HERESIES

A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics

#1

$2.50

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 esthetic 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 contributors as well as members of 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. Themes will be announced well in advance in order to collect material from many sources. (See inside of back cover for list of projected issues.) Possibly satellite pamphlets and broadsides will be produced continuing the discussion of each central theme.

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 esthetic, 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.

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Frontispiece (*traditional status values of the village . . .*): poster by Australian artist Mandy Martin.

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Heresies

THE DRIVE OF THE U.S. IS TO REPLACE THE TRADITIONAL STATUS VALUES OF THE VILLAGE SUCH AS WRITING GREAT POETRY ... WITH NEW ONES LIKE

OWNING A T.V. SET

Feminism—Art—Politics. What is their connection? In theory? In reality?

Once there was a women's art center that was very excited about an "Art as Work" seminar I proposed. They wanted a short personal resumé to follow the course description in the catalogue—to let students know who I was, where I was coming from: Harmony Hammond is a lesbian feminist artist who has exhibited at Gallery X and Gallery Z and taught at R. University and C. University. They wanted my labels and then did not like them. No seminar. Really, I was coming on too strong. Couldn't I use a different word? Or just not say it at all? Would I be teaching art or politics? They were an "Art" center. They were afraid, they said, afraid I would jeopardize. . . .

Jeopardize what? Their art? Their teaching? Their students? Their bodies? Their minds? Their sexuality? Their politics? Their power? Their authority? Their thinking? They did not know. . . they were just afraid.

I did not fit their concept of a feminist and therefore I was dangerous.

Labels. The meaninglessness of labels. The power of labels. The confining. What does it mean to be a lesbian, radical feminist, activist, mother, artist? I am all of these individually and combined. It means I am political. It means I want to change existing power relationships. A list of experiences. The power of labels is the power of ideas and action combined.

The political mother, the political artist, the political feminist, and the political lesbian refuse to be second-class. They take action by "doing." They refuse to be isolated into separatist stances, and they become a total whole. They add up to what Charlotte Bunch has called a "non-aligned feminism"—not automatically attached to one line of feminism (socialist/left vs. reformist vs. cultural/spiritual) but rather evaluating each individual issue and situation from an independent feminist perspective.

Lesbian. Radical feminist. Activist. Mother. Artist.

The common denominator is woman. Women are oppressed as a class. This oppression underlies the patriarchal institutions of capitalism, imperialism, racism, and heterosexism. To end all forms of oppression we must first end the oppression of all women regardless of sexuality or economic class, racial or cultural background.

Lesbian. Radical feminist. Activist. Mother. Artist.

Together they form my feminism. Feminism is my politics. My art both is formed by and is a statement of my feminism.

H.H.

While I'd always worked in social programs, I never considered myself a political person. Political groups so often revealed confused priorities that I inevitably ended up by questioning my own. But feminism was different—so much was personally at stake. If I questioned my commitment (how can I be amused by this or not outraged by that), I soon found I was *not* amused and I *was* outraged by things I might once have considered innocuous or simply unalterable. Feminism had become a persistent way of living and thinking and the most important awareness of my life.

Today I trust the impulses calling out for radical change because they're rooted in a lifetime of self-analysis continuously and consistently validated by other women. Frustration, it seems, is being resolved in conviction and action and the awareness of this power has been startling to me. Needless to say, art which strengthens that awareness is exhilarating.

I am a medievalist. I was attracted to the field by the escapist fantasies of folklore and romance. But I now feel that all art—whether ancient or modern—can be seen and judged within a feminist context.

A.L.

From the First-Issue Collective

The editorial collective of this first issue of *Heresies* shares not a political line but a commitment to the development of coherent feminist theory in the context of practical work. The time for reformulating old positions or merely attacking sexism is past. Now we must take on the most problematic aspects of feminist theory, esthetic theory and political theory. We are not only analyzing our own oppression in order to put an end to it, but also exploring concrete ways of transforming society into one that is socially just and culturally free.

The role of the arts and the artist in the political process is our specific arena. By confronting the very real differences in our own attitudes towards art and politics, which reflect those in the wider feminist community, we have uncovered networks connecting a broad range of forms and ideologies. As material for the first issue came in to us, we found that no hard line could be drawn between texts and visual material. There are, therefore, few "illustrations" here, but independent statements expressed visually, verbally, or in combination, sharing

When pressed by the people who ask "What do you do?" at times I call myself an artist and then no one knows what to expect. The term is so vague and useless that it does not begin to identify a point of view. The fact that art work keeps the bourgeoisie in style, and the bourgeoisie keeps all the art, suggests that most artists don't bother with politics and ideology, instead they are united by a lifestyle: generally you must privatize your work, hang your head to the left late at night in the bars, and think deeply about how your work will be understood in the melancholic future; be concerned about your isolation from the community.

It is difficult not to become a cynic. Opportunism knocks. Even the women's movement is another stepping stone towards critical recognition. Most people are more concerned with the objects we are producing than the world into which we place our work. I make abstract paintings and super-8 films—but not for a living. I work as an editor for a left news magazine called *Seven Days*. This is where I learned the business of developing an audience and disseminating information. *Heresies* is an attempt to politicize the art world; a chance to attack the history of our work as opposed to "documenting" it.

I have been a feminist it seems ever since I noticed I was living with great difficulty; it came out during the 1960s—but that's a long story. In the 1970s, feminism has tendencies which serve merely to push liberal institutions to their farthest extremes. This has left many women caught in a dubious struggle; a recognition of strength and an inability to act. The feminist movement should not work towards gaining economic power, but towards developing a coherent ideology if we are to participate in change and work towards socialism. (You knew I'd say that.) The point is that an understanding of feminism without an analysis of class is like a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs.

Capitalism is so efficient that it can sustain its own alternatives; likewise the art world—one more radical magazine.

E.H.

the same power and the same intent, and indicating that word and image can be equal ingredients in politically effective art.

