many platform shoes they wear to work, every minute of their day is monitored with military precision. They are sitting in regimented rows. Their bathroom breaks are clocked. They do segments of tasks that are miniscule beyond the point of rationality. They are as interchangeable as the parts in their machines. As in high school, they are most easily organized around issues of dress codes and lunch breaks. At the same time stratification is intensifying, not

decreasing. There may be as many as ten graded steps between an executive secretary and a woman in a typing pool or a receptionist, even though their skills may be functionally interchangeable. This stratification is ideological in character—ideological and political. Its function is social control, not economic efficiency. Its result is to totally individualize promotion and work-evalution criteria.

Most of these women are not unionized. The structure of ever-expanding job ladders fosters the illusion of mobility and replaces the incipient proletarian consciousness of the production worker (female and male), who is clear that a line is crossed when someone becomes a foreman. Your supervisor is perceived more as a counselor or teacher encouraging you to "achieve," than as a boss forcing you to produce. The product is often "service," not guns or cars. Rebellion hurts "the public," not government or the capitalist. The frictions and antagonisms created by actual production demands and surveillance systems of supervision borrowed from the military in all-female offices intensify mistrust between women at the bottom. The male boss, benign, floating like God-the-Father above the "petty" details of bureaucratic work, remains exempt from blame.

Being chained to a typewriter or keypunch produces an entirely different set of mental responses from being chained to the land. And I would say that this happens to both the black and the nonblack women in those situations. The culture of the "all-girl" office, the pursuit of perpetual youth, the actual segregation of female work groups by age, all have tremendous impact when we're talking about organizing women for liberation at these places of work.

That's a brief review. It's incomplete, but I hope it suggests some dimensions of the problem.

By and large, the women's movement in the U.S. has been mute on these issues. When it has been content to accept capitalist terms of incorporation, its development model has had a quantitative and accumulative character which assumes eventual equality with the oppressor. In its few transcendent moments, it has adopted a moral outrage politics in which individual heroines, like Joann Little, who are only distinguished by their victimization, arise and are immediately taken over as "woman of the year" by bourgeois elements of the movement. Or feminists adopt a maximalist rhetoric in which sexism gets elevated to the primary contradiction in the world since time immemorial. These feminists have argued for the colonial status of women as a metaphor rather than a concrete historical condition, and have often confused biology with politics. I don't think we have the luxury to do this anymore. It produces chaos. And it is particularly confusing when we try to define "women's politics" or "women's issues" and then add the variable of race.

In my experience in the movement, I have seen black women courageously attack the right of the government to define their children's socialization in the schools. They demanded community control. They unmasked the racism in the curriculum and the bankruptcy of the whole credentials system by proving their own ability to teach. They actually forced their own access to the educational process through paraprofessionalism and then wound up, in the words of one sister I know, as "teachers' maids, not teachers' aides." They were running errands, cleaning classrooms, and thus only accomplishing the further stratification of janitorial service. Reinforced in their children's eyes as domestics, they found themselves still under the tutelage of white women half their age whose feminist concerns surfaced in striking for higher salaries for less work.

I have seen white women build on the corporate analysis of the sixties movement and develop very sophisticated rationales and organizational strategies to break through the channeling system that feeds women into jobs that are the public extensions of housework. I've watched them demand and achieve access to so-called "nontraditional" careers and in their escape still give scant attention to how work for their sisters trapped in those other jobs could become just as political.

I've seen black and white women come to blows over the issues of birth control and abortion because for white women such reforms meant increased freedom of choice in the context of family-centered oppression and for blacks such measures meant all the horrors of involuntary sterilization, the further extension of government control over our lives, and the spectre of genocide.

We must ask oursleves some difficult questions at this point in our history. What makes the black registered nurse resist hospital unionization drives which the white Croatian woman orderly welcomes? What perpetuates the tunnel vision with which white career women pressure their corporations to institute childcare facilities so as to maximize their vocational options without regard to the wage scales, welfare legislation and institutionalized values which will

ensure that Third World women will be those taking care of their kids? What prompts black women to say, "Please, Lord, let me have the luxury to stay at home and be a housewife"? Against what historical background should that be judged? By what feminist criteria do white women celebrate token jobs as truck drivers when not only the mob connections but the racism of the trucking industry is legendary and the unemployment rate in the black community as a whole continues to be twice that in the white?

None of these are false issues. They all describe part of the problem. To resolve them we obviously must go beyond change within the system because we all know, I would hope, that it was never meant to stretch that far. Our problem is not just that the dominant patterns of socialization for white women in America have been home-centered, privatized, male-dominated, self-sacrificial. They're all that and more. They suffer cruelly and resist these forms of exploitation. It is not just black women in America (and I'm sorry that my own historical experience and time limitations combine to restrict my comments to the situation of black women) have been on the public auction block, meat for sale, from Day One. Slavery, tenant farming and industrial labor left little room for bourgeois role differentiation between the sexes in the black community. It's not just that in the cultural mystification of our society, black women will almost involuntarily associate white women with cloisters and pedestals and being pampered; and white women will flash "sexual promiscuity," "Aid for Dependent Children" and "strength" in characterizing black women as a group. Black women voluntarily take pay cuts in order to have white-collar jobs associated with gentility, while white women voluntarily submit themselves to severe psychological and physical hardship, racing into the male preserves of assembly-line labor and the skilled trades, eager to demonstrate their strength under the lash as well as to enjoy higher wages.

For those of us who tend to look at things as monolithic, I must say that in present-day America the black community is almost as socially and economically stratified as the white community. Black women, I'm here to tell you, have maids and they have Tupperware parties. White ADC mothers go hungry and know the reality of forced labor. Black women are still used by corporations as double statistics to substantiate the sham of progress and to avoid employing black men. White women, believing the corporate figures, continue to have faith that the economy will at least be able to provide them with personal and occupational opportunities. Never mind that general unemployment keeps rising.

I touch on these things in order to say to you that in contemporary America we experience at least as many varieties of subjective human alienation as there are job categories in the system. Our immediate impulse as individuals fighting for self-respect is to legitimate only our particular form of victimization. But that simply isn't enough. We unfurl the flag of our separate and personal situation and make that our morality. Because we have been trained to survive in the context of capitalistic hierarchical relationships at home and on the job, we tend to reproduce those values even as we organize for our rights.

We each have our range of personal needs which must find expression before we can join with others as full and strong human beings struggling for social revolution. Political, economic revolution, if necessary by military means. That's a long struggle, a difficult struggle. I do not hold out hopes for peaceful transformation; I'm sure the representatives from Chile do not. We have a lot to learn from the Latin American experience in that regard, and I would like to see some of that discussion incorporated into our consideration of the American reality.

The point is that we ought always to measure our struggles in a collective context; we ought always to seek the proletarian standpoint in our individual situations; we ought always to realize that, as Che Guevara said, "to be a revolutionary, one must be guided by feelings of great love"; and we must never settle for less than the entirety.

The oldness of new things
fascinates me;
like a new feeling about love,
about people,
snow,
highways that sparkle at night; talk,
laughter. . .
that old longing for freedom that this
place renews—
it all makes me know that humankind
has longed to be free ever forever
since its break from the whole

maybe the longing for freedom
will soon make others homesick
for our natural state
not dead,
but living;
not asking for freedom—but free.

—Ericka Huggins

This article is an edited version of an address delivered by Michele Russell as part of a panel on sex, race and empire at the Theology of the Americas' Conference in Detroit, August, 1975. It was first published in *Radical Religion A Quarterly Review of Opinion,* Vol. 2, No. 4, 1976.

Thesis: Antithesis

by Jan Clausen

But we have different voices, even in sleep,
and our bodies, so alike, are yet so different
and the past echoing through our bloodstreams
is freighted with different language, different meanings—
though in any chronicle of the world we share
it could be written with new meaning
we were two lovers of one gender,
we were two women of one generation.

—Adrienne Rich, *Twenty-one Love Poems*, XII

For Jean

Two women were friends; then they quarreled over politics. But, though the period of their silence and anger with each other lengthened until soon it had been going on for considerably longer than that of their original friendship, oddly enough they did not grow farther apart, did not gradually become indifferent to one another. In the normal course of things they would have realized, on one of their chance meetings (for years they continued to live in the same half-decaying, half-renovated urban neighborhood, moving often but usually ending up within several blocks of each other), that they no longer cared enough to maintain their feud. Then they would have gone out for a cup of coffee, smiled for an hour at memories of youthful folly, and parted amicably with hearty admonitions to "keep in touch." Instead, each found that the momentary encounter, the other's closed face glimpsed in a crowd, continued to inflict acute pain. They avoided one another.

But I have begun badly. In making it appear that I'm competent to give you both women's perspectives on what happened (even that, in a sense, they shared a perspective) I have misrepresented my position. In fact, their almost desperate need to understand one another should not be confused with a similarity of outlook. They were so unalike in their approaches to their common experience—and I am so deeply involved in the issues with which they were grappling—that it is probably beyond me to understand them equally or to present them objectively.

Take, for example, my first sentence: "Two women were friends, then they quarreled over politics." Neither Jean nor Amanda would have used the word "quarrel." Amanda would have said that her friend Jean had simply become impossible; that she, Amanda, had had to draw the line somewhere. Or this is how half of her, the rational, injured half, would have explained it. The guilt-ridden, remorseful half would have retorted sarcastically, "Yes, she got to be too much trouble, so you ditched her. You didn't want to be bothered." To be fair, most of Amanda's friends would have corroborated the first explanation; they too found Jean, or rather her politics (but it became increasingly difficult to separate Jean from her politics; this was part of the problem), insufferable.

Jean's view, corroborated by *her* friends, was closer to the second explanation: she had been ditched. After all, Amanda was the one who had come out with, "I don't think we have anything productive to say to each other right now." Jean had made it plain that she wanted to continue their dialogue.

Jan Clausen has published two books of poetry and is an editor of Conditions. *Her first book of short stories,* Mother, Sister, Daughter, Lover *(The Crossing Press), will be out in spring 1980.*
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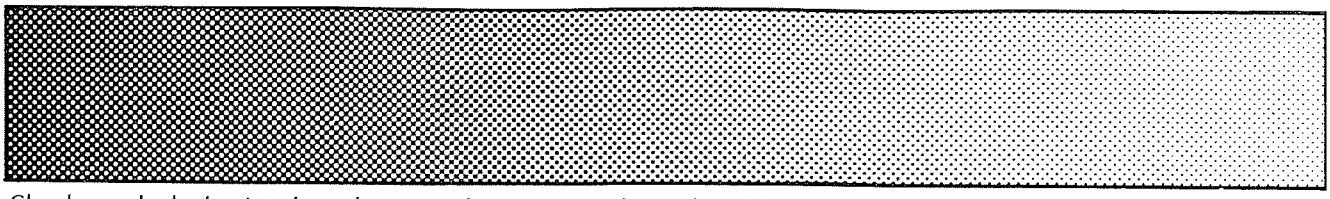


Clearly, as she had pointed out, honest and productive relationships are impossible without struggle; isn't that part of the meaning of dialectics? It was unfortunate that Amanda had felt so threatened by Jean's politics, or rather by the politics of her Organization, since their current line had been forged in struggle with other groups on the Left, represented the culmination of a difficult process of learning to take leadership from the proper quarters, and was proved correct on the most basic level by a host of national and international developments. Not that there was any great cause for surprise; Jean had lost other friends lately. But none of them had been so close to her as Amanda, either politically or (she hesitated slightly before using the word) "personally."

I am assuming, by the way, that we all share a basic, intuitive understanding of the difference between the "political" and the "personal"; despite the feminist proverb which equates the two, I think you will find that they are hardly interchangeable, in this story at any rate. It may simply be noted that whereas, in the women's movement in general, the blurring of distinctions between the personal and the political often signals a desire to dismiss the strictly "political," for Jean it was an assertion of the irrelevance of the purely "personal."

In general, then, while Amanda, in her self-critical moments, faulted herself for having abandoned a *friend*, a "personal" responsibility, Jean emphasized Amanda's evasion of "political" responsibility. But Amanda also had her moments of wondering whether she had been guilty of political cowardice: perhaps she ought to have been strong enough to continue to subject her every opinion and motive to the grim, battering scrutiny which Jean called "struggle." And Jean, I suppose, felt abandoned and wronged on a personal as well as a political level, but she tried to set such feelings aside since they were insignificant compared to the much more serious fact of Amanda's political intransigeance.

I say "I suppose" because Jean is the one I find hard to understand. The thing is, though, that I try, and in that sense I am, it seems, like Amanda, like Jean; from the beginning their friendship had been based on "understanding," on long conversations in which they sorted out their psychological, aesthetic and political perceptions and values, each attempting to come to terms with the other one's point of view.

Their divergent personalities cannot very well be explained by their backgrounds, which appear nearly identical. Their ancestors emigrated from the same two or three Western European countries in the same decade of the nineteenth century. Both were born, in one of the bleakest years of the Cold War, into white, middle-class, Christian families in which the fifties were not perceived as particularly bleak. They were raised in the suburbs by women who saw motherhood as a profession, and claimed to desire no other. From the first grade on they were tracked into the "gifted" classes. After high school came college; there were no alternatives. The backdrop to higher education was the Vietnam War which gradually attracted their attention, pointing up the irrelevance of what they were supposed to be doing. They demonstrated, dropped out, hung out, bummed around, went back, dropped out again, collected food stamps, took money from their parents, stopped taking money from their parents, worked in factories and fast food joints and offices, fled to the inner city. They became "artists," first tentatively, then with increasing dedication, but they never stopped attending political meetings. They learned to identify themselves as feminists, then lesbians. Both were socialists, a term they preferred not to use because they felt it had become so vague as to be almost meaningless.

We are the same person, Amanda said to herself occasionally, liking the sound of it, not at all sure what she meant. Yet from the beginning they had focused on their differences. Were these really so great, or did they simply loom larger than differences in less important relationships? "Thesis and antithesis," Amanda had once dubbed them, at a point when it was still possible to make such jokes.

"But which of us is which?" Jean had asked. And she had swung into one of her clowning imitations of Broadway routines:

You say po-tay-toes
And I say po-tah-toes
You say to-may-toes
And I say to-mah-toes

Amanda was compulsively punctual, Jean chronically tardy; Amanda was a writer who claimed incomprehension of all other branches of the arts, Jean a painter who wrote poetry; Amanda was the oldest daughter in a prim Protestant grouping of three, while Jean fell somewhere in the middle of one of those sprawling Catholic families of five or six or seven; Amanda was serially monogamous out of habit and preference, while Jean held high the standard of experimental nonmonogamy. And though both, for a time, appeared to share a comparable level of political confusion, Jean one day ushered in a new era with the ominous remark, "You can't stay unaligned forever. I'm going to join a study group."

Of course you are curious about the precise content of the political disagreement which developed. I have, however, decided against going into the gory, sectarian details. For one thing, Jean's Organization changed its analysis several times, and to follow this development would be extremely tedious. For another, it was precisely Amanda's problem that she could never care really deeply about the particulars of a given "line"; her clash with Jean was not, in essence, one of belief versus belief, but of belief vesus skepticism.

Still, it may prove instructive to describe a policy shift which took place several months after Jean's formal reception into the Organization (an event she jokingly referred to as "taking the veil"). This development, which at first cheered Amanda because it seemed to belie the Organization's reputation for rigidity and dogmatism, later alarmed her. The salutary spring-cleaning was, so far as she could tell from Jean's reports, turning into a bit of a purge. They had all, Jean revealed, been opportunist and worse. It now appeared that most of their work to date had been completely worthless, if not downright counterproductive. Only a thorough renovation of their analysis, a radical overhaul of their methods, a ruthless elimination of members who remained entrenched in the old positions, would enable them to move forward.

Heads rolled, but—somewhat to Amanda's surprise—the Organization pulled through, and Jean with it. True, there were now only about thirty members locally, in addition to a handful of smaller affiliate groups scattered around the Eastern seaboard. But they all had so much energy! And instead of the "lowest common denominator politics" in which (as they now said) they had previously indulged, they began "upping the ante," confronting other groups and individuals on the Left with their new, quite drastic view of what was to be done.

Amanda was now singled out as eminently organizable. She was smiled upon at demonstrations and court ap-

pearances; invited to dinners, benefits and forums. She went on one dismal country retreat, sitting around a smoky fire all weekend with some other fellow-travel types while two or three of Jean's "comrades" (they really used this expression) led discussions of such questions as: How can the lesbian community play a progressive role on the Left? Is it possible to give up privilege? and (thank god for this old standby, which has whiled away so many winter evenings) What is the primary contradiction?

Amanda argued, expressed her point of view, but later she was to realize that she had been careful to do this in a way that would be acceptable to the discussion leaders. For example, she questioned the evidence for considering this group more oppressed than that, but she did not question the necessity for devoting so much energy to ranking oppressions. She was left with an uneasy sense of having allowed terms to be dictated. She resolved to avoid such predicaments; from now on she would discuss Jean's politics only in one-to-one situations with Jean.

It did not occur to her that she and Jean might stop discussing politics. For what, then, would they talk about? Amanda could see for herself that Jean had less and less of a "personal" life.

Jean reminded Amanda of a woman who claims she's getting married merely in order to furnish her apartment with the wedding presents, then becomes hopelessly enmeshed in her wifely role. Gone were the reservations and questions of which Jean had spoken at the time she "took the veil" (an expression she did not use anymore). There was no criticism of her Organization to which she did not have an instant rebuttal, whether in the form of a defense or a shouldering of blame which somehow served to encompass and neutralize the criticism.

Amanda thought of her old friend Jean: demonstrating fifties dance styles in a bar; painting in the morning, paint all over her tennis shoes, light streaming in through the dusty windows of the loft she had long since left for a collective house; waiting out a heat wave in nothing but her ragged underpants, a beer in her hand; telling funny horror stories about her Catholic education. That was the real Jean, not this chain-smoking politico who saw "agents" everywhere and refused to discuss anything on the phone; who spent her days silk-screening posters and her nights attending meetings; and for whom the shit was, always, "finally hitting the fan," the contradictions "heightening" or "intensifying." This new Jean talked too fast.

"Does Jean take speed?" someone asked quite seriously one day.

"No, she's just high on History," Amanda replied cynically.

Their encounters now took on an unvarying pattern: Jean would describe her political activities, interlarding the account with generous fragments of political theory. Amanda would respond with questions, criticisms or agreement. Amanda was at this time becoming "more political"; that is to say that she more often knew what she thought, began to break out of her old habit of wallowing in helpless admiration of lives she considered more radical than her own. Now that she allowed herself to investigate her opinion of Jean's Organization, she realized that she had simultaneously nurtured two contradictory views of it: that it was a collection of heroically dedicated, morally superior individuals (this, though she of course knew with what withering contempt "morality" is regarded on the Left); that it was a gang of fanatics wearing blinders and driven by complicated needs including deeply painful guilt and a lust for power. Perhaps there was something in each of these views, but could she sustain both?

And why did it matter so much? Why couldn't she just dismiss this particular craziness in the same way she would have done had Jean become a Hare Krishna or Moonie? She knew people with friends who had done such things, and she knew what their responses had been. They had cut their losses.

Amanda felt sure that this *struggle* (Jean's word, she knew, but she meant it a bit differently) had been going on almost forever, the form identical and only the content shifting with the times. At a period when religion had been impossible to ignore, she, Amanda, would have been the one tormented by doubt, by the example of Jean's belief. (Jean, on the other hand, was clearly the type to have burned for her too-intense, heretical devotion.) During the thirties Jean would have joined the CP while Amanda remained the fellow traveler. Or Amanda would have joined briefly, leaving at the time of the Nazi-Soviet pact while Jean only redoubled her dedication. None of this was original. They might have been crude figures counterposed in some dreadful Herman Hesse novel—except that Hesse, of course, wrote about men.

Well, she is the Catholic, I the Protestant, Amanda thought. Her liberal parents, for whom "prejudice" was a cardinal sin, had instilled in her the WASP's usual consciousness of superiority to Catholics. If she closed her eyes she could still see the copy of *American Freedom and Catholic Power* prominently displayed on their bookshelf.

What if she is right? Amanda would think. The question had the dizzy fascination of a view from an open fifteenth-story window. They could not both be right. *Am I saved?* is really what she meant. But, consciously or not, she had already made up her mind. It was only a matter of time before she would precipitate the fatal conversation, come out with the famous words, "I don't think we have anything productive to say to each other right now."

"Speak for yourself," Jean replied when the time came, sullen, unsurprised, lighting another cigarette.

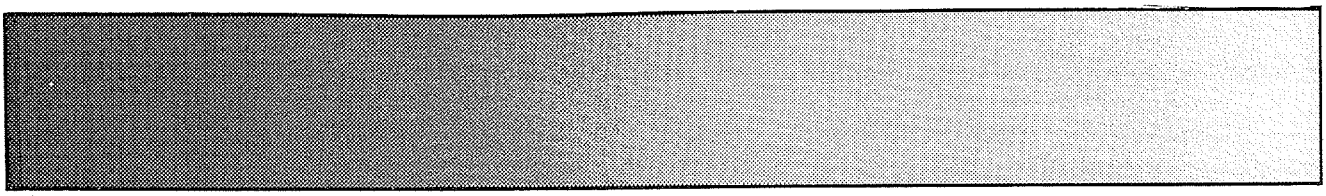
Amanda did not protest. She had accepted that in order to be free she would have to take on the role of heavy. She even enjoyed the dramatic moment in which she got up and walked away from Jean's objections. Partly this was sadistic pleasure; after all the difficulty, there was some satisfaction in having hurt Jean. Partly it was relief: Jean was not omnipotent, then. Within their relationship her power was great; she set the terms. But Amanda had the ultimate power. She could walk away.

Or so she thought; and for a while she enjoyed her vacation from the complications of Jean. Certainly she felt somehow diminished in her range of possibilities; she would never, for instance, be able to call herself a revolutionary. On the other hand, she was beginning to feel better about the issue-oriented political work she was doing. And she had plenty of friends; she did not need Jean. Life was so much simpler now that she had "given Jean up," which was how she came to think of it, as though Jean were some pleasurable vice: cigars, or an expensive country house.

But the thing was that she had not really renounced Jean. Because she remained on the Organization's mailing list, she was able to keep up with its—Jean's—political development by reading through the ten or fifteen points of unity inevitably printed in miniscule type on both sides of the leaflets that flooded her mailbox. And since the Organization was active in the neighborhood, the walls of abandoned buildings and boarded-up storefronts were always plastered with posters—designed, naturally, by Jean—advertising their forums and demonstrations.