We found no solutions to the issues raised, but we are finding approaches that feel fresher and more satisfying. Working together toward collective decisions was entirely different from working alone or as part of conventional hierarchies. Each of us worked on every page of this magazine, a slow and frustrating process, but one from which we learned a great deal: about each other, about editorial and mechanical skills, about the collective process itself, about our subject—feminism, art and politics—and about what it means to be political in a real, active, living situation. We mean to go on from these beginnings and we look to the larger feminist community for participation, response and criticism. Together we can work toward some answers. We have nothing to lose but our illusions.

Joan Braderman, Harmony Hammond, Elizabeth Hess, Arlene Ladden, Lucy Lippard, May Stevens.

I am a feminist first and a socialist second, rather than a Socialist-Feminist. Not because I don't care about what happens to the oppressed men in the world. Not because I'm against an ideally democratic socialism. But because women's oppression crosses economic-class lines. It's a matter of focus. Clearly the needs of welfare-class women are most urgent and those of upper-class women are least urgent. Some socialists say that getting rid of patriarchy won't change the world. I wonder. Even in revolutionary socialist movements women must maintain an autonomous base. Revolution for Every*man* isn't the same as real social change; it has taken place in the past without solving the "woman question."

In the meantime, living in a capitalist country without a strong Socialist Party provokes an irresistible urge to kill time as a liberal feminist. Even though I'm aware of the dangers of opportunism, reformism, co-optation, and all the slimy horde, I often find myself working for reform rather than revolution because I can't bear to see *nothing* done.

Within the art world, this means I work to get women artists into a system I oppose. Outside, in the real world, this means I want the ERA passed because it's going to make a difference in women's lives. I want to see a politically aware feminist culture and I hope that *Heresies* will help create it and help destroy some of the boundaries that separate women from the power to make a better society that will fit our needs as well as men's.

(P.S. Because I'm a critic, I've been called a "class enemy" of artists, which is bullshit. I'm exploited by publishers, and perhaps editors, just as artists are exploited by galleries, and perhaps critics. I identify with artists whether or not they identify with me because long experience has shown me that our lives are more or less the same.)

L.R.L

When we decided that each of us in the first issue collective should write an individual statement to put our political differences "out front," I thought it was a fine idea. But trying to write one page about my notion of how feminism relates to Marxism relates to making theory and making films was easier said than done: too much to argue in too little space. So what I wanted to do was write, "please see my article on page x" where I've tried to work out some of these problems in more analytical depth. But my sister-editors said, "write something personal." They chided me for my rhetorical style and my obsessive? academic? commitment to making "complete" arguments. "Who are *you* in all that," they asked. O.K. I'm a woman, I'm white, I'm 28. I'm a film teacher, I'm a student, I'm a writer, theorist, critic, filmmaker. I do political work—in the feminist community and with a new Coalition (July 4th) that's building toward a mass, progressive peoples' movement in this country. I guess I'm what's come to be called a cultural worker.

Often it seems there's just not enough time in each day to do all the things that have to be done. And to earn a living, and write a dissertation, and see the art I care about, and do the laundry, and talk with students, and be with the friends I love, and see the ocean sometimes. Putting it all together, I'd often like a few clones of myself to help out. I juggle what's possible with what's not.

Where does the fight for women fit with fighting imperialism? Does working in collectives really help change our deeply entrenched American individualism? How can "cultural workers" best advance these struggles? I often argue esthetics with my political comrades. Films, I say, don't have to be simplistic to communicate with mass audiences. We're all subject to subtle propaganda from Hollywood and Madison Avenue. We're all jugglers of contradictions and need to see and hear and read about alternatives to what is. We have to make films that not only say something different but say it *in a different way*. They have to be made in a practical political context, in a coherent theoretical context, and they have to be able to recapture the imaginations of masses of people being lulled to sleep by the crap that's sold as "mass art." We have to find strategies for making our alternate points of view visible, making peoples' voices heard, our ideas and films *seen*; find ways of fighting the commercial monopolies that own the air waves, the movie screens, the mass media, that own *us*.

I argue politics with my feminist sisters. No more separatism, I say. I work on HERESIES to say that and also because—another contradiction—I need community in a country that is in fragments. In short, and as labor people like my grandparents always said: women, artists, men, people; we've got to get organized.

J.B.

What kind of socialist-feminist-artist am I?

What kind of socialist artist loves Corot as well as Courbet and forgives oil painting its bourgeois origins and abstract expressionism its heraldry of U.S. imperialism?

What kind of feminist artist sees pink as a private color to be sparingly used?

To the women's movement I would like to bring, as to art, the subtlest perceptions. To political action, I would like to bring, as to art, a precise and delicate imagination.

The personal is the political only if you make it so. The connections have to be drawn. Feminism without socialism can create only utopian pockets. And the lifespan of a collective is approximately two years.

Socialism without feminism is still patriarchy. But more smug. Try to imagine a classless society run by men.

Trying to be part of a collective is a little like being a chameleon set on plaid. I may split apart before I get the pattern right. But somehow it seems worth the pain because I believe community is the highest goal.

I believe every woman's life is a little better because of what we are doing.

M.S.

Toward Socialist Feminism*

Barbara Ehrenreich

At some level, perhaps not too well articulated, socialist feminism has been around for a long time. You are a woman in a capitalist society. You get pissed off: about the job, about the bills, about your husband (or ex), about the kids' school, the housework, being pretty, not being pretty, being looked at, not being looked at (and either way, not listened to), etc. If you think about all these things and how they fit together and what has to be changed, and then you look around for some words to hold all these thoughts together in abbreviated form, you'd almost have to come up with something like "socialist feminism."

A lot of us came to socialist feminism in just that way: we were reaching for a word/term/phrase that would begin to express *all* of our concerns, all of our principles, in a way that neither "socialist" nor "feminist" seemed to. I have to admit that most socialist feminists I know are not too happy with the term "socialist feminist" either. On the one hand it is too long (I have no hopes for a hyphenated mass movement); on the other hand it is much too short for what is, after all, really socialist internationalist anti-racist anti-heterosexist feminism.