Amanda went away for a month in the summer; when she came back her mailbox was full of propaganda, the storefronts covered with fresh posters. She remembered guiltily that Jean never took vacations. Amanda went to a movie she considered frivolous and encountered several of Jean's "comrades" in the lobby. She promptly experienced a ludicrous sense of relief, as though she had received permission to be there.

Amanda's obsession was shared by some of her friends. Small conclaves devoted hours to discussing, criticizing, and complaining about the Organization, which was, everyone agreed, misguided, crazy, divisive, dangerous, and above all irrelevant. Prediction, often disguised as grim humor, was a favorite pastime at these gatherings.



"I'm not necessarily against terrorism under certain circumstances, but if *they* ever use it I'll know there's something wrong with it," Amanda once remarked.

"Won't it be ironic when we all get put in jail for refusing to testify to the grand jury investigating that crew?" someone responded.

All this was pleasurable, the scratching of a chronic itch, but it represented only one aspect of Amanda's ongoing relationship with Jean. Another was the way in which Amanda had begun to search for Jean's characteristics in other women she met. And then there were the dreams.

These dreams were deeply satisfying, some even sexually so, which was odd since Amanda had always thought herself uninterested in being Jean's lover. But the sexual dreams were not more important than the others, the ones in which there was danger, the city toppling all around, an atmosphere of terror straight out of *The Battle of Algiers*; the ones in which Jean, although dressed in contemporary clothing, was undoubtedly a nun, martyr or religious hermit; the ones in which everything seemed quite normal, they were talking about something insignificant, "personal," as they used to do in the old days, except that there was something just below the surface, everything was about to change, some important secret was to be revealed. There was even one dream in which Amanda came up behind Jean as she stood in front of an easel, painting; she stepped aside to reveal a great, vibrant design which, Amanda realized upon waking, could only be described as a mandala. She laughed at herself; she did not approve of Jung. But she found herself waiting to dream this dream over again.

In all these dreams, even the sexual ones, Jean was in some way teacher, mentor. There was a hint of sternness, a whiff of reproach, but also the promise of forgiveness, absolution.

All of this might have gone on indefinitely if the Organization, weary of its righteous isolation, had not relaxed its standards somewhat. ("A lower level of unity is acceptable at this stage of the struggle," was, I believe, how they phrased it.) They launched a fresh "outreach" campaign directed at "all progressive elements" in the local women's community. Amanda began to get phone calls sweetly pressuring her to attend this or that demonstration. Smug as Jesus freaks or Right-to-Lifers, Jean's "comrades" twisted her arm; "Wouldn't you feel a lot better if you did what you knew was right?" was their basic attitide.

Amanda was vulnerable because she had been Jean's friend. When she understood this, she knew what she would have to do; she became brutal and sarcastic on the telephone, wrote "return to sender" on all mailed communications, refused leaflets thrust in her face at demonstrations which the Organization's members attended not to offer support but to make converts. The result was that they let her alone; she was no longer considered a "progressive element."

Still, she could never be sure of her freedom unless she were willing truly to divest herself of Jean. In order to accomplish this, she decided to put Jean into a story, a strategy she had, without knowing it, been saving, saying she did not want to be disloyal.

It worked. She stopped having the dreams. She experienced a bitter sense of triumph, as though, after long planning, she had executed the perfect crime. But when she saw the magazine in which her story eventually appeared, she understood that what she had written was nothing other than a long love letter to Jean, an explanation and self-justification, a plea for understanding and forgiveness.

This story has, it seems to me, at least three possible (and plausible) endings. Please be assured that my decision to offer you your choice among them has nothing to do with the hackneyed tricks of certain "experimental" writers. Rather, it is due to the fact that, as I indicated earlier, I am more involved than I ought to be with this subject matter, and am therefore incapable of exercising proper authorial control.

In the first ending, Amanda's joking prediction of an extremist direction for Jean's Organization is proved correct. After many months of strenuous "outreach" work, mostly unsuccessful, several members initiate a criticism-self-criticism campaign. A scrutiny of past practice reveals errors so serious that the validity of the Organization's existence is once more cast into doubt. At the same time, the country is moving rapidly to the right. Clearly, it seems, a change in methods is called for.

One by one, Jean's cohorts drop out of sight. Months go by; then there is a rash of bombings at selected targets throughout the city. The bombs having been timed to go off at night, there are no injuries except for one security guard, who is killed instantly. In their note claiming credit for the explosion, the Organization places the blame for this death unequivocally on the shoulders of the government and the multinational corporations. About a year after the last of the bombings, Jean is apprehended in a large Midwestern industrial city.

Of course Amanda works on her defense committee. The positions of real responsibility are reserved for those who are close to Jean politically, but there's plenty of shitwork left for everyone else. Amanda makes a lot of phone calls, posts a lot of leaflets. She is never to know for sure whether Jean was directly involved in either the planning or execution of the bombings. Not that it matters.

Jean is magnificent. She takes a principled stand, insisting that her defense emphasize the criminality of the government and the illegitimacy of the institutions which had been targeted, rather than focusing on technicalities. Although barred at the trial from reading her own prepared statement, her presence is itself a statement. Her thinness, her pallor, her hair cropped close to remove the remants of bleach from her year underground, all somehow underline not vulnerability, but strength. She looks like she's *sure*, like she *knows*, Amanda thinks. Like Joan of Arc at the stake. The characterization is admiring, not sarcastic.

The government's case is weak, so Jean ends up doing time at a minimum-security facility where repressive tolerance is the order of the day. From breakfast to dinner the inmates are free to wander around corridors painted in dingy pastels. There is a "beauty salon" where they spend hours doing each other's hair and nails. They watch a lot of television.

It is like high school, Jean says, when Amanda goes to visit her. "The sisters really want to get it together, but. . . ." The problem, Amanda sees, is that there is very little overt brutality around which to organize. And the lack of it has diminished Jean; she looks listless and bloated. Amanda is reminded of descriptions she's read of mental patients subjected to insulin treatments and electroshock. Well, an indeterminate sentence and the prison diet would do it to anyone. Amanda goes back again and again, knowing Jean doesn't have many visitors now that her case is no longer publicized. But she dreads the visits.

After Jean's release—she is recommended for parole on grounds of good behavior—they avoid a review of their history. Once, though, Jean tells Amanda about her year underground. "You can't imagine it, it was tremendous, like

not having a face or something." Amanda is a bit shocked by the eagerness with which her friend describes this obliteration; Jean is, she realizes, talking about the happiest year of her life.

Back among the living, Jean's time is once more entirely taken up with political work, but work that is, so to speak, more ecumenical than formerly. She lends her name out to worthy causes, is invited to speak with the likes of Martin Sostre, Morton Sobell, Angela Y. Davis. This broadening of perspective is, after all, what Amanda had once hoped for. Why, then, has she come to think of Jean as a has-been? The two are cordial, but they do not meet often.

I should perhaps mention that there is a variant of this particular ending in which Jean is killed—murdered, that is, as the leaflets for the protest demonstration quite accurately state—by police who claim she drew a gun while they were attempting to apprehend her. But I tend to agree with Jean's own analysis that such fates, in this society, are typically reserved for those "more oppressed" than she. Typically—but not always.

In the second ending, things remain fairly stable for a period of some years. Jean continues her political graphics work, her endless round of dreary meetings, ineffectual demonstrations, lethal criticism/self-criticism sessions. (But these harsh adjectives represent Amanda's perspective; probably Jean herself considers this life quite rewarding.) Jean and her friends never do anything drastic enough to incur more than routine FBI harassment, phone taps, and arrests for unruly courtroom behavior and illegal postering. The Organization, though disliked, has become a fixture on the Left, and as such is tolerated. Its vitality is as mysterious as that of some fundamentalist sect which keeps predicting the Final Days and is not the least bit chagrined when they fail to materialize. The contradictions—make no mistake about this—are heightening, deepening, intensifying.

Then one summer Jean is killed in a car accident. Amanda, hearing the news, experiences a confused sort of grief. But she does not hesitate in deciding to attend the funeral. There she learns what happens to daughters of the middle class who are unaffected by petit bourgeois concerns for the future: their remains are claimed and borne away by relatives who install them safely in suburban graveyards. It is the most dismal finish Amanda can possibly imagine.

One of the "comrades" invites Amanda to a sort of memorial party or wake held in Jean's old collective house. Amanda is surprised to see how neat and pleasant everything is, not Jean's former chaos, the irrelevance of housekeeping in the face of impending revolution. The walls are covered with Jean's graphics. Amanda notices how good they are. Oh, she had always known Jean was good, of course, but it had been hard to cling to that knowledge in the face of Jean's deprecation of her own talent.

It's not quite fair, Amanda thinks. What she means is that Jean gained a certain moral advantage by pretending to renounce art, while in fact she renounced nothing. "Did she ever talk about me?" she wants to ask Jean's housemates, but doesn't dare. She imagines she recognizes something like her own face in a multi-ethnic grouping on one of the posters, but she can't be sure.

In the third and final ending, nothing happens. Both Amanda and Jean go through many personal and political changes, some of which appear ludicrous to outside observers, but all of which are experienced as internally consistent. Yet the hurt of their rupture remains long after the circumstances which produced it have altered. They cannot seem to transcend this.

Amanda tries—once. After a lapse of months or years, she has another one of her dreams about Jean. Taking this as a sign, she obtains Jean's current phone number, calls her up. Could they meet to talk things over?

Jean is cool, but agrees. They choose a neutral spot for the meeting, a women's bar. Jean is typically late. Amanda sits alone, nervous, drinking her beer, while around her couples sway, dancing, or sit at small tables gazing into each other's faces, no doubt absorbed in romantic dilemmas with which Amanda feels an overwhelming lack of sympathy.

Finally Jean arrives, apologizing perfunctorily for her lateness; she was at a meeting. She orders a drink. They talk, review their history. But they are not getting to the real point.

"I loved you, I always loved you," Amanda says suddenly, risking. In the pause that follows this non sequitur, she hears the jukebox parodying her statement.

"I think," Jean says finally, staring into her drink, "that you've always been so goddamned involved with what I represent, something I mean to you about yourself politically or who you think you ought to be or something, that you don't have the slightest fucking idea what you feel about me personally. So let's not discuss it, okay?"

The truth, Amanda thinks, *but not the whole truth.* Yet what choice has she other than to accept it?

LESBIAN FRIENDS

BY MYRNA ROBINS

I am your sister We are women
talking over fixed lunches
Across tables we are close
You tell me
about your sex life I tell you
I have feelings
not denying not revealing
I become a mirror you watch
Curiously you listen
Touching my arm
by yawning in my face
leaning in laughing
about what you did
last night with him
Confusing my truth with yours
Confusing yours with his
After reliving every
detail in my ear you wait
I become astonished
by your sensuality I
become attracted to your face
I choose the parts I like
Fix the image
Arrest the effort

Myrna Robins, a poet and playwright from NY, has lived in Paris for nine years, working with French feminists and the English-Speaking Group.

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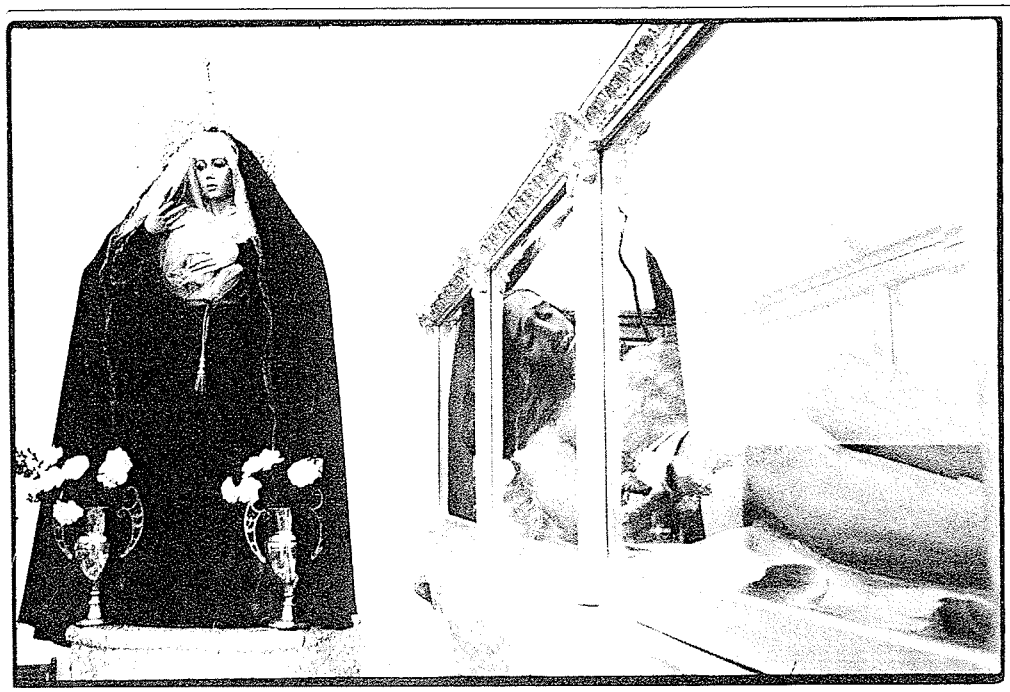
Sex, Sin, & Abortion

by Jennie Rose Lifrieri
Photographs by Su Friedrich



Su Friedrich is a NYC filmmaker. These photographs were taken in New York and Spain in 1978. ©1980 Su Friedrich

Jennie Rose Lifrieri has taught high school, done computer programming, and is active in the South Westchester NOW chapter. Her speech was first given at a NYC pro-abortion rally in spring 1979. ©1980 Jennie Rose Lifrieri

My name is Jennie Rose Lifrieri and I am N.Y. State President of Catholics for a Free Choice. I am married and I have three children. In my lifetime I attended nothing but Catholic schools: St. Francis de Sales Elementary School, Charlestown, Mass.; Mount Trinity Academy, Watertown, Mass.; and Emmanuel College, Boston, Mass., class of 1954. In Catholic schools I was taught that my body should always be under the control of my mind or reason; I was taught not to trust my so-called passions and emotions. Now, with contraception, sterilization and abortion when one wants them, my body will finally be under control of my mind and will not do anything that I do not want it to do.

The Catholic Church is not Pro-Life. If the Catholic Church were really Pro-Life, then it would oppose all wars, the neutron bomb and guns. These are the things that destroy life. The Catholic Church is not Pro-Life. The Catholic Church is really anti sex! All those celibate men can't tolerate the idea that Catholic husbands and wives, Catholic men and women, are actually enjoying making love and want to go on making love without making babies.

The Church's position on abortion is really a punishment of women for the sin of sex. Make no mistake about it, as long as there's been sex there has been a sin, and someone has got to pay, and that someone has got to be the woman —never the man. Men have always gotten away with the sin of sex. I was always taught in Catholic schools that it was my job, my responsibility to keep that man's sexuality or passions under control, that if we both sinned it was *my* fault, like he has no mind or will of his own.

Today the Church is saying that the fetus is a person, that every fertilized human egg is a person. You've heard them say it over and over again. Life begins at conception. Well, if the fetus is a person and life begins at conception, then why haven't they been burying miscarriages? Third-month miscarriages, fourth-month miscarriages, etc.—all should have had requiem masses, caskets and formal burials. Every late period of every sexually active woman should be examined for the presence of a human being. Have they really believed the fetus to be a per-

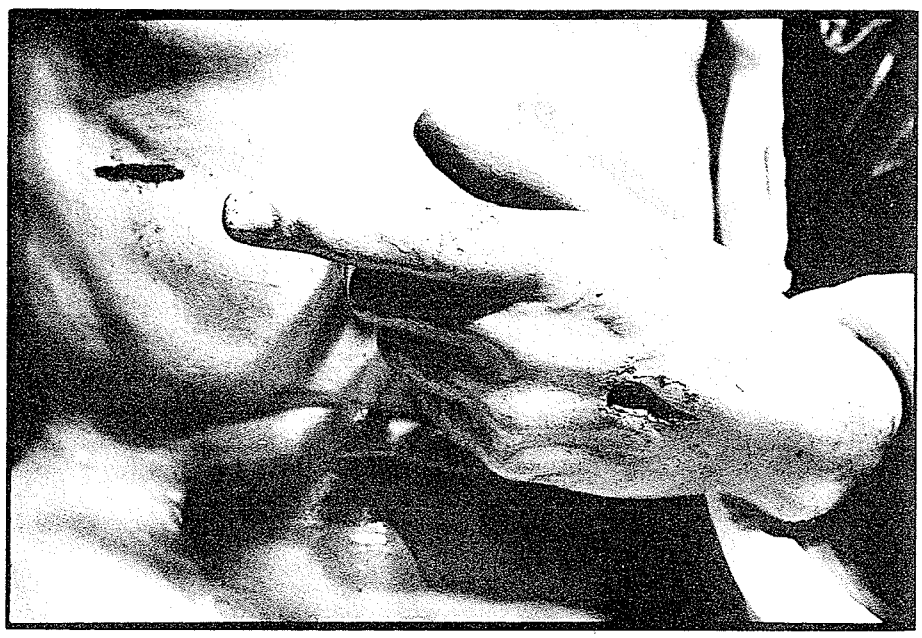
son? No. They lie. A fertilized human egg does not have an unbridled divine right to grow and develop within the body of a woman at no matter what cost to her or to her family. That is not morality, that is insanity.

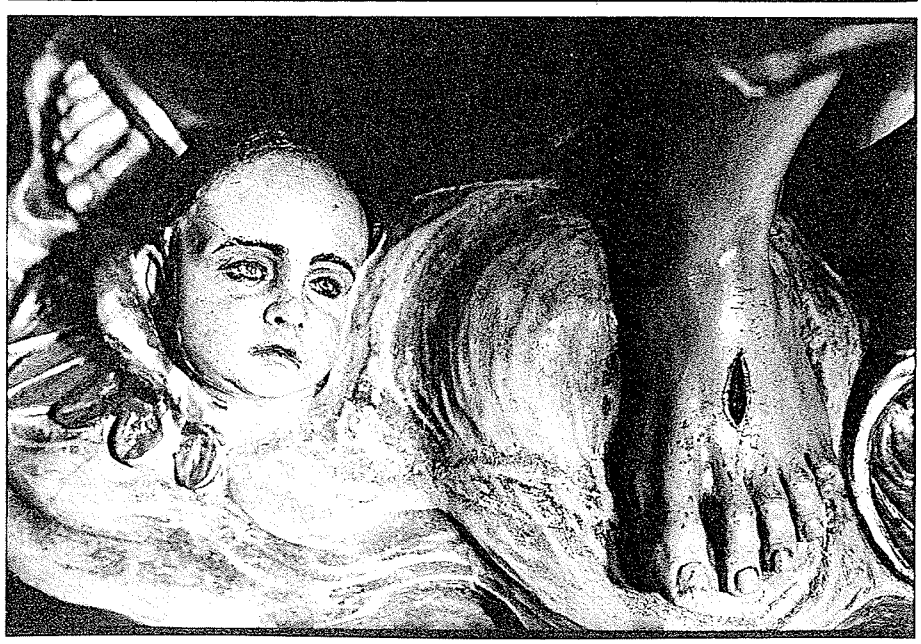
I am angry that a celibate male hierarchy has had such an enormous effect on the lives of American women. The Hyde Amendment would never have passed Congress were it not for the institutional involvement of the Catholic Church. Celibate men who know nothing of women and pregnancy, who supposedly have absolutely no experience in these matters, have written the laws of this country. Celibate men—they have given up their own sexuality, so now they spend all their time totally preoccupied with other people's sexuality. Is this what Freud meant by sublimation? Sex is always on their minds. In Catholic schools I was taught good and evil but the only evil I ever heard about was sex. If there was another evil in the world, I had to discover it for myself.

The reason the bishops are carrying on about abortion is fear—fear that they are losing control of the women. If they lose control of the women, who will they control? They have never controlled the men. In my experience, very few Catholic men really believe; very few follow the rules. It's the women who believe; it's the women who have followed the rules; and the women in turn keep the men in line. If they lose control of the women, they've lost it all.

The Catholic Church places little value on women. That's why they can talk about life with no mention whatever of the woman in whose uterus the fetus resides. We do not belong, we have never belonged. We have always been on the outside looking in. It is a male church, male-dominated, male-run, with male actors worshipping a male God. Throughout history the Church has never valued women, only virgins—that leaves most of us out.

I hope to reach more of my Catholic sisters and brothers and help them wake up. I was the good Catholic girl. I believed it all. I never broke the rules. If I came to realize the truth, I'm sure many others can. "The truth shall make you free."





The Chador of Women's Liberation:

In 1973, I defined cultural feminism as "the belief that women will be freed via an alternate women's culture."[1] The definition still applies and cultural feminism still controls the movement, but it is far less benign than it was then. The matriarchal tendency has grown much stronger and spread throughout the women's movement. (I use women's movement rather than women's liberation movement as the name for the entire movement because I consider the WLM radical, and most of the current movement does not deserve that term; I have also avoided "feminist movement" because feminism is a distinct political position which much of the movement does not share.) Cultural feminism has evolved into spirituality and goddess-worshipping cults, disruptive "dyketactics" groups and—more peacefully—academic cultural feminism, the main activity of which seems to be reading novels by women. Cultural feminism is an ideology. It is *not* the same thing as women's art. Artists aren't automatically cultural feminists any more than other women.

As a radical feminist (loosely within the women's liberation traditions of the Redstockings circa 1969, "The Feminists" Cell 16 and perhaps *early* New York Radical Feminists circa 1970), I base my politics on the fact that men oppress women; this is a *basic* oppression common to all economic systems and classes, races, countries and other groups throughout history. The only historically effective way of *mitigating*, much less *ending*, the situation is a strong, independent mass movement of women whose goal is women's liberation from male supremacy. I would add that the solution to male supremacy lies in revolutionary feminist change and to accomplish this a movement must be political and radical.

Function & Importance of Movement Media

Of all the areas where cultural feminism is entrenched, the women's movement press is crucial. It provides the movement's main, and only open, communications. It lets people know what's happening within and outside their issues and geographic areas. It provides information on upcoming events and what happened at previous ones, as well as analysis of specific actions, issues and theory. Its propaganda function makes women aware of movement opinions, how and by whom these are being developed. It reflects movement opinion, but it also helps shape it. Ideas are molded at least in part by what is read in the press. And for many women outside the movement, their first exposure to an internal source is the movement's local publication. In short, the press supplies a forum—particularly important to an oppressed group usually denied access to media outlets.