The trouble with taking a new label of any kind is that it creates an instant aura of sectarianism. "Socialist feminism" becomes a challenge, a mystery, an issue in and of itself. We have speakers, conferences, articles on "socialist feminism"—though we know perfectly well that either "socialism" or "feminism" is too huge and too inclusive to be a subject for any sensible speech, conference, or article. People, including avowed socialist feminists, ask themselves anxiously, "What *is* socialist feminism?" There is a kind of expectation that it is (or is about to be at any moment, maybe in the next speech, conference, or article) a brilliant synthesis of world historical proportions—an evolutionary leap beyond Marx, Freud and Wollstonecraft. Or that it will turn out to be nothing, a fad seized on by a few disgruntled feminists and female socialists, a temporary distraction.

I want to try to cut through some of the mystery which has grown up around socialist feminism. Here I am going to focus on our "theory"—the way we look at and analyze the world. I am not going to deal with our total outlook as socialist feminists because I want to stick as closely as possible to the interface of the two main traditions we grow out of—socialism and feminism.

A logical way to start is to look at socialism and feminism separately. How does a socialist—more precisely a Marxist—look at the world? How does a feminist look at the world? To begin with, Marxism and feminism have something important in common: they are *critical* ways of looking at the world. Both rip away popular mythology and "common-sense wisdom" and force us to look at experience in a new way. Both seek to understand the world—not in terms of static balances and symmetries (as in conventional social science), but in terms of *antagonisms*. So they lead to conclusions which are jarring and disturbing at the same time that they are liberating. There is no way to have a Marxist or a feminist outlook and remain a spectator. To understand the reality laid bare by these analyses is to move into action to change it.

Here I am going to restrict myself to what I see as the core insights of Marxism and feminism, and state these as briefly and starkly as possible: Marxism (in 20 words or less) addresses itself to the class dynamics of capitalist society. Every social scientist knows that capitalist societies are characterized by more or less severe, systemic inequality. Marxism understands this inequality to arise from processes which are *intrinsic* to capitalism as an economic system. A minority of people (the capitalist class) own all the factories/ energy sources/resources on which everyone else depends in order to live. The great majority (the working class) must, out of sheer necessity, work, under conditions set by the capitalists, for the wages the capitalists pay. Since the capitalists make their profits by paying less in wages than the value of what the workers actually produce, the relationship between these two classes is necessarily one of irreconcilable antagonism: the capitalist class owes its very existence to the continued exploitation of the working class. What maintains this system of class rule is, in the last analysis, force. The capitalist class controls (directly or indirectly) the means of organized violence represented by the state—policemen, jails, etc. Only by waging a revolutionary struggle aimed at the seizure of state power can the working class free itself, and, ultimately, all people.

Feminism addresses itself to another familiar inequality. All human societies are marked by some degree of inequality between the sexes. If we survey human societies at a glance, sweeping through history and across continents, we see that they have commonly been character-

ized by: the subjugation of women to male authority, both within the family and in the community in general; the objectification of women as a form of property; a sexual division of labor in which women are confined to such activities as childraising, performing personal services for adult males, and specified (usually low-prestige) forms of productive labor.

Feminists, struck by the near-universality of these things, have looked for explanations in the biological "givens" which underlie all human social existence: men are physically stronger than women on the average, especially compared to pregnant women or women who are nursing babies. Furthermore, men have the power to make women pregnant. Thus the forms that sexual inequality takes—however various they may be from culture to culture—rest, in the last analysis, on what is clearly a physical advantage males hold over females. That is to say, they rest on violence, or the threat of violence.

The ancient, biological roots of male supremacy—the fact of male violence—are commonly obscured by the laws and conventions which regulate the relations between the sexes in any particular culture. But they are there, according to a feminist analysis. The possibility of male assault stands as a constant warning to "bad" (rebellious, aggressive) women, and drives "good" women into complicity with male supremacy. The reward for being "good" ("pretty," submissive) is protection from random male violence and, in some cases, economic security.

I hope I have written these capsule summaries of Marxism and feminism in such a way that some similarities of approach show through. Marxism rips away the myths about "democracy" and "pluralism" to reveal a system of class rule that rests on *forcible* exploitation. Feminism cuts through myths about "instinct" and romantic love to expose male rule as a rule of *force*. Both analyses compel us to look at a fundamental injustice. If either, or both, make you uncomfortable, they were meant to! The choice is to reach for the comfort of the myths or, as Marx put it, to work for a social order which does not require myths to sustain it.

Having gone to the trouble to provide these thumbnail sketches of Marxism and feminism, the obvious thing to do would be just to add them up and call the sum "socialist feminism." In fact, this is probably how most socialist feminists operate most of the time—as a kind of hybrid, pushing feminism in socialist circles, socialism in feminist circles. Practically speaking, I think this is a perfectly reasonable way to operate a lot of the time. One trouble with leaving things like that, though, is that it keeps people wondering "Well, what is she *really*?" or demanding of us "What is the principal contradiction?" Such questions often stop us in our tracks: It sounds so compelling and authoritative and logical: "Make a choice! Be one or another!" Yet we know that there is a political consistency to socialist feminism. We are not hybrids or fence-sitters.

To get to that political consistency we have to go beyond the capsule versions of Marxism and feminism I laid out. We have to differentiate ourselves, as feminists from other kinds of feminists, and as Marxists from other kinds of Marxists. We have to stake out a socialist feminist kind of feminism and a socialist feminist kind of socialism. Only then is there a possibility that things will "add up" to something more than an uneasy juxtaposition.

First, what is our outlook as feminists and how is it different from that of other feminists? I think most radical feminists and socialist feminists would agree with my capsule characterization of feminism *as far as it goes*. The trouble with radical feminism, from a socialist feminist point of view, is that it doesn't go any farther: it remains transfixed by the universality of male supremacy: things have never really changed; all social systems are "patriarchies"; imperialism, militarism and capitalism are all simply expressions of innate male aggressiveness. And so on.

The problem with this is not only that it leaves out men (and the possibility of reconciliation with them on a truly human and egalitarian basis) but that it leaves out an awful lot about women. For example, to discount a socialist country such as China as a "patriarchy"—as I have heard some radical feminists do—is to ignore the real struggles and achievements of millions of women. Socialist feminists, while agreeing that there is something timeless and universal about women's oppression, have insisted that it takes different forms in different settings, and that the *differences* are of vital importance. There is a difference between a society in which sexism is expressed by female infanticide and a society in which sexism takes the form of unequal representation on the Central Committee. And the difference is worth dying for.

One of the historical variations on the theme of sexism which ought to concern all feminists is the set of changes that came with the transition from an agrarian society to industrial capitalism. This is no academic issue. The social system which industrial capitalism replaced was in fact a *patriarchal* one, and I am using that term now in its original sense to mean a system in which production is centered in the household and is presided over by the oldest male. The fact is that industrial capitalism came along and tore the rug out from under that system: production went into the factories; individuals broke off from the family to become "free" wage earners. To say that capitalism disrupted the patriarchal organization of production and family life is not, of course, to say that capitalism abolished male supremacy! But the particu-

lar forms of sex oppression we experience today are, to a significant degree, *recent* developments. A huge historical discontinuity lies between us and true patriarchy. If we are to understand our experience as women today, we must move beyond the biological invariants of human experience to a consideration of *capitalism* as a system.

There are other ways I could have gotten to the same point. I could have said simply that as feminists we are most interested in the most oppressed women—poor and working-class women, third-world women—and for *that* reason we are led to a need to comprehend and confront captialism. I could have said that we need to address ourselves to the class system simply because women are members of classes. But I am trying to bring out something else about our perspective: that there is no way to understand sexism as it acts on our lives—never mind class oppression for a minute!—without putting it in the historical context of capitalism.

Now let's go on to our outlook as Marxists. Again, I think most socialist feminists would agree with my capsule summary *as far as it goes*. And the trouble again is that there are a lot of people (I'll call them "mechanical Marxists") who do not go any further. To these people, the only "real" and important things that go on in capitalist society are those that relate to the productive process or the conventional political sphere. From such a point of view, every other part of experience and social existence—education, sexuality, recreation, the family, art, music, housework (you name it)—is peripheral to the central dynamics of social change; it is part of the "superstructure" or "culture."

Socialist feminists are in a very different camp. We (along with many Marxists who are not feminists) see capitalism as a social and cultural *totality*. We understand that, in its search for markets, capitalism is driven to penetrate every nook and cranny of social existence. Especially in the monopoly capitalism phase, the realm of consumption is every bit as important, just from an economic point of view, as the realm of production. So we cannot understand class struggle as something confined to issues of wages and hours, or confined only to workplace issues. Class struggle occurs in every arena where the interests of the classes conflict, and that includes education, health, the arts, etc. We aim to transform not only the ownership of the means of production, but the totality of social existence.

So, as Marxists, we come to feminism from a completely different place than the "mechanical Marxists." Because we see monopoly capitalism as a political/economic/cultural totality, we have room within our *Marxist* framework for feminist issues which have nothing ostensibly to do with production or "politics," issues that have to do with "private" life.

Furthermore, in our brand of Marxism, there is no "woman question," no big mystery about women—because we never compartmentalized women off to the "superstructure" in the first place. Marxists of a mechanical bent continually ponder the issue of the unwaged woman (the housewife): is she really a member of the working class? That is, does she really produce surplus value? We say, of course housewives are members of the working class—*not* because we have some elaborate proof that they really do produce surplus value—but because we understand a class as being composed of *people*, and as having a *social* existence quite apart from the capitalist-dominated realm of production. When we think of class in this way, then we see that in fact the women who seemed most peripheral, the housewives, are at the very heart of their class—raising children, holding together families, maintaining the culture and social networks of the community.

So we are coming out of a kind of feminism and a kind of Marxism whose interests quite naturally flow together. I think we are in a position now to see why it is that socialist feminism has been such a great mystery. It is a paradox only as long as what you mean by socialism is really "mechanical Marxism" and what you mean by feminism is an ahistorical kind of radical feminism. These things don't add up; they have nothing in common.

But if you put together another kind of socialism and another kind of feminism, as I have tried to define them, you do get some common ground. And that is one of the most important things about socialist feminism today: that it is a space—free from the constrictions of a truncated kind of feminism and a truncated version of Marxism—a space in which we can develop the kind of politics that address the political/economic/cultural *totality* of monopoly capitalist society. We could go only so far with the available feminisms, the conventional Marxism, and then we had to break out to something that is not so restrictive and so incomplete in its view of the world. We had to take a new name, "socialist feminism," in order to assert our determination to comprehend the *whole* of our experience and to forge a politics that reflects the totality of that comprehension.

At that I may have fulfilled my mission of demystifying socialist feminism, but I don't want to leave this theory as a "space" or a common ground. Things are beginning to grow in that ground. We are closer to a synthesis in our understanding of sex and class, capitalism and male domination, than we were a few years ago. Here I will indicate very sketchily one such line of thought:

1. The Marxist/feminist understanding that class and sex domination rest "ultimately" on force is correct, and this remains the most devastating critique of sexist/capitalist society. But there is a lot to that "ultimately." In a

day-to-day sense, most people acquiesce to sex and class domination without being held in line by the threat of violence, and often without even the threat of material deprivation.

2. It is very important, then, to figure out what, if not the direct application of force, keeps things going. In the case of class, a great deal has been written already about why the American working class lacks militant class consciousness. Certainly ethnic divisions, especially the Black/white division, are a key to the answer. But, I would argue, in addition to being divided, the working class has been socially *atomized*: working-class neighborhoods have been destroyed and allowed to decay; life has become increasingly privatized and inward-looking; skills once possessed by the working class have been expropriated by the capitalist class; capitalist-controlled "mass culture" has edged out almost all indigenous working-class culture and institutions. Instead of collectivity and self-reliance as a class, there is mutual isolation and collective *dependency* on the capitalist class.