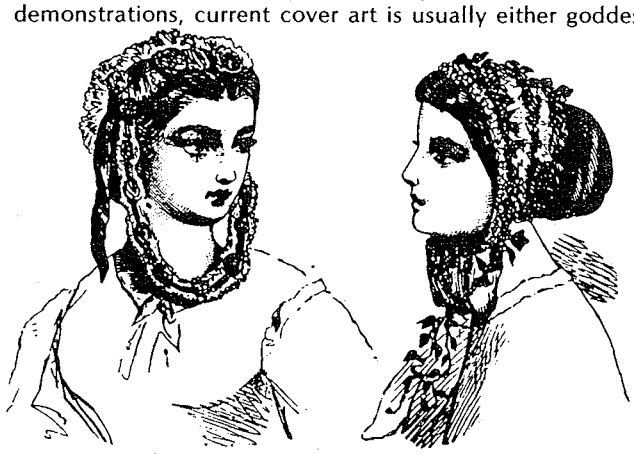
Thus, who controls the press is of pivotal importance. Outside the reformist wing, there are no national multi-issue organizations. In a relatively unstructured, decentralized situation, the press is bound to be the major link for the movement at large.

Reading the Proof:
How Cultural Feminism Controls the Press

The early women's liberation press reflected the movement's pressing need for theory, its New Left origins and its national scope. Radical feminist theory was mostly found in journals. The East Coast papers (*Rat* and *off our backs*, to name two) were dominated by politicos, while the West Coast newspapers (with exceptions) were more feminist-centered. Both concentrated on news of actions and on the lives and situations of women. Every time a book or TV show on the movement appeared, it was criticized in detail, and mass media distortions and negative portrayals of women were routinely exposed.

Things have certainly changed since then. By 1974, almost all the early women's liberation newspapers had folded, and most of the journals had gone under before. To my knowledge *off our backs* and *Women's Press* are the only early newspapers still extant. Movement publications have proliferated, but they are mostly newspapers devoted to publishing local, intra-movement news. Theory and muckraking, except for specific issues like health, are generally avoided. I think these changes resulted from the takeover of cultural feminism as the dominant tendency of the women's movement and from its alliances with liberal groups like the *Ms.* complex and with socialist feminism.

The cultural feminist takeover shows up both in periodicals from 1974 or later and in earlier, long-lasting ones. Consider, for example, the trend beginning around 1972 of giving publications mythological names: *The Furies, Amazon Quarterly, Hera, 13th Moon, Pandora, The Full Moon, Siren,* etc., and compare these with earlier titles: *off our backs, Up from Under, Women: A Journal of Liberation, The Second Wave, A Journal of Female Liberation—No More Fun and Games, Ain't I a Woman, Tooth 'n' Nail, It Ain't Me Babe, Women's Press,* etc. Graphics have changed, too: while pre-1972 issues were likely to feature photos of actions and demonstrations, current cover art is usually either goddess



pictures or photos of a woman or two just *being*, or, if they are doing anything, it has no connection with movement activity. Hardly a periodical now isn't loaded with goddess articles, and many use the dyke separatist spellings for woman/women: womon, womyn, womin, wimmin, womben, womun, wommin, wymyn, etc.

The newer periodicals are overwhelmingly cultural feminist: *The Matriarchist, Womanspirit* and *Chrysalis*, for instance. The latter, which calls itself "a magazine of women's culture," had this to say in a recent editorial:

Brooke is a radical feminist who has been active in the Women's Liberation Movement since 1970. Most recently she has worked with the Feminist Art Institute in NYC. ©1980 Brooke Williams

Cultural Feminism and the Movement Press

by Brooke

> Feminist concerns have broadened from initial consciousness-raising and political activism to confronting all social and economic institutions; to creating our own alternative institutions and culture, to evolving female aesthetic sensibility and producing the literature, music, visual art, and performance that reflect a connectedness to our sources; and ultimately to reexamining and redefining our concepts of reality.[2]

Quest is another, less overt instance; the themes of its first five issues were "Processes of Change" (replete with spiral imagery—a favorite cultural feminist motif—in graphics and articles), "Money, Fame & Power," "Selfhood of Women," "Women & Spirituality" and "Future Visions & Fantasies." While *Quest* prints articles on practical organizing, almost every issue has a strong cultural feminist influence. Most literary magazines and explicitly lesbian publications are cultural feminist.

Older periodicals also show signs of a cultural feminist takeover. *Sister* (Los Angeles) had a regular Z Budapest column on witchcraft rituals.[3] *The Second Wave* (Cambridge), which began in 1971, initially featured articles on "Black Nationalism and Feminism," childcare, "Lesbians in the Women's Liberation Movement," "Prostitution and the Law," American and Polish women, etc. By contrast, a recent issue features "Women and Science Fiction," "Thoughts on Transsexualism" and "Mother of Us All" (about Gertrude Stein's opera about Susan B. Anthony and the connections between Anthony, M. Carey Thomas and Stein).[4] All three articles are good. *The Second Wave* is an anarcho-feminist rather than cultural feminist magazine, and in the past it has run articles critical of spiritualism and even to some extent of feminist businesses,[5] but that makes the change in emphasis even more striking.

Women: A Journal of Liberation (Baltimore), since it began in Fall 1969, has been "politico" (later socialist feminist) oriented. A recent issue on "Power," however, shows a thoroughly cultural feminist viewpoint in its articles and editorials. The collective's "Towards a New Definition of Power" pushes matriarchy, assuming we have had power: "We have lost control of the institutions which shape our lives and within which we are a sustaining force."[6]

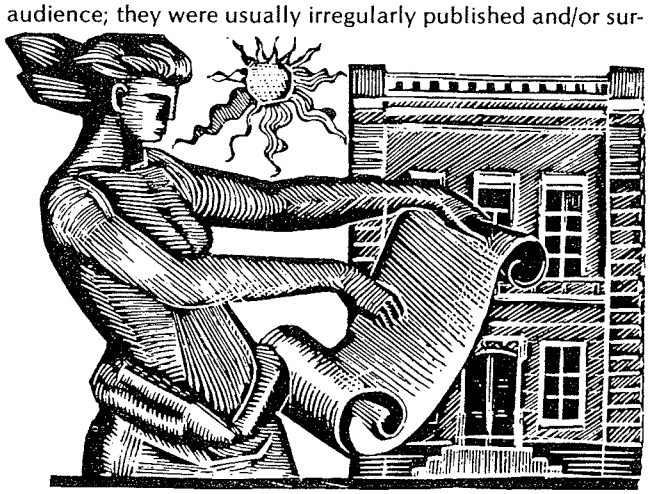
Cultural feminism is not the only tendency in the women's movement. Its hegemony, however, is best illustrated by its coalition and even fusion with socialist feminism.[7] (I must note here that outside of books, most leading socialist feminist writers now publish almost exclusively with leftist and/or academic publications like *Radical America* and *Socialist Review*, not within women's movement publications.)

By redefining feminist politics, cultural feminism and socialist feminism occasionally fuse ideologically. While the radical feminist position is that feminism *is* political, cultural feminism's slogan is "Everything women do is political," and the view of socialist feminists, as well as dyke separatists (the closest to a militant political side of cultural feminism) and even liberal reformists can be summed up as "Everything women do is feminist." These two statements can easily be blended. For example, a common—perhaps the most common—political stance in the women's press encompasses spiritualism, lesbianism, emphasis on racial, ethnic and class divisions among women while running after every conceivable (usually superficially leftist) issue except basic feminist ones.[8]

Networks of connections have always been the most potent source of political control. (We've all heard of "old school ties.") They may be based on personal friendship, but they can also include shared organizational membership, political history, participation in events, field of interest, etc. A striking example of this in the women's movement is the history of the group of women who made up The Furies Collective in Washington, D.C., in 1971-1972. This was the first organization to articulate lesbian feminism as a political theory; it published *The Furies*, an influential theoretical newspaper. In the last issue, in 1974, the remnants of the group proposed a strategy of building alternate institutions, which they have since done. Women from The Furies have started or worked with Diana Press, Oliva Records, *Quest*, Daughters, WIND, Sagaris (a school for feminist political theory in 1975), National Gay Task Force, FEN, *Ms.* and more. Impressive in its activity, it still is a prime example of connections in the one-bloc feminist power groups. Connections of this sort exist everywhere. This particular bloc, however, has had enormous impact; it has helped form and now enforces the cultural feminist tendency.

The Institutionalization of the Women's Press

The most striking feature of the women's movement media to date has been its institutionalization. The women's press has grown with the movement. Continuity is necessary for institutionalization: regularly issued newspapers and organizational independence are preconditions for the "press." Early women's liberation publications were often single issues, or intra-movement newsletters aimed at a small audience; they were usually irregularly published and/or survived only three or four issues, so one could not see them as an institution called "the feminist press."



By 1970, this had changed. Women's liberation newspapers were intended as forums of movement opinion, and they published news and announcements of a spectrum of groups. From then on, only a handful of publications (outside of newsletters) were organizational organs, and some of those became independent, frequently due to their parent's demise. (A case in point is *The Second Wave*, which survived Boston Female Liberation.[9])

It is a small step from a group of individual independent publications to an autonomous sector of the movement. Maintaining and expanding old publications and starting new ones is important to perpetuate autonomy. Too often, a publication's existence has become an end in itself, which leads to the development of a bureaucracy. Bureaucracy has spread throughout the movement, and its press is not immune. Steps were taken to coordinate the movement's press at the so-called National Radical Feminist Conference in York, Pa., Summer 1975, and at the Women in Print Conference in Omaha, August 1976. Several books and pamphlets have appeared which list the women's movement press as a market for writers, including Lynne Shapiro's *Write On, Woman!*, Polly Joan and Andrea Chesman's *Guide to Women's Publishing* and, the grandmother and mother of them all, Kirsten Grimstad and Susan Rennie's *New Woman's Survival Catalog* and *New Woman's Survival Sourcebook.*[10]

Bureaucracy's growth has its own ideology. Since its purpose is self-perpetuation, it remains fixed in the present, and the present becomes, by definition, best. An example of this prevalent cultural feminist view is Dorothy Riddle's "The Revolution is Now" theory, commissioned by *Quest:*

> We have trouble with consistent political analysis when we view the "revolution" as occurring in the future, disconnected in meaningful ways from ourselves. The non-linear approach can help us understand that the revolution is happening NOW and that we are striving to increase the amount of time in which we experience it, rather than striving to make it happen at some future date. At the same time, those intuitive flashes about "this is the revolution" can be viewed analytically to help us understand better how we need and want to be with each other.[11]

It follows that bureaucracy is wedded to the idea of a never-ending process. The process *is* the product. As for "the non-linear approach," any small business owner can tell you how bureaucracy goes around, and around, and around. . . . "The revolution is happening NOW" is not only standard cultural feminism, it's the battle cry of bureaucracy.

Changes in the feminist press's function and position correlate with the rise of cultural feminist ideology. After all, the growth of a network of women's publications is part of the growth of a women's culture, which is cultural feminism's desired end. Women writing and women's writing are very important—the more, the better. It doesn't seem to matter, however, *what* women write so long as women's writing exists (and its politics are compatible with cultural feminism). Women are supposed to write for other women, for the women's culture network, for themselves, but *not* particularly to spread or create or clarify feminist politics.

The movement press is more than its writers. The impact of cultural feminism has affected (1) its staff, (2) its audience and (3) its distribution. From the point of view of movement activism, joining a publication can be a relatively "cheap" way to be involved in the movement, requiring no direct action, little outreach beyond initial distribution and little day-to-day work in holding an organization together. This is not to say that running a publication can't take a lot of time, but the staffs of some movement periodicals are made up mostly of non-activists whose movement activity *is* the publication (including social activities and lovers). For these members, the publication's function in the movement changes from communications, organizing, information, propaganda, theory-building and debate to a vanity press, busywork at best and parasitism at worst.

An additional attraction is that writing is very important to cultural feminists, almost bearing the patina of Art without appearing to have the difficulty. Membership on a publication's staff can confer automatic status. Staffers in this category don't consider the reasons for their publication's existence in political terms, so the situation becomes a circle (or, thanks be to cultural feminism, a downward spiral). This is exacerbated by the fact that, in many parts of the country, the publication is the only generalized (as opposed to single-issue) movement activity, outside of NOW. After all, the press's move to autonomy was not one-sided. Attrition in political women's liberation organizations and outreach activism was very high after 1971, and certainly the two are connected.

Lack of activism is also an intrinsic problem in news coverage. There's a difference between attending something because you want to participate, and attending because you have to report on it. Notetaking effectively prevents participation. A politically inexperienced reporter is also an easy mark for manipulation, deception and disruption. Too many movement reporters are ignorant of the history of the women's liberation movement, which affects what they write and what readers learn. Yet this ignorant staffer, by writing for a movement publication, represents the movement, and is a source of knowledge to her readership.

An explanation of why cultural feminism controls the women's press is not complete without considering its audience, and how that audience is reached through distribution. People entering the movement after 1970-71 missed the radical politics of the 1960s, but got the hangovers—what was left of the counterculture: drugs, back-to-nature, spiritual enlightenment, anti-monogamy, do-your-own thing, pop psychology, etc. All are integral elements of cultural feminism. People don't read anymore—at least not "hard" stuff. Reading and analyzing theory requires slow, step-by-step work (and if the author writes in jargon, it doesn't help). Heavy thought *is work*, and requires concentration, and many (not just movement) people are unwilling to take the trouble. So the movement press, like society, has become a spectacle. Its readers (if they *read* it) aren't meant to think, or to *use* the work as a basis for thought or activity. Polemics, for instance, require at least a mental response. Many readers don't like polemics; they just want to be entertained; they want everything to pass painlessly through their brains without any residue. Most negative responses to material that questions some aspect of cultural feminism fall into this category. Few negative respondents bother to reply on a political level, and this is evident in letters to the editor in feminist publications.

The Happiness Mystique

While it's true that the sisterhood argument—"you mustn't attack a sister"—has been used to stifle debate practically since the women's liberation movement began, it has taken cultural feminism to bring us the happiness mystique.

Here are two examples. The first is Charlene Spretnak's pro-goddess article (spirituality *is* politics); the second, Eleanor Hakim's report of a speak-out on crimes against women in Paris:

> At anti-nuclear demonstrations and at conferences on violence against women, women have led rituals that involve the transformation of rage and depression into constructive, activist energy. Participants enter the closing ceremony exhausted and discouraged; they leave feeling exhilarated, bonded with each other, and optimistic about organizing.[12]
>
> Different groups take turns on the stage. Two days of personal

testimony of crimes against women. Two days of testimony in solidarity in a public meeting hall rented for the occasion, by which the personal becomes the public; hence, the political.

But no—there are deviations from the program. The homosexual group does not give testimony; at least, it is not a testimony of outrage. They choose to make their testimony different from that of the others. They do not sit in a circle. They do not offer case histories, explanations, apologies. They stand. They dance. They sing. They touch. Arcadian echoes. Joy. Testament rather than testimony. A *politique* of the joy of being. Each of us a Muse. Captained by a writer in a battered hat, singing and dancing together in Parnassian re-enactment. It is infectious; women in the audience clap hands in rhythm and join in song. A moment of liberation.[13]

Feeling good is the ultimate value. Spretnak never lets us know why other people were exhausted, discouraged, enraged and depressed. The push to send everyone home happy prevents anybody from figuring out what went wrong, making it that much more likely that the next event will be as bad, if not worse, and another (stronger?) ritual will be required. As for the second passage, pleasant though the incident may have been, it was, politically speaking, a cop-out. The lesbian group did not do what the event was set up to do, and they should not have had to "apologize," simply to testify to crimes against lesbians. Their avoidance of the political issues retarded the event and the feminist (and their own) fight. By emphasizing the joy, Hakim condones their action and implies to her readership that lesbians' lives are "Arcadian" and idyllic, and that being a lesbian is in itself liberating.

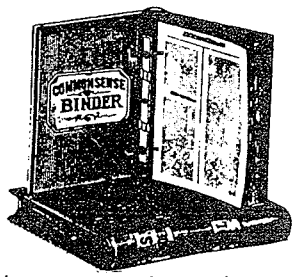
The above is typical of conference reporting in the movement press. This soothes readers, diverting them from discomfort and from the issues. All is well with the world, or at least with the movement. The prevalence of the happiness mystique and the ideology of selfishness[14] indicates a lack of faith in political solutions. This is understandable, since there are no radical women's liberation politics in organized form.

The Decline and Fall of the Pamphlet

Distribution is a crucial factor for the women's press. It brings money, exposure and an audience. It has been drastically affected by the decline of political organizations. Early in the women's liberation movement, 1967-1970 (perhaps later outside the big cities), if one wanted to obtain literature, one had to go to a meeting—in short, to participate in a group or organization. There was no way of even *hearing* about feminist literature outside the *WLM*. With the appearance of the first women's liberation anthologies (the Big Three being Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood Is Powerful*, Leslie B. Tanner's *Voices from Women's Liberation* and Sookie Stambler's *Women's Liberation: Blueprint for the Future*[15]), which listed names and addresses of places to get literature, people who weren't necessarily active could subscribe and send away for material. Newspapers and journals were initially circulated at meetings and other events, and through mail order, hawking and an occasional leftist bookstore.

The next phase (circa 1970-1972) saw the collapse of most radical feminist political organizations and the rise of women's centers as the new organizational form. The women's centers served as intermediaries between unaligned women, various project groups and local organizations. Usually, one needed at least a passing acquaintance with the women's liberation movement to know about the women's center. Women visiting there weren't necessarily active, but they were at least encouraged to join a consciousness-raising group.

Individual hawking of journals was all but abandoned by 1972, except at conferences. Direct mail order or women's centers and a few bookstores became the main methods of obtaining literature. Another indication of change is the decline and fall of the article-as-pamphlet. In 1969-1971,



mimeographed or offset articles were made available by mail order and were highly successful in getting the word out. By 1972, most distributing organizations had shut down or slowed down. Probably the single factor most crippling to the article-as-pamphlet format has been the takeover of movement literature distribution by bookstores. Bookstores are set up to sell books. Articles take up space, are hard to display, get mussed and/or buried with the greatest of ease.

The women's bookstores began, and took off, in 1973. The bookstore is not a movement organization, but it is the most public entity now associated with the movement. It's safe to say that most customers aren't active in the movement; they're members of "the women's community." The women's press and women's businesses have a symbiotic relationship. Not only do women's bookstores sell periodicals, but periodicals advertise businesses and review books sold in the store.

The Protection Racket

Another aspect of bureaucracy is the "expert." The personality trend is an example of false expertise. The rise of cultural feminist leaders and the personality trend has been pushed forward and reflected in movement publications. The celebrity pitch—famous names and faces (especially on the cover!)—sells periodicals and the stars too. Bureaucracy and other power structures, in the women's movement and out, breed a protection racket. Those in power must be protected from criticism; those not in power (most of the audience) must be protected from annoyance and disillusion. The protection racket in turn leads to the "circle of support." And this in turn leads to the double standard.[16] One way this is applied is in the preference for articles written by the staff as opposed to those written by non-staff. This seems to be part of publishing, but it feeds the incestuousness which is such a prominent feature of the women's press. Sometimes staff members' articles aren't even looked over before they go in, as they are written over layout weekend. The next step down—frequently essential to getting published in a periodical at all—is to be *known* to the staff. Being a big movement name helps too.

And finally the double standard is applied to the controversial article (controversial in a cultural feminist milieu meaning anti-cultural feminist). The cost in time, energy and perhaps unfavorable feedback means that, as Ann Leffler has put it:

> as the collective members become achingly familiar with the cost of handling controversial material, they begin to twitch as soon as they see manuscripts which even hint of controversy . . . best to reject the ms. and move on. What begins as collective discussions about controversial material, ends in a situation where collective unanimity is a prerequisite for publishing anything. Controversy disappears.[17]

It's ironic that free speech and free press as stated in the First Amendment were originally meant to apply to unpopular dissenters and radicals—in short, to controversial material. In reality, under the law and in the women's movement, these are the last areas where free speech and free press are applied.

Note: This article is excerpted from the first half of a long essay to be published in pamphlet form. The entire essay includes a discussion of the role of the Feminist Writers' Guild in the movement press and its *Feminist Review*, how dissenting publications and dissent

within publications are controlled, problems in publications' content, censorship and distortion, recommendations for feminist action, and more. The essay calls for the women's movement establishment and for radical feminists to take action as consumers, to write for publications with potential, to start our own periodicals and presses, and to raise consciousness about the role and functions of the movement's press.

The title's reference to the *chador* is from Marsha Segerberg's article on a "feminist science" conference:

> While the women of Iran were donning the *chardour* [sic] as a symbol of resistance against the oppressive regime of the Shah, likewise American and English feminists, lesbian feminist engineers, ethnologists, sociologists, poets, philosophers, nurses, psychologists, theologians outfitted themselves with the dispassion appropriate for such an occasion, but stepped onto the platform in the Grand Ballroom (!) of the Shamrock Hilton and proposed a vision of feminism/science as an embrace of passion and subjectivity [Marsha Segerberg, "Re/de/e/volving: feminist theories of science," *off our backs*, Vol. IX, No. 3, March 1979, p.12].

The *chador* is the full head and body veil worn by Islamic women in Iran. When Khomeini's government ordered women to wear it in public, women held mass demonstrations demanding equal rights and shouting, "No to the veil!" Feminists all over the world supported them.