3. The subjugation of women, in ways characteristic of late capitalist society, has been a key to this process of class atomization. To put it another way: the forces which have atomized working-class life and promoted cultural/material dependency on the capitalist class are the *same* forces which have served to perpetuate the subjugation of women. It is women who are most isolated in what has become an increasingly privatized family existence (even when they work outside the home too). It is, in many instances, women's skills (productive skills, healing, midwifery) which have been discredited or banned to make way for commodities. It is, above all, women who are required to be utterly passive/uncritical/dependent (i.e., "feminine") in the face of the pervasive capitalist penetration of private life. Historically, late capitalist penetration of working-class life has singled out women as prime targets of pacification (or "feminization") because *women are the culture-bearers of their class.*

4. It follows that there is a fundamental interconnectedness between women's struggle and what is traditionally conceived as class struggle. Not all women's struggles have an inherently anti-capitalist thrust (particularly not those which seek only to advance the power and wealth of special groups of women), but all those which build *collectivity* and *collective confidence* among women are vitally important to the building of class consciousness. Conversely, not all class struggles have an inherently anti-sexist thrust (especially not those which cling to pre-industrial patriarchal values) but all those which seek to build the social and cultural autonomy of the working class are necessarily linked to the struggle for women's liberation.

This is one direction which socialist feminist analysis is taking. No one is expecting a synthesis to emerge which will collapse socialist and feminist struggles into the same thing. The capsule summaries I gave earlier retain their "ultimate" truth: there are crucial aspects of capitalist domination (such as racial oppression) which a purely feminist perspective simply cannot account for or deal with—without bizarre distortions, that is. There are crucial aspects of sex oppression (such as male violence within the family) into which socialist thought has little insight—again, without a lot of stretching and distortion. Hence the need to continue to be socialists *and* feminists. But there *is* enough of a synthesis, both in what we think and what we do, for us to begin to develop a self-confident identity as *socialist feminists.*

*Versions of this article have been presented at the Socialist Feminist Conference, Yellow Springs, Ohio, July 1975; at Women's Week, Brown University, April, 1976; and in WIN (June 3, 1976) as "What is Socialist Feminism?"

Barbara Ehrenreich is the co-author, with Deirdre English, of *Witches, Midwives and Nurses: A History of Women Healers,* and *Complaints and Disorders: The Sexual Politics of Sickness* (Feminist Press, New York). She is a member of HealthRight (a New York women's health collective), Action for Women in Chile, and New American Movement.

Tijuana Maid*

Martha Rosler

Crucé por primera vez cuando tenía 22 años. Hacía 6 meses que había llegado a Tijuana, viniendo de mi pueblo. Como había poco trabajo y mi hermana tenía amigas que estaban trabajando de criadas en San Diego, estaba segura de que seriá fácil arreglarlo. Dejaría a Rosita y Juanito con ella, y ella también my ayudaría a buscar la manera de cruzar la frontera y obtener empleo. Prefiero no discutir los detalles de como llegué aquí. Había unos hombres que me pedían mucho dinero, pero prometían conseguirme empleo muy pronto y luego la tarjeta verde. Pero nunca recibí la tarjeta. Querían $350 por una falsa, pero casi siempre uno no pasa más allá de los inspectores con éstas. Firmé un papel diciendo que les daría la mitad de mi sueldo por 3 meses y entonces me cruzaron. Por todo Tijuana hay hombres con carros americanos, muy lustrosos y bonitos, esperando y prometiendo empleos. Ellos cruzan a cientos, miles de mujeres cada año. No lo sabía entonces.

1

Estaba aterrorizada: yo estaba segura de que nos iban a encontrar, también tenía mucho miedo de ir a un país extranjero. Sólo sabía unas pocas palabras de inglés. ¡Qué sola me encontraría, especialmenta sin mis niños! Muchas mujeres cruzan a diario con la mica, una tarjeta para ir de compras solamente. Ellas se toman el Greyhound para el centro de San Diego y de allí se van en un camión urbano a sus trabajos. El Greyhound es muy caro, casi $1. Oí decir a alguien que la ciudad quería poner una ruta por 25 centavos, pero la Greyhound logró que la corte los parara. Si yo cruzara a diario, podría estar con mis niños en las noches, pero las que lo hacen se cansan mucho: trabajan para la patrona todo el día y durante la noche se ocupan de sus familias. En fin, los hombres me dijeron que sólo podía trabajar viviendo con una familia. Me pagarían menos, pero siquiera no cruzaría la frontera, con sus inspectores, a diario. Son impredecibles, como los jaguares; te dejan cruzar a diario, cada semana, y de repente te quitan la tarjeta.

2

Los hombres me conseguieron un empleo con una familia muy rica, el patrón era hombre de negocios. La patrona era buena, realmente. Ella me enseño como funcionaban las cosas en su casa y me ayudó con el idioma inglés. Ella me dijo que sólo contaba con que duraría unos 8 meses con ella, lo suficiente para aprender inglés, como vestirme y peinarme para poder conseguir un empleo en una oficina. ¡Estaba tan sorprendida! Sólo le daban gracias a Dios por haberme conseguido empleo. Ellos suponian que trabajaría los 7 días de la semana, pero cuando les conté de Rosita y Juanito ellos me dieron un día y medio de descanso.

La mujer me dió un libro para que lo estudiara, llamado Home Maid Spanish Cook Book. El libro dice "Our aim is not to teach the Mexican or Spanish speaking maid how to make her own native dishes. She can do that to perfection and without our help. We want to have her help Y O U in the kitchen. To do things Y O U R way." El libro tiene un dibujo de una cocina americana con el nombre de todas las cosas en español. Este libro trae también recetas de comidas típicas americanas, tal como las Hamburguesas, los Hot Dogs, Guisado de Atun, Bistecs, Lomo Asado y Pastel de Manzanas.

Te enseñá como hacer botanas para las fiestas de los patrones, como Galletas con Caviar, y también como preparar los tragos. Los favoritos de mis patrones eran Los Martinis y los Old Fashioneds.

3

PEANUT BUTTER & JELLY SANDWICH

Butter 2 slices of bread. Spread one slice generously with peanut butter and top with a layer of jelly. Cóver with remaining slice of bread; cut in half. Serve with a large glass of milk for a hearty lunch.

EMPAREDADO DE JALEA Y MANTEQUILLA DE CACAHUATE

Unte de mantequilla 2 rebanadas de pan. Unte generosamente 1 rebanada con mantequilla de cacahuate y luego con la jalea. Cúbrala con la otra rebanada de pan y corte a la mitad (diagonal). Sirva con un vaso grande de leche.

El libro contiene una lista de frases en inglés y en español:

Sweep the kitchen floor.	Barra el piso de la cocina.
scrub	Estregue
wax and polish	encere y saque brillo
We like breakfast served at-----.	Nos gusto que nos sirva el desayuno a las-----.
Have you ever shopped in a supermarket?	Ha ido usted al super-mercado?

etcetera, etcetera, y contiene una frase que oía siempre:

Will you cook a Mexican dinner for us sometime?
Nos cocina una comida mexicana para nosotros alguna vez?

4

Había bastante que hacer, con tres chamacos muy cochinos, la casa grande, y muchas fiestas con bastante de limpiar después. La señora trataba de hablarme en español pero su accento estaba tan mal que apenas podía entenderle. El señor casi no me hablaba, nomas para preguntarme de cuándo iba a hacer chile con carne, que no es un platillo mexicano, o para preguntarme cuándo iba a hacerles unos tamales. Me hacía la mal entendida. No me daban ganas de hacer tamales. No esperaba cocinar tanto, pero no iba a durar si me quejaba. Entonces hacía tacos. No sabía que me disgustaba más, si cocinar las comidas americanas tan aburridas que les gustaban, o los tacos una vez a la semana. Mi hermana me platicó de una muchacha de nuestro pueblo que fué llevada a Laguna Beach por una pareja para cuidar sus niños, pero pasaba todo el día limpiando y cocinando. La tenían cocinando platillos mexicanos bastante picantes para sus amigos, luego la sacaban de la cocina para que los amigos la vieran. Estaba muy joven, sola y no podía hablar inglés. Ella se suicidó--claro, se mató.

Bueno, mis patrones me dejaban comer lo que yo quería después que ellos acababan, ¡yo nunca había comido tanta carne en mi vida! Hacía $30 por semana de los cuales la mitad iba a los hombres, mi cuarto era chica y mal aluzado, pero tenía trabajo, y comía a tiempo.

5

Hicimos un trato y acabé de pagarles a los hombres. Era verano y los niños estaban en el campo y la patrona se fué de visita por unos días. Estaba leyendo en mi cuarto una noche cuando tocó el patron la puerta. Le dije que esperara porque tenía que vestirme pero de todos modos entró y se recargó sobre mi. Traté de escapar, me agarró fuerte y peleamos. Estaba tratando de besarme y me tiró a la cama. Rompió mi ropa interior. Empezó a forzarme pero me zafé y corrí al baño y cerré la puerta con candado. Insistía casi tumbando la puerta y yo comencé a llorar. Aún después de que acabó tenía miedo de abrir la puerta pensando que él podría estar escondido en qualquier parte en el cuarto. Sabía que no tenía esperanza de ayuda con la polecía porque yo era ilegal y porque este tipo de gente tiene plata suficiente para zafarse. Finalmente oí la puerta de enfrente cerrar, el carro prendió y se fué. Salí corriendo a mi cuarto. Recogí todas mi cosas y me fuí. Tome un camión al centro de San Diego y me pasé la noche esperando el camión a la frontera.

Después de este incidente he conocido a 4 mujeres que han sido violadas por sus patrones, una de ellas salió embarazada. Después de todo tuve suerte.

6

Después de un tiempo regresé a San Diego con mi mica. Esta vez sabía buscar en el periódico como encontrar chamba. Obtuve una con un profesor y su esposa en La Jolla. Me pagaban sólo $25 a la semana pero la casa era más chica y sólo 2 niños siempre se la pasaban enfrente de la televisión. Había muchas estatuas y pinturas, y alfombras lindas y mucho que desempolvar y pasar la aspiradora. Tenían muchas vasijas antiguas de barro y muchas estatuas hechas por los indios de México. La comida era mejor, apreciaban mis comidas mexicanas, asi es que no me estorbaba cocinar tanto. Todos estos gringos quieren comer la comida de los pobres. La esposa se sonreía conmigo, pero me hablaba como que fuera una niña o bien estúpida. También tenían todos los libros de "Spanish Maid."

Esta gente era muy mala cuando se trataba de pagarme. Una vez se atrasaron con 5 semanas y cuando les pedí que me pagaron dijeron que no podían porque tenían muchas cuentas. Me enoje y les dije que le iba a hablar a la polecía, que fué ridiculo porque se enojaron y dijeron que le iban a echar la migra. Estaba asustada y dejé el empleo.

7

Mi siguiente trabajo también era en La Jolla, con un doctor y su familia, ¡por $55 a la semana! Tenía que cocinar todas las comidas, cuidar a los niños y hacer toda la limpieza y quedarme 7 días de la semana, asi es que no podía ver a mis niños. ¡Gaste bastante de mi dinero llamandoles por telefono! Después de casi un año oí decir de un señor tal y tal pagaba $35 a la semana para que alguien viviera allí 5 días a la semana. Nos empleó a 2 y hizo arreglos donde comprabamos toda la comida con nuestros sueldos. Le dábamos de comer y limpiábamos para él y sus amigos y además dejaba tener otros trabajos durante el día. Llegué a conocer bastante gente cruel de esta manera. No sé cuales son peores, los que realmente demandan o los que aunque sean buenos creen que nos estan dando limosna. A este tiempo ya tenía fama por hacer buena comida mexicana para fiestas, asi es que hacía además de la limpieza.