1. Brooke, "The Retreat to Cultural Feminism," *Feminist Revolution*, ed. Redstockings (New York: Random House, 1975, 1978), p. 79.
2. Editorial, *Chrysalis*, No. 6, 1979, p. 3 (unpaginated).
3. *Sister* recently folded.
4. The recent issue referred to is Vol. 5, No. 2, with Virginia Rankin, "Women and Science Fiction: Future Possibilities"; Jeannette Muzima, "Thoughts on Transsexualism"; and Patricia Gozemba, "Mother of Us All."
5. See Peggy Kornegger, "The Spirituality Ripoff," *The Second Wave*, Vol. 4, No. 3, and Peggy Kornegger, "Feminism, Anarchism & Economics," *The Second Wave*, Vol. 4, No. 4.
6. The Journal Collective, "Towards a New Definition of Power," *Women: A Journal of Liberation*, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 62.
7. For example, two prominent socialist feminist publications, *Heresies* and *Feminist Studies*, had issues in 1978 whose themes were "The Great Goddess" and "Women & Religion" respectively. *Women: A Journal of Liberation* has just been mentioned.
8. See, for instance, the exchange between Grass Roots Lesbians, "Grass Roots Protest" and Brooke, "Clarifying Feminism," in Letters, *off our backs*, Vol. IX, No. 1, January 1979, pp. 18-19; the Solidarity issue of *Sister* (Los Angeles), January 1979; Terre Poppe's articles in *off our backs* 1977-79; and anti-nuke coverage throughout the women's movement press.
9. "From Us. . . ," *The Second Wave*, Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 6.
10. Lynne D. Shapiro, Ed., *Write On, Woman!* (Lynne D. Shapiro, 345 W. 87th St., New York, NY 10024; 1978). Polly Joan and Andrea Chesman, *Guide to Women's Publishing* (Dustbooks, P.O. Box 100, Paradise, CA 95969; 1978). Kirsten Grimstad and Susan Rennie, Eds., *The New Woman's Survival Catalog* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan/Berkeley Publishing Corporation, 1973). Susan Rennie and Kirsten Grimstad, Eds., *The New Woman's Survival Sourcebook* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975).
11. Dorothy Riddle, "Integrating Process and Product," in "Critique & Commentary: The Process/Product Debate," *Quest*, Vol. IV, No. 4, Fall 1978, pp. 28-29.
12. Charlene Spretnak, "The Politics of Women's Spirituality" ("Hypatia's Column"), *Chrysalis*, No. 6, 1979, p. 15.
13. Eleanor Hakim, "In Defense of Fallen Comrades: La Mutualité" *Heresies*, No. 6 ("On Women and Violence"), 1979, p. 46.
14. [*Ed.*—the section on the "Ideology of Selfishness" is omitted here.]
15. Robin Morgan, Ed., *Sisterhood Is Powerful* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970). Leslie B. Tanner, Ed., *Voices from Women's Liberation* (New York: New American Library, 1970). Sookie Stambler, Ed., *Women's Liberation: Blueprint for the Future* (New York: Ace Books, 1970, now out of print).
16. [Ed.—the complete sections on "The Protection Racket," "The Circle of Support" and "The Double Standard" are not included in this version.]
17. Ann Leffler, letter in "Letters Home to Mama," *Big Mama Rag*, Vol. 6, No. 7, July/August 1978, p. 2.

In the Name of Feminist Film Criticism

by B. Ruby Rich

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Whatever is unnamed, undepicted in images, whatever is omitted from biography, censored in collections of letters, whatever is mis-named as something else, made difficult-to-come-by, whatever is buried in the memory by the collapse of meaning under an inadequate or lying language—this will become, not merely unspoken, but unspeakable.

—Adrienne Rich[1]

The situation for women working in filmmaking and film criticism today is precarious. While our work is no longer invisible, and not yet unspeakable, it still goes dangerously unnamed. There is even uncertainty over what name might characterize that intersection of cinema and the women's movement within which we labor, variously called "films by women," "feminist film," "images of women in film" or "women's films." All are vague and problematic. I see the lack of proper name here as symptomatic of a crisis in the ability of feminist film criticism thus far to come to terms with the work at hand, to apply a truly feminist criticism to the body of work already produced by women filmmakers. This crisis points to a real difference between the name "feminist" and the other names that have traditionally been applied to film (i.e., "structuralist" for certain avant-garde films or "melodrama" for certain Hollywood films).[2] "Feminist" is a name which may have only a marginal relation to the film text, describing more persuasively the context of social and political activity from which the work sprang. Such a difference is due, on the one hand, to a feminist recognition of the links tying a film's aesthetics to its modes of production and reception; and, on the other hand, to the particular history of the cinematic field which "feminist" came to designate—a field in which filmmaking-exhibition-criticism-distribution-audience have always been considered inextricably connected.

The History

The great contribution of feminism, as a body of thought, to culture in our time has been that it has something fairly direct to say, a quality all too rare today. And its equally

B. Ruby Rich is a film critic for the Chicago Reader, *a weekly, and an Associate Editor of* Jump Cut. *She lectures often, teaches occasionally, and is now working on a book of feminist film criticism.*

From Leontine Sagan's *Maedchen in Uniform*

crucial contribution, as a process and style, has been women's insistence on conducting the analysis, making the statements, in unsullied terms, in forms not already associated with the media's oppressiveness toward women. It is this freshness of discourse and distrust of traditional modes of articulation that placed feminist cinema in a singular position vis-a-vis both the dominant cinema and the avant-garde in the early 70's. By the "dominant," I mean Hollywood and all its corresponding manifestations in other cultures; but this could also be termed the Cinema of the Fathers. By the "avant-garde," I mean the experimental/personal cinema which is positioned, by self-inclusion, within the art world; but this could also be termed the Cinema of the Sons. Being a business, the Cinema of the Fathers seeks to do only that which has been done before and proved successful. Being an art, the Cinema of the Sons seeks to do only that which has not been done before and so prove itself successful.

Into such a situation, at the start of the 70's, entered a feminist cinema. In place of the Fathers' bankruptcy of both form and content, there was a new and different energy; a cinema of immediacy and positive force now opposed the retreat into violence and the revival of a dead past which had become the dominant cinema's mainstays. In place of the Sons' increasing alienation and isolation, there was an entirely new sense of identification—with other women—and a corresponding commitment to communicate with this now-identifiable audience, a commitment which replaced, for feminist filmmakers, the elusive public ignored and frequently scorned by the male formalist filmmakers. Thus, from the start, its link to an evolving political movement gave feminist cinema a power and direction entirely unprecedented in independent filmmaking, bringing issues of theory/practice, aesthetics/meaning, process/representation into sharp focus.

Since the origin and development of feminist film work are largely unexamined, the following chronology sketches some of the major events of the 70's in North America and Great Britain. Three sorts of information are omitted as beyond the scope of this survey: (1) European festivals and publications, although some have been extremely significant; (2) beyond the first entry, the hundreds of films made by women during the decade; and (3) the publication in 1969-70 of key feminist writings such as *Sexual Politics, The Dialectic of Sex,* and *Sisterhood Is Powerful,* which must be remembered as the backdrop and theoretical impetus for these film activities.

1971: Release of *Growing Up Female, Janie's Janie, Three Lives* and *The Woman's Film:* first generation of feminist documentaries.

1972: First New York International Festival of Women's Films and the Women's Event at Edinburgh Film Festival. First issue of *Women & Film* magazine; special issues on women and film in *Take One, Film Library Quarterly* and *The Velvet Light Trap;* filmography of women directors in *Film Comment.*

1973: Toronto Women and Film Festival, Washington Women's Film Festival, season of women's cinema at National Film Theatre in London and Buffalo women's film conference. Marjorie Rosen's *Popcorn Venus* (first book on women in film) and *Notes on Women's Cinema,* edited by Claire Johnston for British Film Institute (first anthology of feminist film theory).

1974: Chicago Films by Women Festival. First issue of *Jump Cut* (quarterly on contemporary film emphasizing feminist perspective); two books on images of women in film: Molly Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape* and Joan Mellen's *Women and Their Sexuality in the New Film.*

1975: Conference of Feminists in the Media, New York and Los Angeles. *Women & Film* ceases publication; *The Work of Dorothy Arzner* (BFI monograph edited by Johnston), and Sharon Smith's *Women Who Make Movies* (guide to women filmmakers).

1976: Second New York International Festival of Women's Films (smaller, noncollective, less successful than first) and Womanscene, a section of women's films in Toronto's Festival of Festivals (smaller, noncollective, but comparable in choices to 1973).

1977: First issue of *Camera Obscura* (journal of film theory founded largely by former *Women & Film* members, initially in opposition to it); Karyn Kay and Gerald Peary's *Women and the Cinema* (first anthology of criticism on women and film).

1978: *Women in Film Noir* (BFI anthology edited by E. Ann Kaplan); special feminist issues of *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* and *New German Critique;* Brandon French's *On the Verge of Revolt: Women in American Films of the Fifties* (study on images of women).

1979: Alternative Cinema Conference, bringing together over 100 feminists in the media for screenings, caucuses, and strategizing within the left; Feminism and Cinema Event at Edinburgh Film Festival, assessing the decade's filmmaking

and theory and debating what might come next. Patricia Erens's *Sexual Stratagems: The World of Women in Film* (anthology on women and cinema).

It is immediately apparent from this chronology that the 1972-73 period marked a cultural watershed that has not since been equaled and that the unity, discovery, energy, and brave, we're-here-to-stay spirit of the early days underwent a definite shift in 1975, mid-decade. Since then, the field of vision has altered. There is increased specialization, both in the direction of genre studies (like *film noir*) and film theory (particularly semiotic and psychoanalytic); the start of sectarianism, with women partitioned off into enclaves defined by which conferences are attended or journals subscribed to; increased institutionalization, both of women's studies and cinema studies departments—twin creations of the 70's; a backlash emphasis on "human" liberation, which by making communication with men a priority can leave woman-to-woman feminism looking declassé. Overall, there is a growing acceptance of feminist film as an area of study rather than as a sphere of action. And this may pull feminist film work away from its early political commitment, encompassing a wide social setting; away from issues of life that go beyond form; away from the combative (as an analysis of and weapon against patriarchal capitalism) into the merely representational.

The chronology also shows the initial cross-fertilization between the women's movement and cinema, which took place in the area of practice rather than in written criticism. The films came first. In fact, we find two different currents feeding into film work: one made up of women who were feminists and thereby led to film, the other made up of women already working in film and led therein to feminism. It was largely the first group of women who began making the films which were naturally named "feminist,"[3] and largely the second group of women, often in university film studies departments, who began holding the film festivals, just as naturally named "women and/in film." Spadework has continued in both directions, creating a new women's cinema and rediscovering the antecedents, with the two currents feeding our film criticism.

The past eight years have reduced some of the perils of which Adrienne Rich speaks. No longer are women "undepicted in images": even four years ago, Bonnie Dawson's *Women's Films in Print* could list over 800 available films by U.S. women alone, most depicting women. No longer are women omitted from all biography, nor are letters always censored. (In this respect, note the ongoing work of the four-woman collective engaged in "The Legend of Maya Deren Project" to document and demystify the life and work of a major, underacknowledged figure in American independent cinema.) No longer are women's films so hard to come by: the establishment of New Day Films (1972), the Serious Business Company (c.1973) and the Iris Films collective (1975) ensures the continuing distribution of films by or about women, although the chances of seeing any independently made features by women in a regular movie theatre are still predictably slim (with Jill Godmilow's *Antonia* and Claudia Weill's *Girl Friends* the only U.S. films to succeed so far). Returning to Rich's original warning, however, we reach the end of history's comforts and arrive at our present danger: "whatever is unnamed. . . buried in the memory by the collapse of meaning under an inadequate or lying language—this will become, not merely unspoken, but unspeakable." Herein lies the crisis facing feminist film criticism today; for after a decade of film practice and theory, we still lack our proper names. The impact of this lack on the films themselves is of immediate concern.

The Films

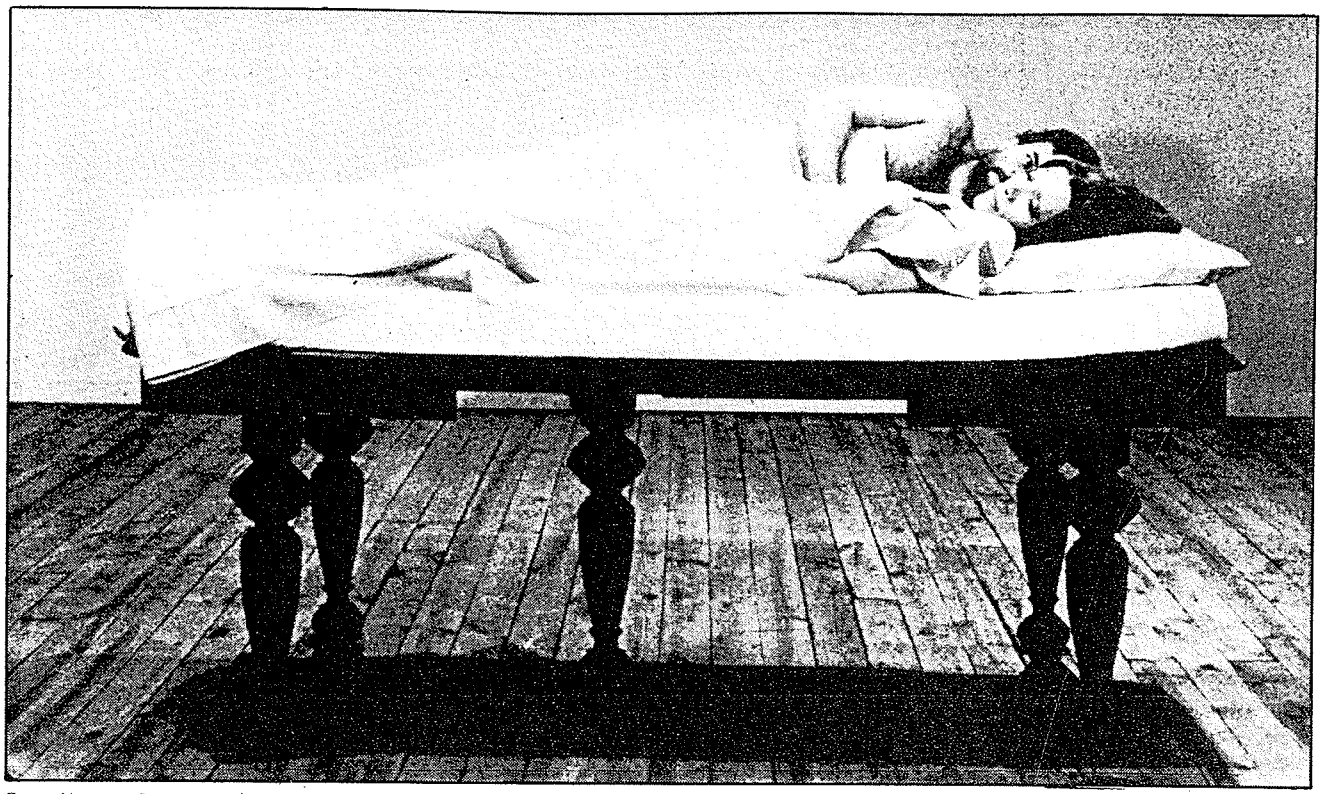
One classic film rediscovered through women's film festivals indicates the sort of mis-naming prevalent in film history. Leontine Sagan's *Maedchen in Uniform*, a 1931 German film, details the relationship between a student and her teacher in a repressive girls' boarding school. The act of naming is itself a pivotal moment in the narrative. Toward the end of the film, the schoolgirls gather at a drunken party after the annual school play. Manuela has just starred as a passionate youth and, drunk with punch, still in boy's clothing, she stands to proclaim her happiness and love—naming her teacher Fraulein von Bernburg as the woman she loves. Before this episode, the lesbian substructure of the school and the clearly shared knowledge of that substructure have been emphasized; the school laundress even points to the prevalence of the Fraulein's initials embroidered on the girls' regulation chemises as evidence of the adulation of her adolescent admirers. This eroticism was *not* in the closet. But only when Manuela stands and names that passion is she punished, locked up in solitary—for her speech, not for her actions.

Such is the power of a name and the valor of naming. It is ironic that the inscription of the power of naming within the film has not forestalled its own continuous mis-naming within film history, which has championed its anti-fascism while masking the lesbian origins of that resistance. The problem is even more acute in dealing with contemporary films, where the lack of an adequate language has contributed to the invisibility of key aspects of our film culture—an invisibility advantageous to the existing film tradition. . . .

The act of mis-naming functions not as an error, but as a strategy of the patriarchy. The lack of proper names facilitates derogatory name-calling; the failure to assign meaningful names to contemporary feminist films eases the acquisition of misnomers. Two key films of the 70's reveal this process and the disenfranchisement we suffer as a result.

Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman* (1975) is a chronicle of three days in the life of a Brussels housewife, a widow and mother who is also a prostitute. It is the first film to scrutinize housework in a language appropriate to the activity itself, showing a woman's activities in the home in real time to communicate the alienation of woman in the nuclear family under European post-war economic conditions. More than three hours in length and nearly devoid of dialogue, the film charts Jeanne Dielman's breakdown via a minute observation of her performance of household routines, at first methodical and unvarying, later increasingly disarranged, until by film's end she permanently disrupts the patriarchal order by murdering her third client. The film was scripted, directed, photographed and edited by women with a consciously feminist sensibility.

The aesthetic repercussions of such a sensibility are evident throughout the film. For example, the choice of camera angle is unusually low. In interviews, Akerman explained that the camera was positioned at her own height; since she is quite short, the entire perspective of the film is different from what we are used to seeing, as shot by male cinematographers. The perspective of every frame thus reveals a female ordering of that space, prompting a reconsideration of point-of-view that I had felt before only in a few works shot by children (which expose the power of tall adults in every shot) and in the films by the Japanese director Yasujiro Ozu (where the low angle has been much discussed by Western critics as an entry into the "oriental" detachment of someone seated on a tatami mat, observing). Akerman's decision to employ only medium and long shots also stems from a feminist critique: the decision to free her character from the exploitation of a zoom lens and to grant her an integrity of private space usually denied in close-ups, thereby also freeing the audience from the insensitivity of a camera barreling in to magnify a woman's emotional crisis. Similarly, the activities of shopping, cooking and cleaning the house are presented without ellipses, making visible the ex-



From Yvonne Rainer's *Film about a Woman Who . . .* *Photo by Babette Mangolte*

tent of time previously omitted from cinematic depictions. Thus, the film is a profoundly feminist work in theme, style and representation; yet it has been critically received in language devoted to sanctifying aesthetics stripped of political consequence.

Shortly after *Jeanne Dielman*'s premiere at the Cannes film festival, European critics extolled the film as "hyper-realist" in homage both to the realist film (and literary) tradition and to the super-realist movement in painting. Two problems arise with such a name: first, the tradition of cinematic realism has never included women in its alleged veracity; second, the comparison with super-realist painters obscures the contradiction between their illusionism and Akerman's anti-illusionism. Another name applied to *Jeanne Dielman* was "ethnographic," in keeping with the film's insistence on real-time presentation and non-elliptical editing. Again, the name negates a basic aspect by referring to a cinema of clinical observation, aimed at "objectivity" and non-involvement, detached rather than engaged. The film's warm texture and Akerman's committed sympathies (the woman's gestures were borrowed from her own mother and aunt) make the name inappropriate.

The critical reception of the film in the *Soho Weekly News* by three different reviewers points up the confusion engendered by linguistic inadequacy.[4] Jonas Mekas questioned, "Why did she have to ruin the film by making the woman a prostitute and introduce a murder at the end, why did she commercialize it?" Later, praising most of the film as a successor to *Greed*, he contended that the heroine's silence was more "revolutionary" than the murder, making a case for the film's artistic merit as separate from its social context and moving the work into the area of existentialism at the expense of its feminism. Amy Taubin considered the film "theatrical" and, while commending the subjectivity of the camerawork and editing, she attacked the character of Jeanne: "Are we to generalize from Jeanne to the oppression of many women through their subjugation to activity which offers them no range of creative choice? If so, Jeanne Dielman's pathology mitigates against our willingness to generalize." By holding a reformist position (i.e., she should vary her menu, change her wardrobe) in relation to a revolutionary character (i.e., a murderer), Taubin was forced into a reading of the film limited by notions of realism that she, as an avant-garde film critic, would have ordinarily tried to avoid: her review split the film along the lines of form/content, annexing the aesthetics as "the real importance" and rejecting the character of Jeanne as a pathological woman. Again we find a notion of pure art set up in opposition to a feminism seemingly restricted to positive role models. Finally, Annette Michelson wrote a protest to Mekas which defended the film for "the sense of renewal it has brought both to a narrative mode and the inscription *within it* of feminist energies" (my italics). Yes, but at what cost? Here the effect of inadequate naming is precisely spelled out: the feminist energies are being spent to create work quickly absorbed into mainstream modes of art that renew themselves at our expense. Already, the renaissance of the "new narrative" is under way in film circles with nary a glance back at filmmakers like Akerman or Yvonne Rainer, who first incurred the wrath of the academy by reintroducing characters, emotions and narratives into their films.

The critical response to Rainer's recent films, especially *Film about a Woman Who...*, adds instances of naming malpractice.[5] Much of the criticism has been in the area of formal textual analysis, concentrating on the "post-modernist" structures, "Brechtian" distancing or cinematic deconstruction of the works. Continuing the tactic of detoxifying films via a divide-and-conquer criticism, critic Brian Henderson analyzed the central section in *Film about a Woman Who...* according to a semiological model, detailing the five channels of communication used to present textual information.[6] The analysis was exhaustive on the level of technique but completely ignored the actual meaning of the information (Rainer's "emotional accretions")—the words themselves and the visualization (a man and woman on a stark bed/table). At the opposite extreme, a *Feminist Art Journal* editorial condemned Rainer as a modernist, "the epitome of the alienated artist," and discounted her film work as regressive for feminists, evidently because of its formal strategies.[7]

Rainer's films deal with the relations between the sexes and the interaction of life and art within a framework combining autobiography and fiction. Whatever the intent of Rainer's filmmaking in political terms, the work stands as a clear product of a feminist cultural milieu. The films deal explicitly with woman as victim and the burden of patriarchal mythology; they offer a critique of emotion, reworking melodrama for women today, and even (*Kristina Talking Pictures*) provide an elegy to the lost innocence of defined male/female roles. The structure of the themes gives priority to the issues over easy identification with the "characters" and involves the audience in an active analysis of emotional process. Yet little of the criticism has managed to reconcile an appreciation for the formal elements with an understanding of the feminist effect. Carol Wikarska, in a short review for *Women & Film*, could only paraphrase Rainer's own descriptions in a stab at *Film about a Woman Who...* seen in purely art-world terms.[8] More critically, the feminist-defined film journal *Camera Obscura* concentrated its first issue on Rainer but fell into a similar quandary. While an interview with Rainer was included, the editors felt obliged to critique the films in the existing semiological vocabulary, taking its feminist value for granted without confronting the points of contradiction within that methodology. The lack of vocabulary once again frustrates a complete consideration of the work.