Pero hace 6 semanas el señor entró al cuarto cuando nos estabamos desvestiendo y nos comenzó a manosear, no salimos y nos movimos a un hotel barato en el centro de San Diego. Hago $100 a la semana cocinando y limpiando para diferente gente, 6 días a la semana. Es muchísimo dinero, pero trabajo muy duro. Y soy independiente.

8

Hay una senora en La Jolla que trató de organizar las criadas, cocineras y los jardineros, los legales en el país, porque hacen menos de $2 la hora sin tener seguridad de sus trabajos. Si se llegan a enfermar o los patrones se van de vacaciones no hay trabajo. Hasta he ido a unas de las juntas, aquí es donde llegué a aprender varias cosas. Aprendí que los inspectores ya no pagaban $50 por los mojados y que no les importaban las mujeres, solamente los hombres. Algunos de ellos mismos tienen criadas ilegales. Aunque asi sea, todos sabemos que por cada una de nosotros hay cienes de gente en México hambreadas y desesperadas que con gusto tomarían nuestro trabajo por la mitad del sueldo. Especialmenta hoy, con tiempos tan malos. Yo sé, yo era una de ellas.

Ahora que soy independiente podía haber pasado más tiempo con mis niños pero hace 2 semanas mi temor fué confirmada porque me quitaron mi mica. Nos quitaron 20 o 30 cuando yo estaba hay, todas a la vez, sin preguntar nada. Nos dijeron que nos las iban a regresar después que las chequeaban, pero casi nunca las regresan y ahora son difíciles encontrar. Misti trabajo por días, finalmente les pague $50 a los hombres con carros. Esta vez nos pasaron a varias, una a la vez, de un hombre a otro parados en la frontera. Habían tantas víboras que creía que me iba a picar una antes que acabara de cruzar.

10

Chiles Rellenos con Salsa para una fiesta

	salsa de jitomate
30 chiles verdes	6 libras de jitomates
3 libras de queso fresco	1 libra de pasas
1 libra de queso amarillo	½ libra de almendras, peladas
1 docena de huevos, separados	3 dientes de ajo
1 taza de pasas	2 onzas de jengibre
harina	1 onza de polvo de chile
aceite para freír	1 libra de azúcar
1 cebolla, picada	1 cuarto de vinagre
8 tazas de salsa de jitomate	sal
orégano, sal y pimienta	

Ase los chiles sobre el fuego hasta que la piel se desprenda. Envuelva en un trapo por 10 minutos, pélelos. Abralos por un lado, saque las semillas y venas. Deje los tallos. Rellene con queso y pasas. Bata las claras de huevos al punto de merengue. Agregue las yemas y bata hasta que estén espesos. Agregue la sal. Enharine los chiles, páselos por el huevo. Se fríen hasta que estén dorados. Fria las cebollas y la salsa de jitomate preparada anteriormente. Agregue el orégano y la sal y pimienta. Hierva a fuego lento por 5 minutos.

(Para preparar la salsa de jitomate, corte los jitomates, agregue un poco de agua, hierva por una ½ hora. Pase por un colador. Muela las pasas, almendras, ajos, jengibres y chiles. Agregue a los jitomates. Agregue el azúcar, vinagre, sal. Hierva hasta que espese.)

9

Ahora busco trabajo con una familia que me deje traer a mis hijos. Sé que haré menos, pero vale la pena. Tengo una amiga que se casó con un gringo que aunque no lo ama, pero él quiere una buena mujer mexicana y cocinera, y él adoptó a su hija. Prefiero vivir en México pero no hay trabajo con que me puedo sorportar con mis hijos. Si encuentro un trabajo en los Estados Unidos donde puedo tener a los niños, no iba a tener que enfrentar los problémas en la frontera. Es sierto que siempre me voy a preocupar de otras cosas, como los cochineros de otra gente, o las señoras que me preguntan a veces en inglés o a veces en español, ¿que si les voy a cocinar una cena mexicana? O también los esposos que no preguntan pero que quieren otras cosas de mí.

11

I first came across when I was 22. It was 6 months since I came to Tijuana from my village. There was little work and my sister had friends who were working as maids in San Diego, and she was sure it would be easy to arrange—I would leave Rosita and Juanito with her and she would help me find out how to get across the border and get a job. I'd rather not discuss the details of how I got here. There were men who demanded a lot of money from me, but they promised to get me a job right away and a green card later. But I never got the card. They wanted $350 for a fake one, but those usually don't get past the inspectors. I signed a paper saying I would give them half my salary for 3 months, and they took me across. All over Tijuana there are men with beautiful, shiny American cars, waiting, promising jobs. They take hundreds, thousands of women across every year. I didn't know this then.

1

I was terrified—I was sure I'd be caught, and I was also very afraid to go to a foreign country. I knew only a few words of English. How lonely I'd be, especially without my kids! Many women cross every day with the mica, a pass only for shopping. They take the Greyhound to downtown San Diego and then take a city bus to work. The Greyhound is very expensive, almost $1. I heard someone say that the city wanted to have a bus to the border for 25¢, but Greyhound got the court to stop them. If I went across every day I could be with my kids at night, but the ones who do that are always tired—working for the patrona all day and caring for their families at night. But anyway, the men said I could only get a job living in with a family. It would pay less but at least I wouldn't have to pass the border, with its inspectors, every day. They are unpredictable, like jaguars; they let you pass every day, every week, and then all of a sudden they take your card away.