Lest the similarity of these mis-namings merely suggest critical blindness rather than a more deliberate tactic, an ironic reversal is posed by the response to Anne Severson's *Near the Big Chakra.* Silent and in color, the film shows a series of 36 women's cunts photographed in unblinking close-up, some still and some moving, with no explanations or gratuitous presentation. Formally the film fits into the category of "structuralist" cinema: a straightforward listing of parts, no narrative, requisite attention to a predetermined and simplified structure, and fixed camera position (as defined by the namer—P. Adams Sitney). Yet Severson's image is so powerfully uncooptable that her film has never been called "structuralist" to my knowledge, nor—with retrospective revisionism—have her earlier films been so named. Evidently any subject matter that could make a man vomit (as happened at a London screening in 1973) is too much for the critical category, even though it was founded on the "irrelevance" of the visual images. Thus a name can be withheld by the critical establishment if its application alone won't make the film fit the category.

"Whatever they have not laid hands on ... does not appear in the language you speak," wrote Monique Wittig.[9] Here is the problem: not so much that certain names are used, but that other names are *not*—and therefore the qualities they describe are lost. Where patriarchal language holds sway, the silences, the characteristics that are unnamed, frequently hold the greatest potential strength. In Chantal Akerman's work, what is most valuable for us is her decoding of oppressive cinematic conventions and her invention of new codes of non-voyeuristic vision; yet these contributions go unnamed. In Yvonne Rainer's work, the issue is not one of this or that role model for feminists, not whether her women characters are too weak or too victimized or too individualistic. Rather, we can value precisely her refusal to pander (visually and emotionally), her frustration of audience expectation of spectacle (physical or psychic) and her complete reworking of traditional forms of melodrama and elegy to include modern feminist culture. Yet these elements, of greatest value to us, are not accorded critical priority.

The effect of not-naming is censorship, whether caused by the imperialism of the patriarchal language or the underdevelopment of a feminist language. We need to begin analyzing our own films, but first it is necessary to learn to speak in our own name. The recent history of feminist film criticism indicates the urgency of that need....[10]

Anticlimax: The Names

Without new names, we run the danger of losing title to films that we sorely need. By stretching the name "feminist" beyond all reasonable elasticity, we contribute to its ultimate impoverishment. At the same time, so many films have been partitioned off to established traditions, with the implication that these other names contradict or forestall any application of the name "feminist" to the works so annexed, that the domain of "feminist" cinema is fast becoming limited to that work concerned only with feminism as explicit subject matter. "Feminist," if it is to make a comeback from the loss of meaning caused by its all-encompassing overuse, requires new legions of names to preserve for us the inner strengths, the not-yet-visible qualities of these films still lacking in definition.

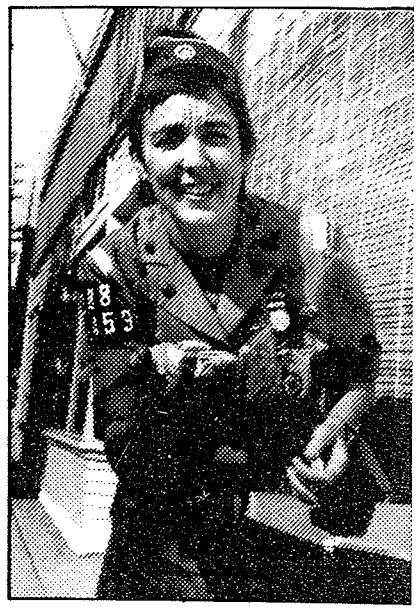
Because this need is so very urgent, I here offer an experimental glossary of names as an aid to initiating a new stage of feminist criticism. These names are not likely to be an immediate hit. First of all, it's all well and good to call for new names to appear in the night sky like so many constellations, but it's quite another thing to invent them and commit them to paper. Second, there's the inevitable contradiction of complaining about names and then committing more naming acts. Third, there's the danger that, however unwieldy, these new names might be taken as formulas to be applied willy-nilly to every hapless film that comes our way. The point, after all, is not to set up new power institutions (feminist banks, feminist popes, feminist names) but rather to open the mind to new descriptive possibilities. Not to require alternate glossaries of Talmudic herstory, but to suggest the revolutionary possibilities of non-patriarchal, non-capitalist imaginings. In that quintessentially romantic film, *Children of Paradise*, there is a relevant conversation. The criminal Lacenaire and the count Salou meet on the grand staircase in the count's mansion; when Salou demands a formal introduction, Lacenaire refuses on the grounds of habit, claiming that the pleasure of meeting a stranger is always spoiled by the anticlimax of learning the name. At the risk, then, of such an anticlimax, I offer the following names, stressing once again that they are meant to suggest, not define.

VALIDATIVE: One of feminist filmmaking's greatest contributions is the body of films about women's lives, political struggles, organizing, etc. These films have been vaguely classified under the *cinéma verité* banner, where they reside in decidedly mixed company. Since they function as a validation and legitimation of women's culture and individual lives, the name "validative" would be a better choice. It has the added advantage of aligning the work with products of oppressed peoples (with the filmmaker as insider), whereas the *cinéma verité* label represents the oppressors, who make films as superior outsiders documenting alien, implicitly inferior cultures, often from a position of condescension. The feminist films of the early 70's were validative, and validative films continue to be an important component of feminist filmmaking. They may be ethnographic, documenting the evolution of women's lives and issues (as in *We're Alive*, a portrait and analysis of women in prison) or archaeological, uncovering women's hidden past (as in *Union Maids*, with its recovery of women's role in the labor movement, or Sylvia Morale's *Chicana*, the first film history of the Mexican-American woman's struggle). The form is well established, yet the constantly evolving issues require new films, such as *We Will Not Be Beaten*, a film on domestic violence culled from videoed interviews with women. By employing the name "validative" in place of *cinéma verité*, we can combat the patriarchal annexation of the woman filmmaker as one of the boys, i.e., as a professional who is not *of* the culture being filmed. It is a unifying name aimed at conserving strength.

CORRESPONDENCE: A different name is necessary for more avant-garde films, like those of Yvonne Rainer, Chantal Akerman, Helke Sander or Laura Mulvey/Peter Wollen. Looking to literary history, we find a concern with the role played by letters ("personal" discourse) as a sustaining mode for women's writing during times of literary repression. The publication of historical letters by famous and ordinary women has been a major component of the feminist publishing renaissance, just as the long-standing denigration of the genre as not "real" writing (i.e., not certified by either a publishing house or monetary exchange) has been an additional goad for the creation of feminist alternatives to the literary establishment. A cinema of "correspondence" is a fitting homage to this tradition of introspective missives sent out into the world. Equally relevant is the other definition of "correspondence" as "mutual response, the answering of things to each other," or, to take Swedenborg's literal Doctrine of Correspondence as an example, the tenet that "every natural object symbolizes or corresponds to some spiritual fact or principle which is, as it were, its archetype."[11] Films of correspondence, then, would be those investigating correspondences, i.e., between emotion and objectivity, narrative and deconstruction, art and ideology. Thus *Jeanne Dielman* is a film of correspondence in its exploration of the bonds between housework and madness, prostitution and heterosexuality, epic and dramatic temporality.

What distinguishes such films of correspondence from formally similar films by male avant-garde filmmakers is their inclusion of the author within the text. *Film about a Woman Who...* corresponds to very clear experiences and emotional concerns in Rainer's life and *Jeanne Dielman* draws on the gestures of the women in Akerman's family, whereas Michael Snow's *Rameau's Nephew* uses the form to suppress the author's presence. (Of course, there is a tradition of "diary" movies by men as well as women, but, significantly, the presence of Jonas Mekas in most of his diary films—like that of Godard in *Numéro deux*—is of the filmmaker rather than the "man" outside that professional role.) Similarly, Helke Sander in *The All Around Reduced Personality* revises the ironic, distanced narration of modernist German cinema to include the filmmaker in a same first-person-plural with her characters, unlike her compatriot Alexander Kluge, who always remains external and superior to his characters. It is this resolute correspondence between form and content, to put it bluntly, that distinguishes the films of correspondence. Such films are essential to the development of new structures and forms for the creation and communication of feminist works and values; more experimental than validative, they are laying the groundwork of a feminist cinematic vocabulary.

RECONSTRUCTIVE: Several recent films suggest another name, located midway between the two described above, and dealing directly with issues of form posed by the political and emotional concerns of the work. One such film is Sally Potter's *Thriller*, a feminist murder mystery related as a first-person inquiry by the victim: Mimi, the seamstress of Puccini's *La Bohème*, investigates the cause of her death and the manner of her life, uncovering in the process the contradictions hidden by the bourgeois male artist. Michelle Citron's *Daughter Rite* probes relations between women in the family, using dramatic sequences to critique *cinéma verité* and optical printing to re-examine home movies, that U.S. index to domestic history. Both *Thriller* and *Daughter Rite* are reconstructive in their rebuilding of other forms, whether grand opera or soap opera, according to feminist specifications. At the same time both Potter and Citron reconstruct some basic cinematic styles (psychodrama, documentary) to create new feminist forms, in harmony with the desires of the audience as well as the theoretical concerns of the filmmakers. By reconstructing forms in a constructive manner, these films build bridges between the needs of women and the goals of art.



Top: Jan Oxenberg's *A Comedy in Six Unnatural Acts.* Middle: Michelle Citron's *Daughter Rite.* Bottom: Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman.*

MEDUSAN: Humor should not be overlooked as a weapon of great power. Comedy requires further cultivation for its revolutionary potential as a deflator of the patriarchal order and an extraordinary leveler and reinventor of dramatic structure. An acknowledgment of the subversive power of humor, the name "Medusan" is taken from Helene Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa," in which she celebrates the potential of feminist texts "to blow up the law, to break up the 'truth' with laughter."[12] Cixous's contention that when women confront the figure of Medusa she will be laughing is a rejoinder to Freud's posing the "Medusa's Head" as an incarnation of male castration fears. For Cixous, women are having the last laugh. And, to be sure, all the films in this camp deal with combinations of humor and sexuality. Vera Chytilova's *Daisies* was one of the first films by a woman to move in the direction of anarchic sexuality, though its disruptive humor was received largely as slapstick at the time. Nelly Kaplan's two films, *A Very Curious Girl* and *Nea*, also offer an explosive humor coupled with sexuality to discomfort patriarchal society (even though her fondness for "happy" endings that restore order has discomfited many feminist critics). Jan Oxenberg's *A Comedy in Six Unnatural Acts* is an excellent recent example of a Medusan film, attacking not just men or sexism but the heterosexually-defined stereotypes of lesbianism; its success has been demonstrated by its raucous cult reception and, more pointedly, by its tendency to polarize a mixed audience along the lines not of class, but of sexual preference. It is disruptive of homophobic complacency with a force never approached by analytical films of those defensive of lesbianism. Another highly Medusan film is Jacques Rivette's *Celine and Julie Go Boating* (which may be curious, as it is directed by a man, but production credits indicate a total collaboration with the four actresses and co-scenarists). Celine and Julie enter each other's lives by magic and books, joined in a unity of farce; once they are together, each proceeds to demolish the other's ties to men (an employer, a childhood lover) by using humor, laughing in the face of male fantasies and expectations and thus "spoiling" the relationships with a fungus of parody. The film has been criticized as silly, for Juliet Berto and Dominique Labourier do laugh constantly—at the other characters, themselves, the audience, acting itself—yet their laughter ultimately proves their finest arsenal, enabling them to rescue the plot's girl-child from a darkly imminent Henry Jamesian destruction simply through a laughing refusal to obey its allegedly binding rules. Again, *Celine and Julie* has consistently divided its audience according to whom it threatens: it has become a cult feminist movie even as the male critical establishment (except for Rivette fan Jonathan Rosenbaum) has denounced the film as silly, belabored, too obvious, etc.

CORRECTIVE REALISM: As mentioned earlier, the tradition of realism in the cinema has never done well by women. Indeed, extolling realism to women is rather like praising the criminal to the victim, so thoroughly have women been falsified under its banner. A feminist feature cinema, generally representational, is now developing with a regular cast of actresses, a story line, aimed at a wide audience and generally accepting of many cinematic conventions. The women making these films, however, are so thoroughly transforming the characterizations and the narrative workings of traditional realism that they have created a new feminist cinema of "corrective realism." Thus, in Margarethe von Trotta's *The Second Awakening of Christa Klages*, it is the women's actions that advance the narrative; bonding between women functions to save, not to paralyze or trap the characters; running away brings Christa freedom, while holding his ground brings her male lover only death. The film has outrageously inventive character details, an attention to the minutiae of daily life, an endorsement of emotion and intuitive ties, and an infectious humor. Marta Meszaros's *Women* presents a profound reworking of socialist realism in its depiction of the friendship between two women in a Hungarian work hostel. The alternating close-ups and medium shots become a means of social critique, while the more traditional portrayal of the growing intimacy between the two women insistently places emotional concerns at the center of the film. Both films successfully adapt an existing cinematic tradition to feminist purposes, going far beyond a simple "positive role model" in their establishment of a feminist cinematic environment within which to envision their female protagonists and their activities.

These, then, are a few of the naming possibilities. However, it is not only the feminist films that demand new names, but also (for clarity) the films being made by men about women.

PROJECTILE: One name resurrected from the 50's by 70's criticism was Molly Haskell's recoining of the "woman's film," the matinee melodramas which, cleared of pejorative connotations, were refitted for relevance to women's cinematic concerns today. Wishful thinking. The name was Hollywood's and there it stays, demonstrated by the new "woman's films" that are pushing actual women's films off the screen, out into the dark. These are male fantasies of women—men's projections of themselves and their fears onto female characters. The name "projectile" identifies these films' true nature and gives an added awareness of the destructive impact of male illusions on the female audience. It is time the bluff was called on the touted authenticity of these works, which pose as objective while remaining entirely subjective in their conception and execution. The clearest justification for this name can be found in director Paul Mazursky's description of his *An Unmarried Woman*: "I don't know if this is a woman's movie or not. I don't know what that means anymore. . . . I wanted to get inside a woman's head. I've felt that all the pictures I've done, I've done with men. I put myself inside a man's head, using myself a lot. I wanted this time to think like a woman. That's one of the reasons there was so much rewriting. . . . There were many things the women I cast in the film . . . wouldn't say. They'd tell me why, and I'd say, 'Well, what would you say?' and I'd let them say that. I used a real therapist; I wanted a woman, and I had to change what she said based on what she is. In other words, the only thing I could have done was to get a woman to help me write it. I thought about that for a while, but in the end I think it worked out."[13] Films such as this one (and *The Turning Point, Pretty Baby, Luna,* and so on, ad infinitum) are aimed fatally at us; they deserve to be named "projectile."

Certainly the names offered here do not cover all possibilities, nor can every film be fitted neatly into one category. But I hope their relative usefulness or failings will prompt a continuation of the process by others. The urgency of the naming task cannot be overstated.

Warning Signs: A Postscript

We are now in a period of normalization, a time that can offer feminists complacency as a mask for cooption. Scanning the horizon for signs of backlash and propaganda, the storm clouds within feminist film criticism are gathering most clearly over issues of form.

It has become a truism to call for new forms. Over and over, we have heard the sacred vows: you can't put new revolutionary subjects/messages into reactionary forms; new forms, a new anti-patriarchal film language for feminist cinema must be developed. While certainly true to an extent, form remains only one element of the work. And the valorization of form above and independent of other criteria has begun to create its own problems.

There is the misconception that form, unlike subject matter, is inviolate and can somehow encase the meaning in protective armor. But form is as cooptable as other elements. A recent analysis by critic Julianne Burton of the *cinema novo*

movement in Brazil raised this exact point by demonstrating how the Brazilian state film apparatus took over the forms and styles of *cinema novo* and stripped them of their ideological significance as one means of disarming the movement.[14] If we fetishize the long take, the unmediated shot, etc., as feminist per se, then we will shortly be at loss over how to evaluate the facsimiles proliferating in the wake of such a definition. Furthermore, the reliance on form as the ultimate gauge of a film's worth sets up an inevitable hierarchy that places reconstructive films or films of correspondence at the top of a pyramid, leaving corrective realist or validative approaches among the baser elements. This itself is a complex problem. First, such a view reproduces the notion of history as "progress" and supposes that forms, like technology, grow cumulatively better and better; some believe in that sort of linear quality, but I don't. Second, recent criticism by Christine Gledhill (of film) and Myra Love (of literature) has questioned the naturalness of the Brechtian, post-modernist, deconstructive model as a feminist strategy, pointing out the real drawbacks of its endemic authoritarianism and ambiguity.[15] Third, our very reasons for supporting such work must at least be examined honestly. Carolyn Heilbrun's point should be well taken: "critics, and particularly academics, are understandably prone to admire and overvalue the carefully construed, almost puzzlelike novel [read: film], not only for its profundities, but because it provides them, in explication, with their livelihood."[16] Just as a generosity of criticism can provide the strongest support for feminist filmmakers, so acceptance of a variety of filmic strategies can provide the vigor needed by the feminist audience.

For we must look to the filmmaker and viewer for a way out of this aesthetic cul-de-sac. Aesthetics are not eternally embedded in a work like a penny in a cube of lucite. They are dependent on and subject to the work's reception. The formal values of a film cannot be considered in isolation, cut off from the thematic correspondents within the text and from the social determinants without. Reception by viewers as well as by critics is key to any film's meaning. As my chronology indicates, feminist cinema arose out of a need not only on the part of the filmmakers and writers, but on the part of the women they knew to be their audience. Today we must constantly check feminist film work to gauge how alive this thread of connection still is, how communicable its feminist values are. We are in a time of transition now, when we still have the luxury of enjoying feminist work on its makers' own terms, without having to sift the sands paranoiacally for impostors. But this transitional period is running out: as the cultural lag catches up, the dominant and avant-garde cinema may begin to incorporate feminist success before we recognize what we've lost. The emphasis on form makes that incorporation easier. Burton ended her article with a call for the inscription of modes of production within the body of Third World film criticism. Therein lies a clue. Feminism has always emphasized process; now it's time that this process of production and reception be inscribed within the critical text. How was the film made? With what intention? With what kind of crew? With what relationship to the subject? How was it produced? Who is distributing it? Where is it being shown? For what audience is it constructed? How is it available? How is it being received? There is no need to establish a tyranny of the productive sphere over a film's definition, nor to authorize only immediately popular films, but it will prove helpful in the difficult times ahead of us to keep this bottom-line of method and context in mind, to avoid painting ourselves into a corner.

Formal devices are progressive only if they are employed with a goal beyond aesthetics alone. Here, finally, is the end of the line. Feminist film criticism cannot solve problems still undefined in the sphere of feminist thought and activity at large. We all are continually borrowing from and adding to each other's ideas, energies, insights, across disciplines. We also need to develop lines of communication across the boundaries of race, class and sexuality. Last year in Cuba, I heard a presentation by Alfredo Guevara, founder and director of the Cuban Film Institute. He explained its efforts to educate the Cuban audience to the tricks of cinema, to demystify the technology, to give the viewers the means with which to defend themselves against cinematic hypnosis, to challenge the dominant ideology of world cinema, to create a new liberated generation of film viewers. I will never forget his next words: "We do not claim to have created this audience already, nor do we think it is a task only of cinema." The crisis of naming requires more than an etymologist to solve it.

An earlier version of this article, "The Crisis of Naming in Feminist Film Criticism," appeared in *Jump Cut*, No. 19 (1979).

Many of the ideas in the section on "The Names" originated in the context of a germinative discussion published as "Women and Film: A Discussion of Feminist Aesthetics," *New German Critique*, No. 13 (1978), pp. 83-107 (an issue entirely devoted to the German women's movement). I am grateful to the other participants in that discussion, including Michelle Citron, Julia Lesage, Judith Mayne, Anna Marie Taylor, and the three *New German Critique* editors, for their support. My article benefited from tough but sympathetic criticism by Joan Braderman, Regina Cornwell and Linda Williams. Finally, this piece has been strengthened by the opportunity to test my new ideas in a winter program at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and at the 1979 Edinburgh Film Festival's Feminism and Cinema Event, where the last section on "Warning Signs" comprised a portion of my talk.

1. Adrienne Rich, "It Is the Lesbian in Us," *Sinister Wisdom*, No. 3 (1977) and "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," *Sinister Wisdom*, No. 6 (1978). See also Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973) for her pioneering analysis of naming as power.
2. "Melodrama" and "structuralist"cinema were the two names analyzed in papers presented by my co-panelists, William Horrigan and Bruce Jenkins, at the 1978 Purdue Conference on Film, where the ideas in this paper were first presented.
3. Women artists working in film continued, as before, to make avant-garde films, but those without feminist material lie outside my present concerns.
4. See *Soho Weekly News*, Nov. 18 (p. 36), Nov. 25 (p. 31), and Dec. 9 (p. 35), all 1976.
5. See also my article, "The Films of Yvonne Rainer," *Chrysalis*, No. 2 (1977).
6. Presented at the International Symposium on Film Theory and Practical Criticism, Center for 20th-Century Studies, University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, in 1975.
7. Cindy Nemser, "Editorial: Rainer and Rothschild, An Overview," *Feminist Art Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1975), p. 4. The same issue contained Lucy Lippard's "Yvonne Rainer on Feminism and Her Film." Lippard, however, is the exception in her ability to handle both the formal value and feminist strengths of Rainer's work.
8. *Women & Film*, No. 7, p. 86, also, *Camera Obscura*, No. 1 (1977).
9. Monique Wittig, *Les Guérillères* (New York: Avon, 1973), p. 114.
10. Section 3 ("Feminist Film Criticism: In Two Voices") is not included in this version.
11. *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary.*
12. Helène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1976), p. 888.
13. "Paul Mazursky Interviewed by Terry Curtis Fox," *Film Comment*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (1978), pp. 30-31.
14. These remarks by Burton are taken from memory of her talk at the 1979 Purdue Conference on Film. As stated, they are a simplification of complexities that she was at pains to elucidate without distortion.
15. Christine Gledhill, "Recent Developments in Feminist Criticism," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (1979); and Myra Love, "Christa Wolf and Feminism: Breaking the Patriarchal Connection," *New German Critique*, No. 17 (1979).
16. Carolyn G. Heilbrun, Introduction to *Mrs. Steven Hears the Mermaids Singing* (New York: Norton, 1974), p. xii.

I JUST SENT IN A JOB APPLICATION TO A RIGHT-WING MAGAZINE

BY ANNE U. FORER

Well I just sent away a job application to a right wing magazine I feel like it is the americanization of emily or the corruption of anne ruth forer but I dont care anything to get out of having to go to work of having to go to that office and come home confused and disoriented out of my mind I decided I would write anything for them they wanted me to write but I would not write fervent or convincing articles for them I thought I would write anything factual for them but it might not be that easy because what if they want me to slant it a certain way I dont know if I could do that either but I figured whats the difference between working for them and working for wall street it never even occurred to me that it could be a right wing magazine when I started writing my letter asking for the job I was telling him that I can write humorously and I have also written articles on womens liberation and I think the idea of interviewing is very interesting I was thinking of interviewing antonioni or mick jagger or simone de beauvoir and asking if I should send samples of my work but then when I had to type up the final draft and put the mans name and his magazine the name had a familiar ring richard berman and the name of the magazine was FREE ENTERPRISE and I thought I wonder if this is a right wing magazine but I had written such a good letter and I was so excited about thinking that I wasnt going to have to go to work all morning after I first saw the ad in the paper I was planning how I was going to get this job and be able to get out of going to work while I was washing the dishes I thought its so nice I'll be able to stay home all the time now and I thought I could even move out of the city and just mail my articles in to him and I thought who knows maybe I'll have an editor who likes my writing and he'll give me encouragement and tell me I'm wonderful and I'll have a good experience so I went ahead and finished the letter just as I had written it except that I put a p.s. at the bottom asking if it was a right wing magazine I thought I ought to know ahead of time but what else could it be I wondered with a name like free enterprise and what will my father think of course I would never tell him and I would write under another name maybe susie sell-out or susie in-a-fix or maybe Sue Capitalism and I tried to think to myself did marx ever support himself by writing for right wing magazines but somehow I didnt think so I know he got his money from engels who got his money from his father's factory in england but I wasnt sure if that was the same thing but I dont care if he offered me the job and was willing to pay the same thing as Dr. Trout but I could stay home and do it as long as I didn't have to write anything I actually didnt believe in I couldnt say anything bad about labor unions I hope they dont want me to do that I couldnt do that maybe they'll have me attack liberals I dont know billy told me in the new york times today the supreme court gave the nazis the right to march in a jewish neighborhood and the aclu defended the nazis and even Dr. Trout told me that she read in the new york times that there was some cia connection to the aclu at some point in time maybe in the 50s and of course my father would be in ecstasy if I was working for the aclu he always tells me how my old friend from high school laurie cohen is now a lawyer for the aclu and isn't that wonderful I dont know I can see how this could be very tough you say to yourself that sometimes extreme right wingers and left wingers wind up on the same side for totally different reasons but I myself cannot think of an example right now of course both my father and my uncle raul do not like abbie hoffman for opposite reasons my father doesnt like abbie hoffman because he is irresponsible politically I think thats why but he is very emotional on the subject and my uncle raul doesnt like him because I think he finds it agitating all the free love and sex he probably has a lot of other reasons too disrespectful maybe but I like abbie hoffman so I would not enjoy writing an article on why abbie hoffman is bad even if it would not upset my father of course I dont like pornography maybe right wingers attack pornography a lot I wonder who I am going to interview I would like to interview bernadette devlin because she is my favorite and I saw her and william buckley on a talk show together probably I will have to interview william buckley I think that would be fun anyway he thinks he's so smart and its always fun to interview people who think they're so smart but I heard he uses a lot of big words thats why my uncle raul thinks he's so intelligent because of william buckley's vocabulary I hope I understand what he's saying because I dont know that many big words my knowledge of big words ended with my senior year in high school college boards and I dont know any big words past that point whenever henry miller uses big words I get the drift of what he's saying but I never know what those words mean I think that I am no longer a girl with a good vocabulary and I should change my self image of course my mother does not like henry miller she says he writes filth and maybe right wingers dont like him either so that is another thing they have in common of course I would feel like a jerk writing an article attacking henry miller but I guess I could do it I dont think it would bother henry miller very much I'm sure he doesnt read free enterprise magazine and you sort of imagine he has a thick hide I would be making an ass out of myself of course but I would do it I just would have a hard time thinking of what to write maybe they tell you what to write or I could attack him from the feminist angle and say I dont think he thinks women are as intelligent as he is and often he is very nasty actually I could enjoy attacking henry miller he can take it and besides he deserves it

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Anne U. Forer is a short (and long) story writer living in the East Village, NYC.

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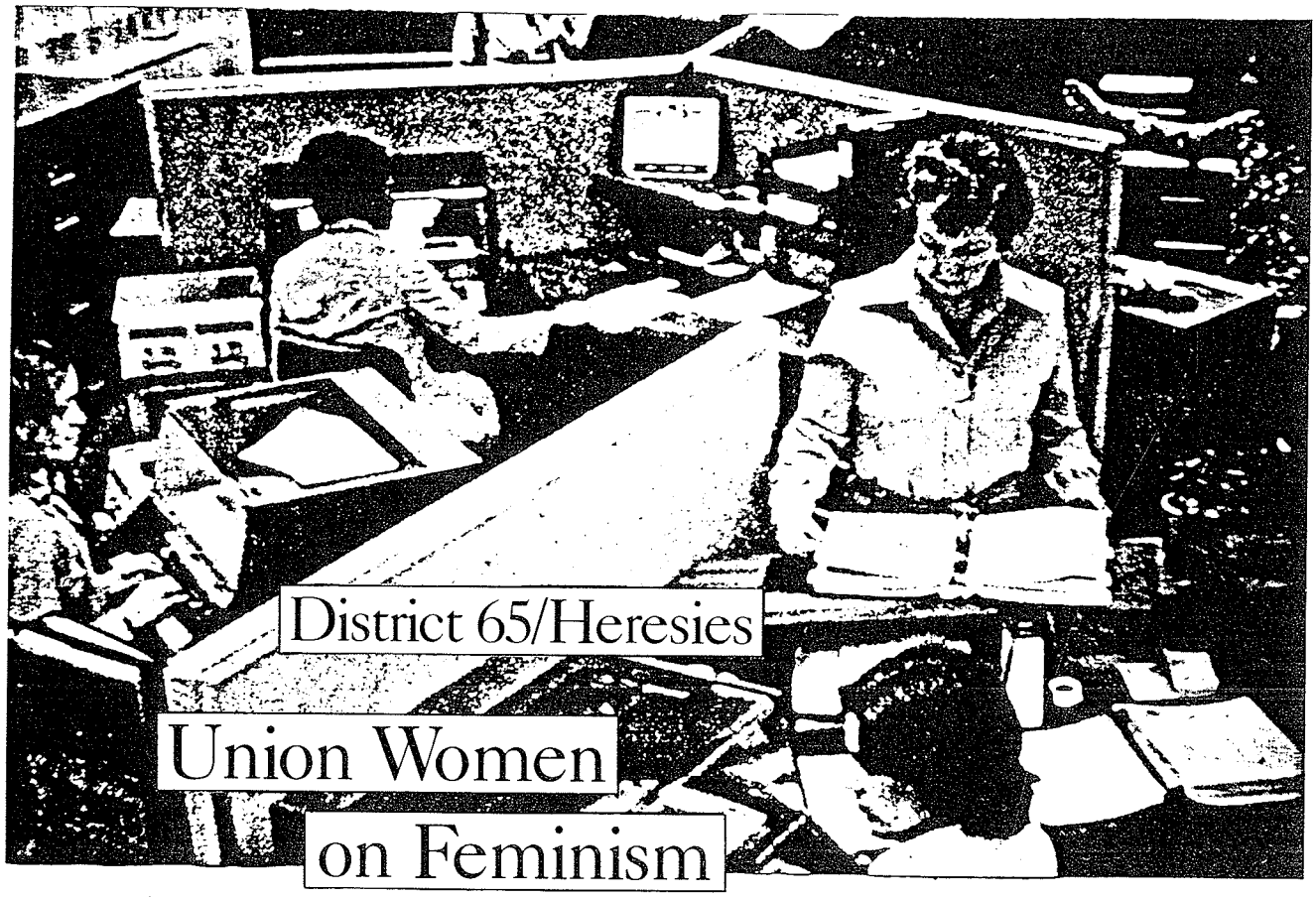


District 65/Heresies
Union Women on Feminism

In creating this issue of Heresies, *we wanted to cover areas we felt were on the cutting edge of the women's movement for the 1980s. We wanted to encourage movement work with progressive unions so that we can reach out to and support many more women. More than half of the women in America work for a living outside their homes. The largest number of these workers have one of the least paid, least respected jobs. They are secretaries, the "pink-collar" workforce which, as everyone knows, keeps the modern corporate world going.*

Two members of our editorial group–Suzanne Harris (SH) and Joan Braderman (JB) decided to interview union women (both organizers and rank-and-file members) for their views on the interrelatedness of feminism, unions and organizing. Marge Albert (MA), Kitty Krupat (KK), Julie Kushner (JK), Anayika Lodescar (AL) and Hanna Woldeamanuel (HW) are all currently working for District 65 in New York City. District 65, which recently affiliated with the United Auto Workers, has more than 30,000 members, including blue-, white-, and pink-collar workers–from postal workers to writers. It has been one of the most active unions in recent years in organizing women, especially office workers.

The following is excerpted from a taped conversation which took place on March 26, 1979 at District 65 on Astor Place. We also made a videotape of the dialogue (with the help of Liza Bear and her crew) at the request of the union women, to be used to provoke further discussion.

SH: How did you first get involved with the union?

AL: I come from Haiti, where I had just begun studying English. I was looking for another class and a friend referred me to the union. I took a three-month course and began working right away in one of the shops. I quit that job and became a member of the union staff in 1973.

JK: I've been working as an organizer for District 65 for about two years. Originally I got involved with unions in Madison, Wisconsin, where I was an office worker in the university. When I came to New York I found out that 65 was organizing women office workers. The day I arrived they were hiring and I took the job.

KK: I'm also an organizer on the staff of the union, and I work with the educational program of District 65. I came into the union after working for 13 years in the publishing industry where I knew we needed a union. It came to my attention like a bolt of lightning that Harper and Row had a union. When there was a strike there, I encouraged a few co-workers at Simon and Schuster to come with me and check it out. We discovered that there were numbers of workers from other houses that had the same idea. Some of the people there had formed a group and were thinking about affiliating with a national union, and they thought highly of District 65. The president of 65 eventually asked us to select somebody from our group to join the staff of the union, and by that time I was anxious to leave publishing for organizing work.

MA: I have been a secretary since 1945; originally I came from the Midwest. My heart was always with union people, but no union ever came knocking at the door where I worked. Eventually I got a job with a law firm in California that had a union, although not a particularly effective one, but nevertheless I became a member for the first time. When I came to New York in 1968, the women's movement was just really beginning and I got a job in another law firm. One of the women attorneys asked to get together with the secretaries to talk about the status of women in the field of law. We quickly saw that our interests were not the same as lawyers' and we began meeting with receptionists and file clerks in other firms. We decided that we really needed our own union. One of us happened to have been a District 65 member for many years and decided to call the union. We were fortunate to find a very willing vice-president who patiently worked with us.

HW: I first worked temporarily for the union. I came back after being in school and I didn't know any other place but Manhattan so the lady in the hiring hall said, "Take this job," and eventually they asked me to become a steward. I was delighted but initially I didn't know anything about unions, and there were quite a few problems when I arrived inside

District 65. I had to find out what my own rights were: Did we have to get coffee for the warehouse, etc.?

MA: That's when I first heard your name, that you wouldn't get coffee for anybody downstairs.

HW: I told the supervisor, "Where does it say in the application 'waitress'? If I wanted a waitress job I would take a waitress job." We had a long fight about it, but later they finally understood. I liked it because they really stood behind us. Now, even the boss gets his own coffee.

SH: That gets us into the next question very nicely. What kinds of problems have come up in organizing jobs that are specifically related to women?

HW: Well, for another example, it used to be in that office like: You're supposed to dress up in a certain way. You're not supposed to wear scarves. So one day I have a big scarf on, so the lady came and said, "You have to take that off." And I said, "Whatever for?" She said, 'Because you're not supposed to come like that to the office." I said, "OK. I come here right? I try to dress like you. Now you even try to tell me what to put on?" I said, "My God, this is my costume." Then she didn't say anything except "you're not supposed to." I said, "This is how I dress in my country." So she left. After that everybody started wearing scarves.

MA: When you go through the door of your workplace you give up virtually all your rights, except to a minimum wage and whatever little protections we have: disability, worker's compensation, or whatever. Basically your time belongs to your boss. The only way to achieve your rights is to form a union. But that doesn't mean we are all looking for the same way to exercise those rights. I have been a secretary in many different kinds of offices. At times I have preferred to be the person who goes out for cigarettes or coffee just to get away from the desk. On the other hand, when I was a legal secretary and the work was much more taxing, I certainly would not appreciate being interrupted as though my work was meaningless, as though his cup of coffee was more important. I think we would be making a mistake if we made the issue: "We don't have to serve coffee." You will find many women saying: "What's wrong with serving coffee?" The point is to have the option to say, "This is my job–anything else I do, I do on a volunteer basis."

JB: When I worked in an office there was this gorgeous woman who did that whole thing. Her job was to sit around and serve the tea as a kind of paid housewife in the office. Those of us who did other work could have used a little lying around.

MA: I was about to say, you have to protect her rights too.

JB: Exactly, we have to watch the ways that we are divided against each other–by the bosses of this world–age, race, anything will do.

KK: I remember one incident when I was head of editorial research at *Esquire* magazine and there was another woman in a fairly key position–senior editor. We had pretty high-level Friday editorial meetings to discuss the format and who should be assigned to various articles and so on. One day they were planning a forum at which some big celebrity type would come down and speak to all the editors about the record industry or television or whatever. Our editor-in-chief turned to the woman editor (who is now a member of District 65 at the *Village Voice*) and said, "Will you make a list and see that so and so gets invited and tell the kitchen that we want this and this?" Nobody said anything and she did it. I could see she was absolutely seething. After the meeting she told me that all chores defined as women's work automatically went to her in spite of the fact that there was a staff of people whose proper jobs would be to make phone calls or send invitations. As angry as she was, she did not speak up.

AL: I know, it happened to me at the beginning. They wanted me to go out for coffee. I used to be very angry. I didn't know what to do. I just went along. But later I got to know the other women in the union and we became friends and they go for you, you go for them. You can trust them. But something else–it's about the role, your title. Being a woman and your title–people consider you something very low. That's why I'm fighting. That's why I wanted to meet people in the union. I don't know how I'm going to organize my office. It's going to be very hard, because my supervisor happens to be a man and he's so nice. People say things to him and he doesn't fly off. He just does his job and he says you're here to do your job. And I feel like my problem becomes very delicate. Anything I say will mess him up, so I don't know–I'm still looking for a way to do something or to say something. But there are other things. I'm working for a bunch of programmers. I'm a librarian, so I keep the tapes and cards and everything. But because I'm not a programmer, sometimes I feel like my supervisors are abusing me. Like, we all may be sitting together and somebody calls from another office or another floor and I'll be the one to go. But if I say no, my boss may go himself, so it becomes very very delicate.

HW: Yeah. You say, oh, she has a certificate and I'm only on the lower ladder, therefore anything that comes up I have to take it. Like you said the man is very nice and if you didn't go, he'd go himself. So let him go himself. To him it doesn't mean anything if you run, but to you it means something. Maybe if he went, well, somebody else might go, or you have to find out if they're going to turn around and say, "Anayika, you going to go get him this?" You say, "Today's your turn." If you always feel that it is not right, that you have to be nice, you'll never be any place. Why not take action? What have you got to lose? Your job, that's all. (laughter)

KK: I've worked in quite a few offices over the years and there's an elitism, a pecking order that somebody, maybe the boss, decides on. These biases filter down and become part of people's attitudes towards each other. When we first began organizing in publishing where the ratio of women is at least 70%, those of us who were interested in organizing women saw this issue of elitism in relationship to women clerical workers. We assumed that by pointing to this issue women would immediately see the need to organize and unite. It took some arrogance on our part not to recognize that for some women there's a certain comfort in doing specific kinds of tasks, and they don't want to be fought for by other women who have decided that they are oppressed.

SH: When you're working with a group of people, the question of who goes for the coffee becomes a social question. The feminist issue is: Did you get sent for the coffee because you are a woman?

MA: Even when you have a female boss, she sends you for the coffee. Although we've been told that education is the way to make it, women hold lower positions and are making less money than men, regardless of their training. The thing that is most exciting to me about organizing is breaking through this myth and explaining that the best steward in the place is often not the most skilled person. You go to college, get a degree–that's one way of elevating your status. But to get stature amongst your co-workers, you have to show them you can fight out a grievance on the job, and this ability has almost nothing to do with education. You obviously need some training, but mostly you need to be able to empathize with other people and to stand up to your employer and show some courage. Women are every bit as strong as men in these respects. But there are other problems which keep women from being as active as men. It's hard for a woman with kids. I don't think I could have been an organizer when my two daughters were children. We're trying to think of ways that women can be organizers or take staff jobs that demand more than a 35-hour week and still have children. Anayika came on the ERA march with her sons, and there were others. But there are more problems for women: keeping house, demanding husbands or boyfriends, children's demands, etc. But in terms of women's ability to be leaders where they work, to be militant, to identify problems and help workers organize, the important question is how you feel about yourself. How do you make it out of a kind of second-class citizenship as a woman? I

would advise women to join a union and get some power. That's the name of the game—power, not education.

JB: The assumption was that once women got out of the home into the workplace, that we would learn strength and leadership roles in the union. What I wonder now, based on your experience organizing, is how these leadership roles in militant union struggles feed back into people's lives?

KK: I think your assumption is not always true. Trying to organize women around specific feminist issues is not always a good strategy because often the assumptions come from a small group of organizers, activists whose consciousnesses have already been raised. They are making assumptions about large groups of women without sharing their concerns or an understanding of their fears about organizing.

SH: Women don't get promoted because they are *women*—not because they aren't as good as men. Isn't it a feminist issue that women don't get promoted?

KK: A woman comes into the industry with a Master's degree and is told she has to start in a clerical position and perhaps may move up. Now, a young man the same age, coming from the same kind of school, with only a B.A., applies and immediately something is created for him that leads directly into the mainstream of the publishing industry. The woman, if she struggles along and succeeds at the variety of tasks she is given to do (most of which are housekeeping tasks), may become some kind of technical editor. She won't get to choose what books are printed, or which authors to go out to lunch with. Her highest achievement may be to move the commas around a little bit on the page. That's considered a promotion—all that education prepared you for just that much advancement.

MA: I don't think it's right to assume that if women organize because they want more money in their paychecks that it's not a feminist issue. That *is* a feminist issue. We're simply not addressing it as a feminist issue, in feminist jargon. It just doesn't work when we do, except where you have a highly developed women's committee already. The word "feminism" has just been too damned distorted by the media. I think the women's movement should try to take a broader view of what a feminist issue is. The fact that women earn 60¢ for every dollar that men earn to me is a feminist issue. There are only two explanations that everybody has been able to come up with to account for this. One, that we work in sex-segregated jobs that are traditionally low paid. Even then, nobody can explain why secretaries are paid less than truck drivers. Two, those very jobs are for the most part the unorganized ones. So, the two things feed into each other. You need a union the same as any other workers need a union. Once you get a union then you try to break down some of the barriers in terms of promotions, etc. Women who are breaking into nontraditional jobs through apprenticeship programs deserve all the credit in the world for some of the junk they have to go through. But they won't do much to affect the majority of women in this country and to break that pay gap of 60¢ on the dollar because most of us are going to continue to work in what we call "pink-collar jobs"—women's jobs. In the union there are some ideas about struggling legally for equal pay for work of comparable value. Now, how do you decide that a secretary is worth more or less than another kind of job? I don't have an awful lot of faith that this is a fruitful way for women to bring about change. The main tool that women have, that workers have, is to organize to make their unions into what they want them to be.

JK: This morning I was talking to the organizing director of my union about doing this videotape and he said, "But there hasn't been any impact on organizing from the feminist movement. It hasn't made any difference." He said, "You know yourself, you tried to raise feminist issues to see if that would propel women in organizing." I said, "Well, to the extent that more women are organizing now, that's feminism. Female-intensive industries have begun to organize and that's feminism." He said, very sincerely, "Sometimes, only if you give them an acceptable male organizer." And that's ironic but true. Some women still respond better to a male organizer because of his age or experience or some sense that he's tough and knows the ropes in the business world. It takes guts and self-confidence to organize. So, you see, the fact that women are doing it is a feminist act.

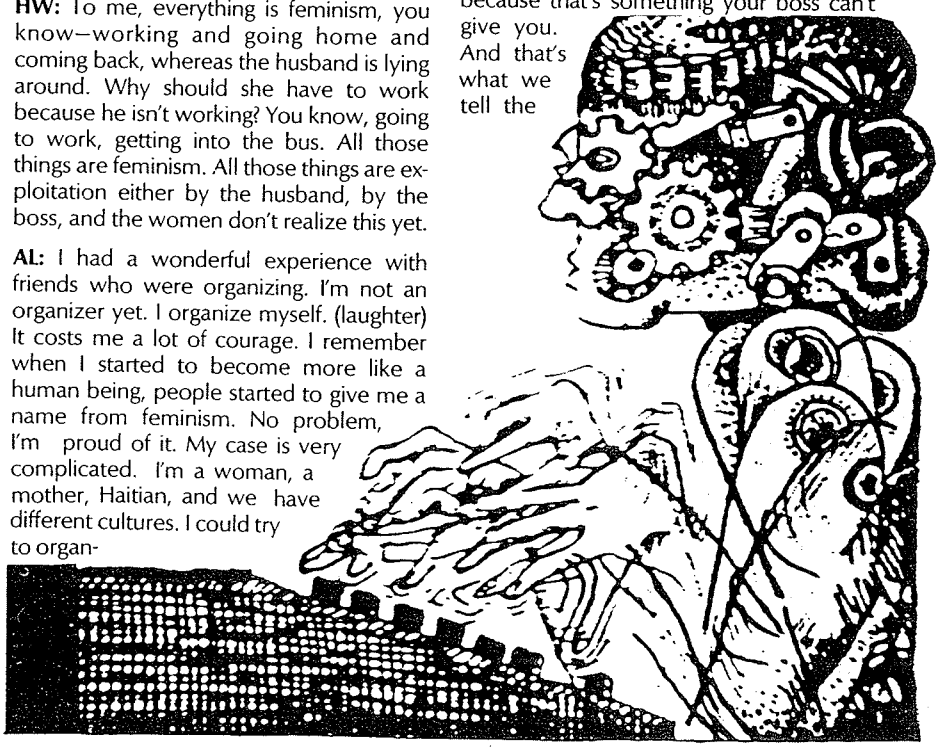
HW: To me, everything is feminism, you know—working and going home and coming back, whereas the husband is lying around. Why should she have to work because he isn't working? You know, going to work, getting into the bus. All those things are feminism. All those things are exploitation either by the husband, by the boss, and the women don't realize this yet.

AL: I had a wonderful experience with friends who were organizing. I'm not an organizer yet. I organize myself. (laughter) It costs me a lot of courage. I remember when I started to become more like a human being, people started to give me a name from feminism. No problem, I'm proud of it. My case is very complicated. I'm a woman, a mother, Haitian, and we have different cultures. I could try to organize friends but something happens to me. I get so sentimental, I have to give it up. It seems like in order for a woman to keep her husband or her boyfriend, she can't organize herself, you know? I like the idea of being free but I wouldn't overstep the bounds. Like I'm not going to be out on the town when my husband is home. But I always say, if he's not home why can't I not be home? Even if he knows where I am, I shouldn't be there. I have to be home. I did so many things, even more than him. I took care of my kids. I worked. I belonged to different activities. And I started these things when I started to realize how marriage is. Like my husband comes home: if I'm not there he goes wild but if I'm there everything is cool. I was like a vegetable, sitting, watching TV and I'm a very active person. I like being with people, helping. But then some women say that's acting like a man. Maybe I should organize the men. You see, it's touchy.

KK: I don't know if anyone else here has had this experience, but the first time I went for a job interview the personnel person asked me if I would mind working for a woman. I had never heard that before and I was completely nonplussed. I didn't know why I was asked that question but I replied, "No, I wouldn't mind." And as I became a little more experienced in the job market I learned through the grapevine, that women bosses were supposed to be awful. If you were a woman and you had made it anyway, then you had to be mean.

JB: In workplaces where workers are largely women, what are the demands that seem highest on people's priority lists?

JK: Job security, money and health benefits —but job security is very high on the list because that's something your boss can't give you. And that's what we tell the



workers when we're organizing. I think the issues today for organizing women are very similar to the issues for organizing men.

MA: Although superficially it often looks like money and promotion are at the heart of every organizing drive, when you get really involved you find out that it is really a question of respect and dignity.

JK: Something happens to somebody, there are unfair firings—or you are trying to change basic working conditions themselves.

MA: Once we got a call from several legal secretaries. They wanted to talk to us about the fact that their office was being painted and they were not given a say in the choice of color. They hated the color that was chosen. It was their workplace and nobody bothered to ask them for input. They felt like machines. If the majority of workers are women and they are asserting their right to be respected and treated with dignity—then isn't that a feminist issue? And isn't it maybe more profound for women to organize than men? Because we are treated like pieces of machinery, interchangeable parts at our typewriters.

JK: But Margie, don't you think that is true of men also?

MA: I think men have other parts of their lives in which they're respected because they are men.

JK: My husband works in the garment center as an organizer and he deals mostly with men. When I see him fighting for his right to sit across the table from his boss and negotiate a contract—it's something that those men need just as much as the women. There's a boss and there are employees; whether they are male or female, they must organize.

JB: How do you see your work in the union relating to broader political struggles in America, towards the transformation of this society into one in which all workers would have rights, women would have autonomy, etc.?

MA: There were times in history when the unions led the fight for all social issues that meant anything to people. In the last few years union women have gotten together with women activists outside—and that's good—but strong ties haven't developed yet. There's still a lot of hostility coming from feminist leaders towards unions and union women, a kind of. . . well, there has been little attempt to reach out to us. I remember when the Barnard clericals were organizing and so-called "feminist" professors crossed the picket line! There was a feeling that the women's movement was primarily concerned with women who were moving up into executive positions, or up in the academic world. Certain broad issues, like abortion rights, were also OK. When the movement talked about economic rights, it was never within the context of how to unite. When it came down to economics, the women's movement ran seminars on how to scramble over each other, how to be as good as the men at stomping on somebody below you so you can get up higher. Union women were naturally repelled by this. It took some time to bring us as much together as we are—and we're not totally together. The women's movement has the responsibility of thinking through what its goals are. If its goals are simply to move women into the labor force to become bosses, then this will never affect the majority of women.

JB: That's why I have a hard time saying simply "feminist" now. It means so many things to different people—not to mention its distortion in the hands of the media. "Socialist-feminist" says more what we mean.

JK: I was involved with the trade union movement and the women's movement at the same time, but they are separate—very, very separate. There was a word that became very key in the women office worker's movement which was "autonomy." Did that mean we should stay separate from the union? Or should we just not get involved with the mainstream activity in the union because it didn't relate to feminist issues?

SH: I don't think the women's movement means "separatist" by "autonomous." The question of whether we need a separate women's union has come up; however, nobody has jumped up and down and said, "Yes, that's the answer."

JB: Within all kinds of political formations, the word "autonomy" has different meanings. In some ways it's about the right to caucus. The problem for us with separatism is that nobody wants to build an island somewhere for special people. But we think that autonomy to clarify the issues and support each other is really necessary. We're still at a point where women and Third World people need to define our own goals. You can never assume that somebody else is going to win your struggles for you.

MA: Women are a source of support and certainly an influence on the trade union movement. Now, too, we have CLUW (The Coalition of Labor Union Women founded in 1974) and there are a number of independent office workers groups around the country like "9 to 5" and WOW (Women Office Workers). The union was dead set against the ERA for a long time, but we got them to change. We need to get more childcare, organize more unorganized women workers—like the Household Technicians. Organizing women is positive, but it is certainly not going to solve all the problems of 40 million women workers. There are such vast differences among women who we might think of as struggling around "womens' issues." After all, some CLUW members are Right-to-Lifers!

JK: In the textile local, for instance, the women in offices organized many years ago and consequently they now have some of the best contracts in the union, in terms of benefits and wages. Look, our work never ends. It's a constant battle. You organize towards an election. You have an election. You fight like hell to win. You win, and then you need a contract. Then you have to keep people together, organized and strong—and there's no magic. It's just plain old power relations. Have you got the strength to get a new contract or not? You win the contract and then you've got the grievances. The boss is constantly trying to bust the union—and you just want to relax. Even after many, many years, if there is the slightest opportunity to bust the union, the boss starts hammering away to try and weaken you until you have nothing.

JB: Which is why we hope that progressive unions will reinvolve themselves in the whole broad political sphere. Otherwise we will be fighting the same battles over and over. . . The women in *Heresies* do various kinds of cultural work (as do other feminists) which could be useful in organizing drives especially if they were planned jointly. I wonder if *Babies and Banners* or *Union Maids,* for example, have been useful to you? I do know that CLUW is using Lorna Rasmussen's new slideshow about clerical work and organizing.

MA: We have used films. And the Mass Transit Street Theatre met with us to talk about the problems of office workers and then came up with several skits. During the warm weather they would come out at lunch hour and perform in front of major office buildings. They helped to raise consciousness. get attention and create a platform for the union. There is also a fine 40-minute slide-tape now that the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers put out that is the best I've seen in succinctly saying why you organize, how you organize, and what you get out of it. We'll use leaflets, films, slides, anything that works, but there's no substitute for talking it through—one on one.

KK: I think one of the most shocking realizations I had when I began organizing was the fact that in some cases women who identified themselves as feminists and who spoke the loudest and most eloquently were absolutely turned off by the best aspect of unionism, by the notion of collective action. They were really only deeply concerned with individual advancement. I still believed that if you raised feminist issues, you could organize a union where there were many women, and I was shocked to discover that, although one of the most successful pieces of literature we put out was one showing the difference in the pay scale between men and women, the women who reacted most strongly against it were the women who spoke out against the union the hardest. That was a very very hard and bitter lesson to learn. Unions are now returning to the idea that the union is a place where you can

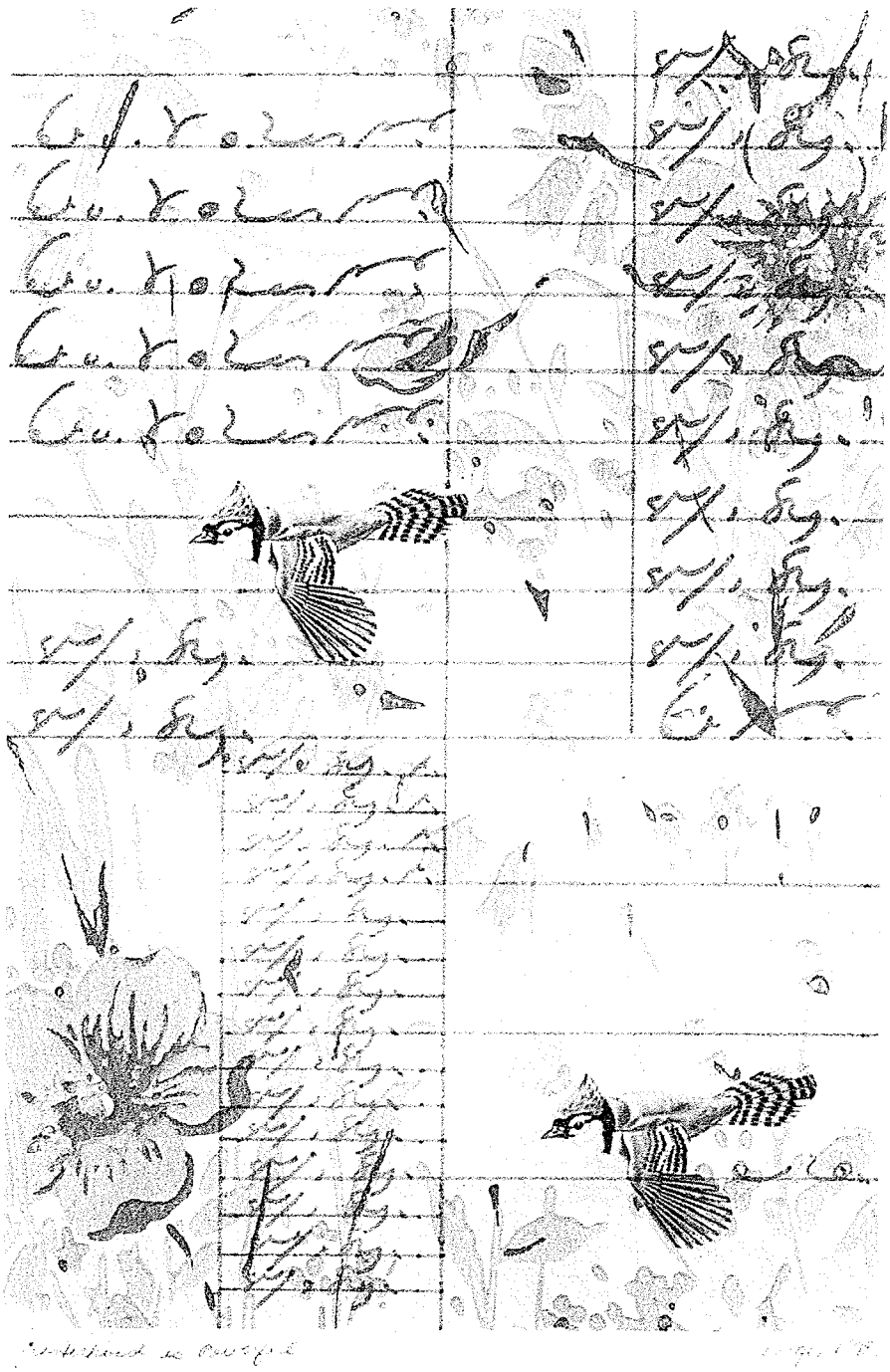
integrate all the parts of your life, more a force for social change. There's real interest in our own union. The educational program that's being developed is a very important thing because it's making a lot of younger union members aware of the amazing history of the labor movement that has been overshadowed by grisly stuff in the media about unions being just bureaucracies. Some unions are even trying to clean up their public image with TV commercials. I think this is an attempt to bring people back to an understanding of how unions began, why they began, what sacrifices and struggles people had to go through to get unions, and how people of varying backgrounds were brought together through unions.

HW: If unions become involved in active politics that means that they will be removed from economic needs to social needs. If the union had some labor party, they would have a word in there, but now they have to go to lobby. I think it would give them a wider social outlook.

JB: What kind of support can the feminist movement give you?

JK: Organize your offices.

MA: Come to the picket lines when we call. That's my main bitch against some feminists. They can see demonstrations, but when it's an economic issue, a picket line somewhere—they don't show up. There are some fine feminist leaders who are there when we need them. But when there's 25, 100 or 200 women out on strike somewhere, I mean what could be closer to the women's movement?



Barbara Nugent, shorthand on mixed media, 1978. (Translation: *Sisterhood Is Powerful.*)

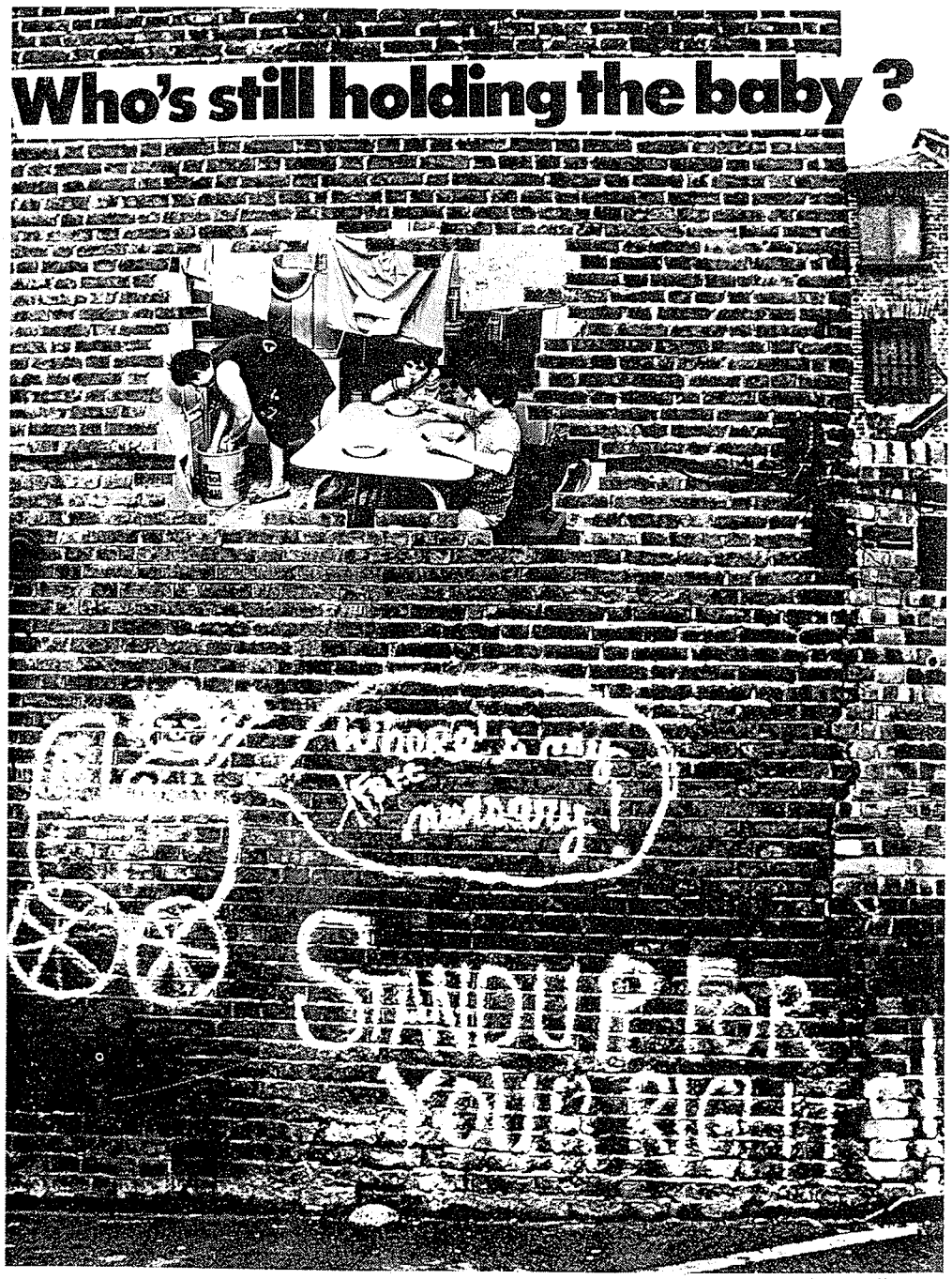
Barbara Nugent lives in Albuquerque and is an active member of New Mexico Women in the Arts. Much of her work draws on her background as a secretary, interior designer and mother. (This work is from a series of drawings and notebooks incorporating shorthand as a "secret women's language.")

©1980 Barbara Nugent

Who's Holding the Baby?

The Hackney Flashers is a collective of nine women. All of us work within education or the media and between us we share a variety of skills—design, illustration, photography. Our practice is also rooted in ongoing discussion and criticism around feminist issues and the representation of women. We all define ourselves as socialists and feminists.

The original group was formed in late 1974 and in 1975 an exhibition — *Women and Work*—was produced as part of the Hackney Trades Council's 75th anniversary celebrations. Since then, *Women and Work* has been exhibited all over Britain in colleges, libraries and community centers, and at conferences in England and in France. Slides have also been used for discussion at a range of events within the women's movement, trade unions and community organizations. We want the work we produce to reach the widest possible audience.

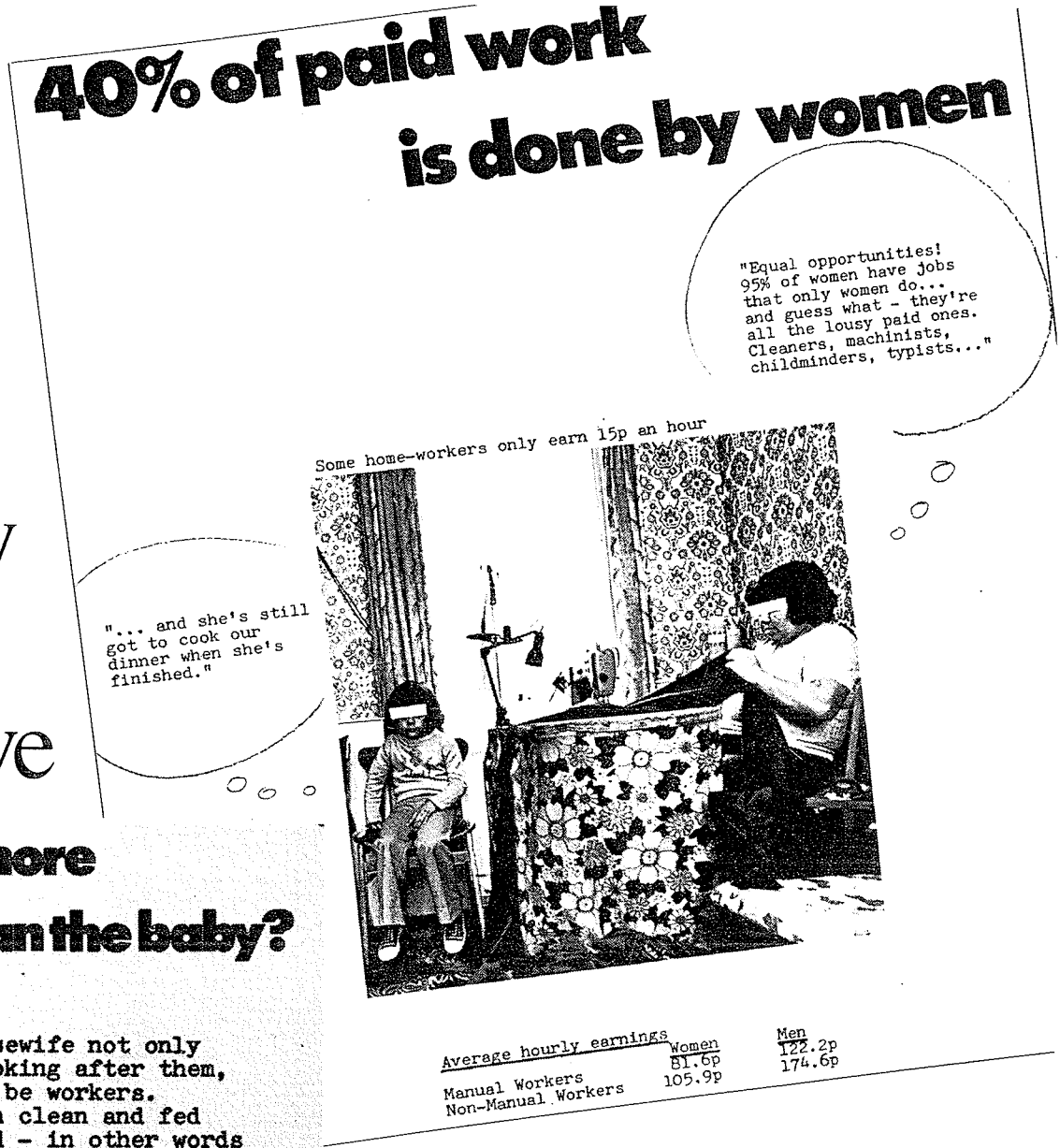


©1980 Hackney Flashers Collective

Who's Holding the Baby first went on exhibit at the Centerprise Community Centre, Hackney, in July 1978.

- The collective's original aim was to document women in Hackney, at work inside and outside the home, with the intention of making visible the invisible, thereby validating women's experience and demonstrating women's unrecognized contribution to the economy.
- The limitations of documentary photography became apparent with the completion of the *Women and Work* exhibition. The photographs assumed a "window on the world" through the camera and failed to question the notion of reality rooted in appearances. The photographs were positive and promoted self-recognition but could not expose the complex social and economic relationships within which women's subordination is maintained. We began to juxtapose our naturalistic photographs with media images to point to the contradictions between women's experience and how it is represented in the media. We wanted to raise the question of class, so much obscured in the representation of women's experience as universal.
- Words anchor the meaning of the photograph—we used simple speech bubbles to bring out the contradictions not obvious in the photograph, changing its meaning more deliberately and effectively than with a descriptive caption. We also used text to connect the image to the social and economic relations that are not obvious within it.
- More discussion of the function of images and an attempt to present an analysis of "Women" and "Childcare" meant that we were working within a framework of ideas, not expecting our ideas to be merely confirmed by the image captured on film. Some ideas were more clearly expressed with cartoons.
- Manipulating the image led to montage and collage. We made an image with the same visual elements as an advertisement, constructing a meaning on the one hand with the use of familiar graphic styles and imagery (woman as glamorous, object of man's look) and undermining it with a different "ad" message (harassed mother and worker). Advertising doesn't present us with a false or distorted image of ourselves; it places us in relation to its images in such a way that it also defines us.
- We constructed a brick wall—graffitied—with another image inside it to link it with the "WHY" of women's struggle for childcare facilities.
- Graphics linked these two panels to illuminate the historical differences in how women's role is defined in relation to the home and the family.
- Women's "problems" are seen as individual—to be met with individual solutions. Drug advertisements represent women as pas-

by the Hackney Flashers Collective



Who's holding more than the baby?

Being a mother and a housewife not only means having kids and looking after them, so that one day they can be workers. It also means keeping men clean and fed and emotionally supported - in other words keeping them in working order, fit for the factory or the office or the dole queue. This maintenance work is unpaid and undervalued. If all women went on strike, our society would grind to a halt.

sive, suffering victims, unable to find their own solutions. They use "realistic" images that emphasize the effects of "the strain of modern living" but conceal the causes. *Taking Action* opposes women in passive isolation with women acting collectively.

Who's Holding the Baby has had useful spinoffs for the women of Hackney. The people who set up the Market Nursery—the main subject of the exhibition—also independently produced their own booklet on how to found a nursery and made extensive use of the photographs taken by the Hackney Flashers. Later the pictures were used to show local councilors the need for childcare and to show the position of women in British society on the public access television program "Grapevine." Currently we are producing a set of slides and notes on childcare and the process of representation, which we hope will be useful in schools.

One of the most interesting comments by the women in the nursery was that looking at the exhibition reminded them that their own struggles needed to be put into the wider context of national government cuts and the continuing fight for collective childcare.

Culture and Anarchy

Leafshade stirring on lichened bark
Daylilies
run wild, "escaped" the botanists call it
from dooryard to meadow to roadside

Life-tingle of angled light
late summer
sharpening toward fall, each year more sharply

This headlong, loved, escaping life

Rainy days at the kitchen table typing,
heaped-up letters, a dry moth's
perfectly mosaiced wings, pamphlets on rape,
enforced sterilization, snapshots in color
of an Alabama woman still quilting in her nineties,
The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony:

I stained and varnished
the library bookcase today and superintended
the plowing of the orchard. . . .
Fitted out a fugitive slave for Canada
with the help of Harriet Tubman. . . .
The women's committee failed
to report. I am mortified to death for them. . . .
Washed every window in the house today.
Put a quilted petticoat in the frame.
Commenced Mrs. Browning's Portuguese
Sonnets. Have just finished
Casa Guidi Windows, a grand poem
and so fitting to our struggle. . . .
To forever blot out slavery is the only
possible compensation for this
merciless war. . . .

The all-alone feeling will creep over me. . . .

Upstairs, long silence, then
again, the sudden torrent of your typing

Rough drafts we share, each reading
her own words over the other's shoulder
trying to see afresh

An energy I cannot even yet
take for granted: picking up a book
of the nineteenth century, reading there the name
of the woman whose book
you found in the old town Atheneum,
beginning to stitch together:
Elizabeth Ellet
Elizabeth Barrett
Elizabeth Blackwell
Frances Kemble
Susan B. Anthony

by Adrienne Rich

On Saturday, Mrs. Ford took me to Haworth,
the home of the Brontë sisters. . . .
A most sad day it was to me,
as I looked into the little parlor where
the sisters walked up and down
with their arms around each other
and planned their novels. . . .
How much the world of literature has lost
because of their short and ill-environed lives
we can only guess. . . .

* * *

Anarchy of August: as if already
autumnal gases glowed in darkness underground
the meadows roughen, grow guttural
with goldenrod, milkweed's late-summer lilac,
cattails, the wild lily brazening,
the dooryards overflowing in late, rough-headed
bloom: bushes of orange daisies, purple mallow,
the thistle blazing in her clump of knives,
and the great SUNFLOWER turns

Haze wiping out the hills. Mornings like milk,
the mind wading, treading water, the line of vision blind
the pages of the book cling to the hand
words hang in a suspension
the prism hanging in the windowpane
is blank
a stillness building all day long to thunder
as the weedpod swells and thickens
no one can call this calm

Jane Addams, marking time
in Europe: *During most*
of that time I was absolutely at sea
so far as any moral purpose was concerned,
clinging only to the desire to live
in a really living world
refusing to be content
with a shadowy intellectual
or aesthetic reflection

finally the bursting of the sky
power, power, release
by sheets by ropes of water, wind
driving before and after
the book laid face-down on the table
spirit traveling the lines of storm
leaping the torrent like a salmon-falls
all that water already
smelling like earth

Elizabeth Barrett to her friend Miss Mitford:
. . . and is it possible you think
a woman has no business with questions
like the question of slavery?
Then she had better use a pen no more.
She had better subside into slavery
and concubinage herself, I think,
as in the times of old,
and take no rank among thinkers and speakers.

★ ★ ★

Early dark; still raining; the electricity
out. On the scrubbed boards of the table
a transparent globe half-filled
with liquid light, the soaked wick quietly
drinking, turning to flame
that faintly stains the slim glass chimney:
ancient, fragile contrivance

light welling, searching the shadows

Matilda Joslyn Gage; Harriet Tubman;
Ida B. Wells-Barnett; Maria Mitchell;
Anna Howard Shaw; Sojourner Truth;
Elizabeth Cady Stanton; Harriet Hosmer;
Clara Barton; Harriet Beecher Stowe;
Ida Husted Harper; Ernestine Rose

and all of those without names
because of their short and ill-environed lives

False dawn. Gossamer tents in wet grass: leaflets
dissolving within hours, unread,
spun of necessity, and
leaving no trace

The heavy volumes, calf, with titles in smooth
leather, red and black, gilt letters spelling out:

THE HISTORY OF HUMAN SUFFERING

I brush my hand across my eyes and read:

THE HISTORY OF WOMAN SUFFRAGE

of a movement
for many years unnoticed
or greatly misrepresented in the public press
its records usually not considered
of sufficient value to be
officially preserved.
None, however, has required
such supreme courage and faithfulness
from its adherents and this fact
makes all the more obligatory
the preserving of their names and deeds.

and conjure up again
the volumes of THE HISTORY
OF HUMAN SUFFERING
like bound back issues of a periodical
stretching for miles

Rape Enslavement Torture Stoning Mutilation Exclusion
Withholding of bread Excision of tongues Enforced motherhood Lynching
Denial of soul Infibulation Beating Branding Blinding
Massacre Solitary confinement Sexual slavery Psychosurgery
Marriage, its laws and customs Withholding of language Pornography
Clitoridectomy Hunger (of body) Hunger (of mind) Erasure

OF HUMAN SUFFERING: borne,
tended, soothed, scapegoated, cauterized,
stanched, cleansed, absorbed, endured
by women

our records usually not considered
of sufficient value to be
officially preserved

The strongest reason
for giving woman all the opportunities
for higher education, for the full
development of her forces of mind and body. . .
the most enlarged freedom of thought and action
a complete emancipation
from all forms of bondage, customs, dependence,
superstition:
from all the crippling influences of fear —
is the solitude
and personal responsibility
of her own individual life.

* * *

Late afternoon: long silence.
Your notes on yellow foolscap drift on the table
you go down to the garden to pick chard
while the strength is in the leaves
crimson stems veining upward into green

How you have given back to me
my dream of a common language
my solitude of self.
I slice the beetroots to the core,
each one contains a different landscape
of bloodlight filaments, distinct rose-purple
striations like the oldest
strata of a Southwestern canyon
an undiscovered planet laid open in the lens

I long to put my arms
around you once more and hear you scold me. . . .
O Susan you are very dear to me. . . .
I should miss you more than any other
living being from this earth. . . .
Yes, our work is one,
we are one in aim and sympathy
and we should be together. . . .

* * *

The sources for the voices of nineteenth-century women heard in this poem are as follows:

Susan B. Anthony, diaries, 1861
Susan B. Anthony, letter to her sister, 1883
(from Ida Husted Harper, *The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony,* Vol. I and II)
Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*
Elizabeth Barrett-Browning, letter to Miss Mitford, 1852
(from Robert Kenyon, ed., *Letters of Elizabeth Barrett-Browning,* Vol. I)
Ida Husted Harper, Introduction
(to *The History of Woman Suffrage,* Vol. IV, by Susan B. Anthony and Ida Husted Harper)
Elizabeth Cady Stanton, speech "On Solitude of Self"
(in *The History of Woman Suffrage,* Vol. IV)
Elizabeth Cady Stanton, letter to Susan B. Anthony, 1865
(in *The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony,* Vol. I)

Adrienne Rich's most recent book is On Lies, Secrets and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978 *(Norton). She now lives in the Connecticut River Valley in western Massachusetts.*

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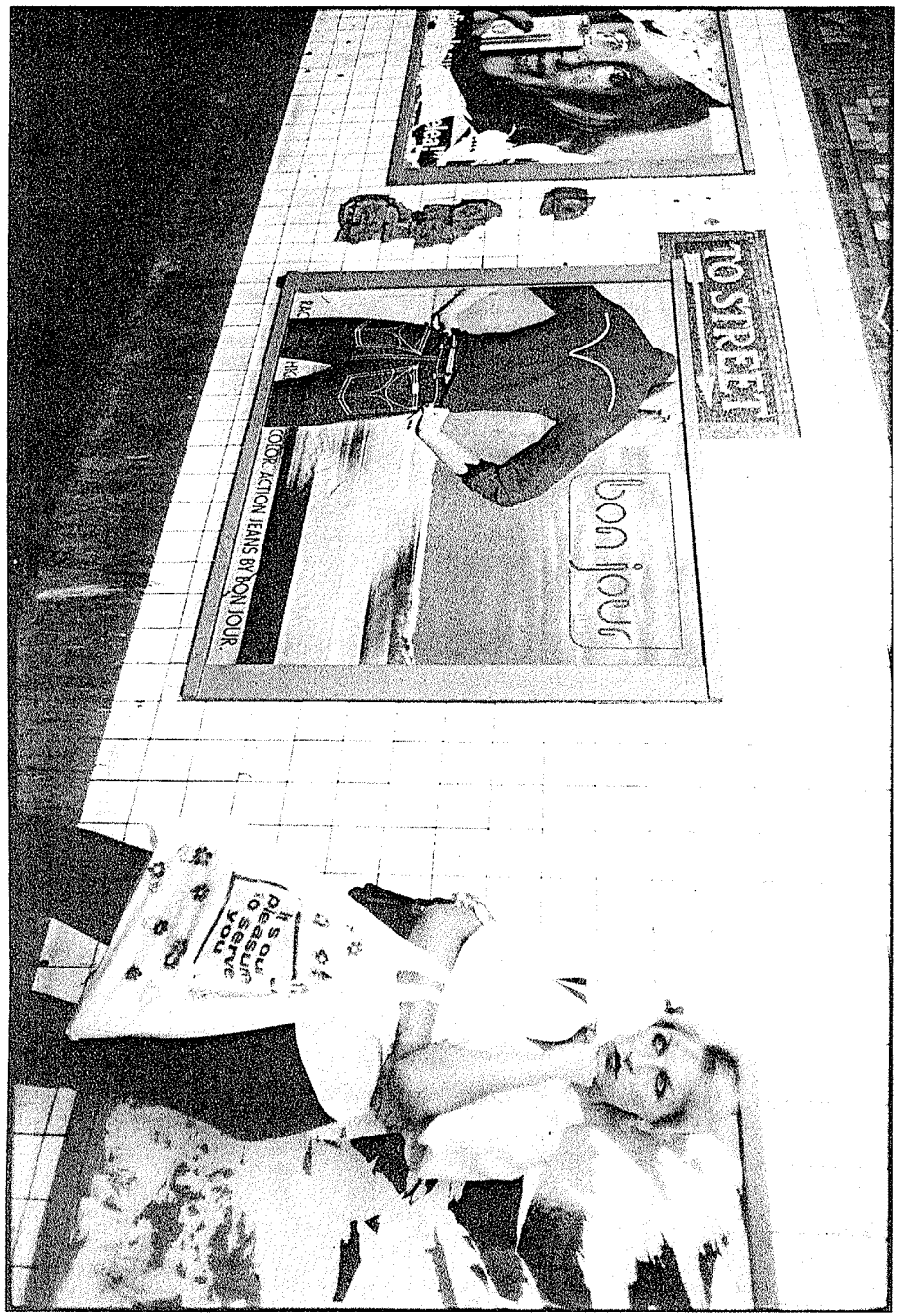

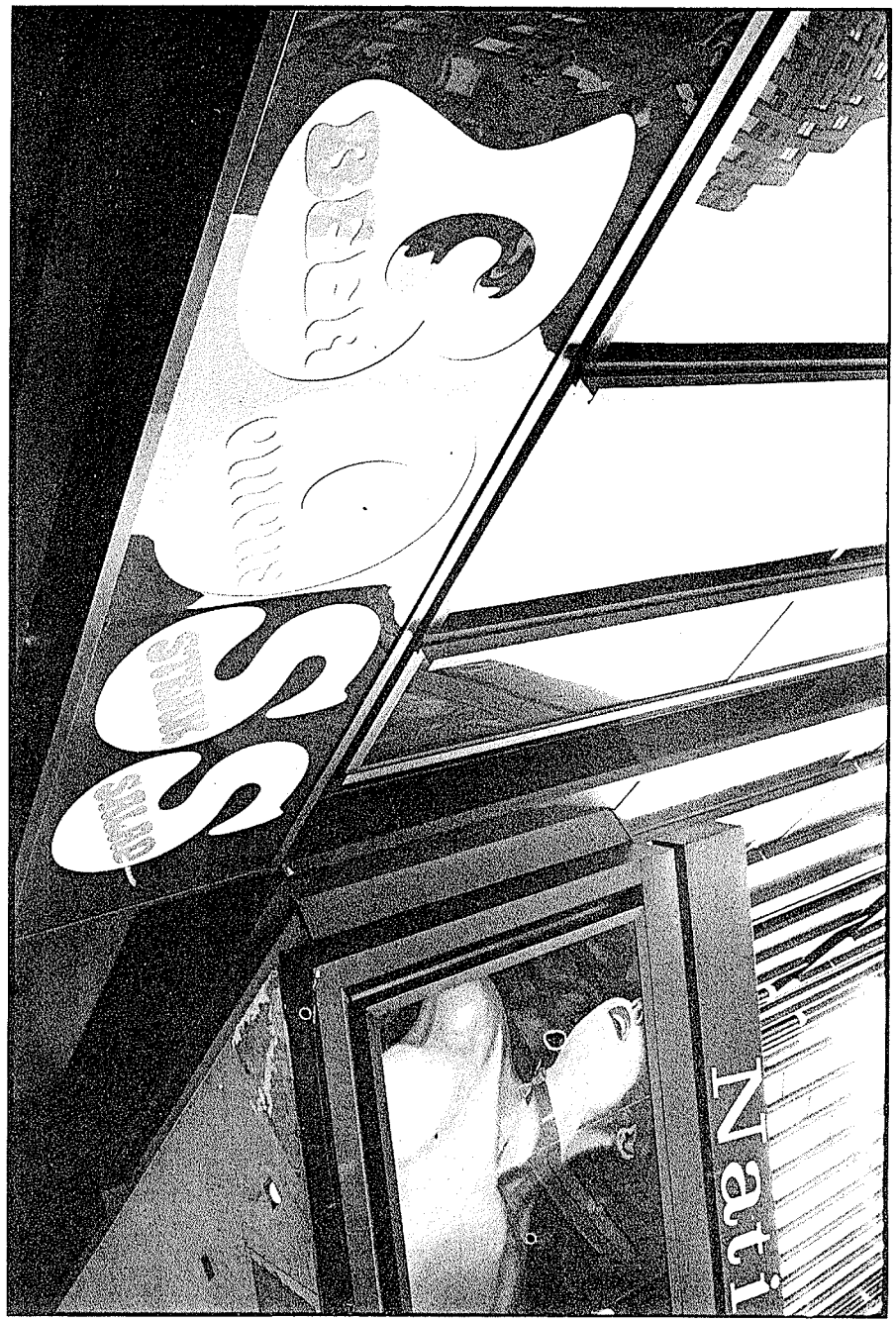

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#11 Women and Architecture. How women experience and perceive the built environment; woman as architect; the nature of the educational process; architecture—interdisciplinary or autonomous; architecture and social change; the relationship of feminism to architecture—compatibility or conflict; historical experience; past and present documentation; visions of the future.

#12 Sexuality. The complexity of female desire—its expression, suppression and repression. Tracing the contours of our own eroticism, arousal, attraction, passion, love and pain. How female sexuality is constructed consciously and unconsciously; how this construction operates under patriarchal rules of conduct; how it rebels. Insiders' views on s/m, child love, man love, woman love. Can feminism accommodate variation in sexual style and practice? What are the lessons from the flesh, what are the questions for the flesh? *Deadline: Now.*

#13 Feminism and Ecology. Personal and political analyses of the relationship between ecological and feminist issues: POLITICS (consumer awareness, population control, pollution and environmental hazards), ART (art that respects and effects the environment, ecologically functional art and original art about these issues designed for the printed page), SCIENCE (redefining the uses of science, ethics and experimentation), LIFE STYLES (utopias, how urban and rural women view the land, responsible fashion, appropriate technology, the counterculture as reactionary and conservation as radical). *Deadline: May 1, 1980.*

Guidelines for Contributors. Each issue of HERESIES has a specific theme and all material submitted should relate to that theme. We welcome outlines and proposals for articles and visual work. Manuscripts (one to five thousand words) should be typewritten, double-spaced and submitted in duplicate. Visual material should be submitted in the form of a slide, xerox or photograph. We *will not be responsible for original art work.* All manuscripts and visual material must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. We do not publish reviews or monographs on contemporary women. We do not commission articles and cannot guarantee acceptance of submitted material. HERESIES pays a small fee for material that is published in each issue.

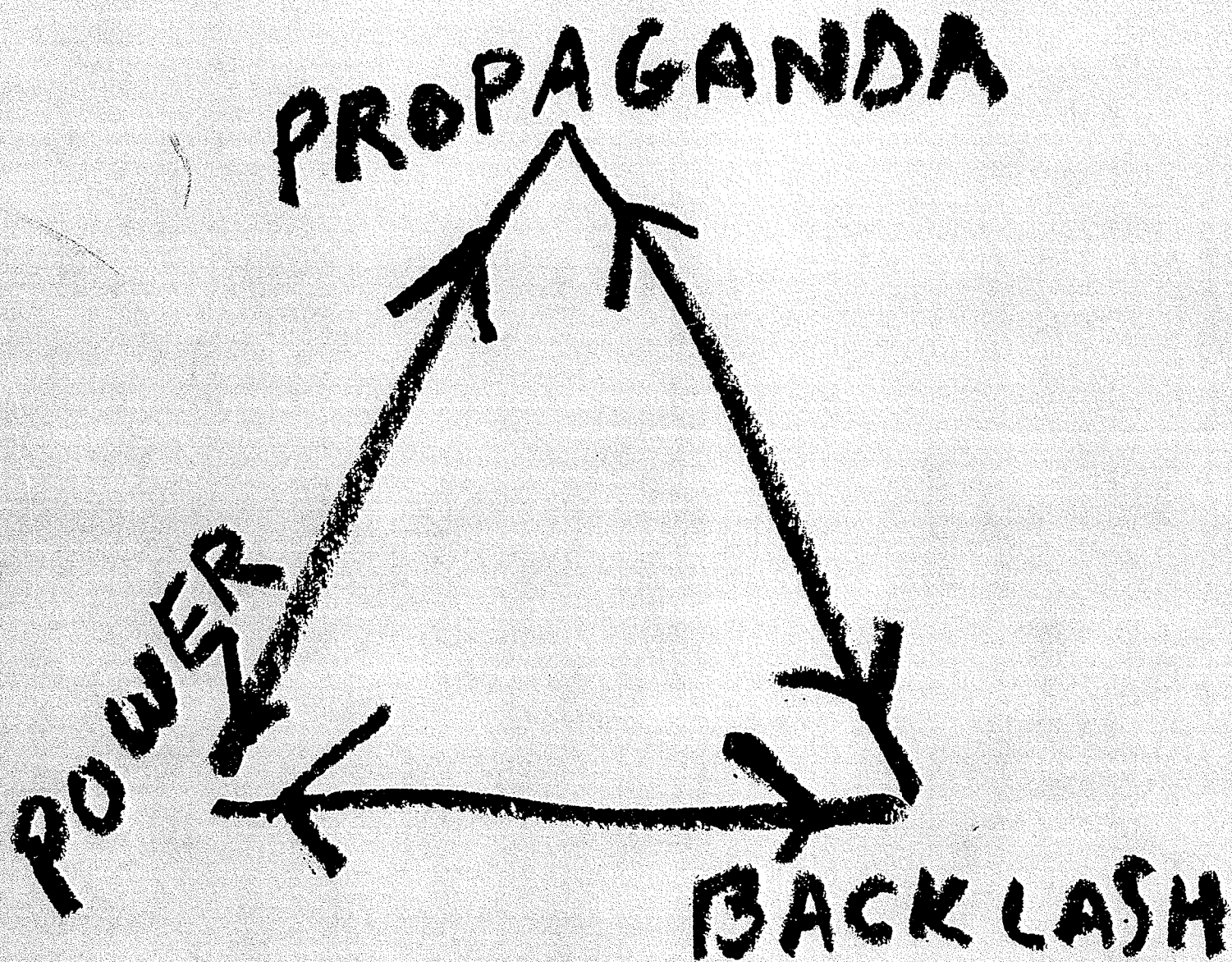
The following people have made MUCH NEEDED contributions to Heresies. Thanks.
Ed Baynard, Suzi McKee Charnas, Elaine Lustig Cohen, Paula Cooper, Lois de la Haba, Barbara Gladstone, Nancy Graves, Doris Grumbach, Jean E. Hardisty, Marty Kingsbury, Kathryn Markel, Dale Petty, The Public Concern Foundation, Miriam Schapiro, Ralph Shikes, Joan Snyder, Holly Solomon, Ann Sperry, Three Lives Bookstore, Susana Torre.

ERRATA
Issue 8: Third World Women

We apologize for the following omissions:

Barbara Sheen's story "Maria" was first published in *Shedevils* by Metis Press, PO Box 25187, Chicago, Ill. 60625

Adrian Piper's "Political Self-Portrait II" was the text for a graphics poster and *not a self-contained journalistic text.*



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