2

The men got me a job with a very rich family; the boss was a business executive. The patrona was kind, really. She showed me how things worked in her house and helped me with English. She said she expected that I would only stay about 8 months with her, long enough to learn English and how to dress and do my hair, so I could get an office job. I was so surprised! I was just thanking God to have a job. They expected me to work 7 days a week, but when I told them about Rosita and Juanito they gave me a day and a half off. The woman gave me a book to study called *Home Maid Spanish Cook Book*. The book said, "Our aim is not to teach the Mexican or Spanish-speaking maid how to make her own native dishes. She can do that to perfection and without our help. We want to have her help Y O U in the kitchen. To do things Y O U R way." The book has drawings of an American kitchen with everything named in Spanish. This book also gives recipes for typical American foods, like Hamburger Sandwiches, Hot Dogs, Tuna Casserole, Steak, Meat Loaf, and Apple Pie.

It tells how to make things for the bosses' parties, like Caviar Crackers, and also how to make drinks. My bosses' favorites were Martinis and Old Fashioneds.

3

Peanut Butter & Jelly Sandwich	*Emparedado de Jalea y Mantequilla de Cacahuate*
Butter 2 slices of bread. Spread one slice generously with peanut butter and top with a layer of jelly. Cover with remaining slice of bread; cut in half. Serve with a large glass of milk, for a hearty lunch.	*Unte con mantequilla 2 rebanadas de pan. Unte generosamente una rebanada con mantequilla de cacahuate y luego con la jalea. Cúbrala con la otra rebanada de pan y corte a la mitad (diagonal). Sirva con un vaso grande de leche.*

The book has a list of phrases in English and Spanish, like:

Sweep the kitchen floor. *scrub* *wax and polish*	*Barra el piso de la cocina.* *Estregue* *encere y saque brillo*
We like breakfast served at ..... *Have you ever shopped in a supermarket?*	*Nos gusta que nos sirva el desayuno a las .....* *Ha ido usted al super-mercado?*

etcetera, etcetera, and it has a phrase that I heard often:

Will you cook a Mexican dinner for us sometime?
Nos cocina una comida mexicana para nosotros alguna vez?

4

There was a lot to do, with three kids messy like pigs, the huge house, and many parties to clean up after. The señora tried to speak to me in Spanish, but her accent was so bad that I could hardly understand her. The señor hardly spoke to me at all, except to ask me when I was going to make chile con carne, which isn't a Mexican dish, or to ask me when I was going to make them some tamales. I'd pretend I didn't understand. I didn't want to make tamales for them. I didn't expect to do so much cooking, but I would not last if I complained. So I made tacos. I don't know which I disliked more, cooking the boring American foods they loved or the tacos once a

week. My sister told me about a girl from our village who was taken to Laguna Beach by a couple to care for their children, but all day they had her cooking and cleaning. They had her cook very spicy Mexican dishes for their friends, and then they would bring her out to show to the guests. She was very young and alone and couldn't speak English. She committed suicide—she killed herself.

Well, my patrones let me eat what I wanted when they were done, and I never ate so much meat in my life! I made $30 a week, half of it went to the men, my room was tiny and badly lit, but I had work, and I was eating regularly.

5

We settled into a routine and I finished paying the men. It was spring and the kids were in camp and the patrona went on a visit for a few days. I was reading in my room one night when the patron knocked on the door. I told him to wait because I had to get dressed but he came in anyway and leaned over me. I tried to escape, he grabbed me and we struggled. He was trying to kiss me and shove me onto the bed. He ripped my underwear. He began to force me but I pulled away and ran to the bathroom and locked the door. He pounded, almost breaking the door and I began to cry. Even after he stopped I was afraid to open the door thinking he could be hidden somewhere in the room. I knew I had no hope of help from the police because I was illegal and because that type of guy has enough money to get himself off. Finally I heard the front door close, the car start up and drive away. I ran to my room. I gathered all my things and ran off. I took a bus downtown and spent the night waiting for the bus to the border.

Since that incident I have met four women who were raped by their bosses; one of them was made pregnant. So I was lucky after all.

6

After a while I went back to San Diego with my mica. This time I knew to look in the newspaper to find a job. I got one with a professor and his wife in La Jolla. They paid me only $25 a week but the house was smaller and there were only 2 kids, who spent all their time before the TV. There were many statues and paintings and beautiful rugs and much to dust and vacuum. They had a lot of old pottery and statues made by the Indians of Mexico. The food was better, they appreciated my Mexican food, and so I didn't mind cooking so much. All these gringos want to eat the food of the poor. The wife smiled at me a lot, but she spoke to me as though I were a child or very stupid. They also had all the "Spanish Maid" books.

These people were very bad about paying me. Once they got 5 weeks behind and when I asked them to pay they said they couldn't

because they had a lot of bills. I got angry and told them I was going to call the police, which was ridiculous because they got angry and said they were going to call immigration. I was terrified and left the job.

7

My next job was also in La Jolla, with a doctor and his family, for $55 a week! I had to cook all the meals, take care of the kids, do all the cleaning, and stay 7 days a week, so I couldn't see my kids. I spent so much money calling them on the phone! After almost a year I heard of a Mr. So-and-so who would pay $35 a week for someone to live there 5 days a week. He hired 2 of us and made an arrangement where we bought all the food with our salaries, we fed and cleaned up after him and his friends, and he let us take other jobs during the day. I met some awfully mean people that way. I don't know which are worse, the ones who are real demanding or the kind ones who think they are giving you charity. By then I had a reputation for making good Mexican food for parties, so I did that as well as cleaning for people.

But 6 weeks ago the señor came into our room while we were undressing and started getting fresh, so we left and moved to a cheap hotel downtown. I make $100 a week cooking and cleaning for different people, 6 days a week. That's a lot of money, but I work very hard. And I'm independent.

8

Stuffed Chili Peppers with Sauce for a party

30 green chilis
3 pounds of cream cheese
1 pound of yellow cheese
1 dozen eggs, separated
1 cup of raisins
flour
oil for frying
1 onion, chopped
8 cups of tomato sauce
oregano, salt and pepper

tomato sauce
6 pounds of tomatoes
1 pound of raisins
½ pound of almonds, blanched
3 cloves of garlic
2 ounces of ginger
1 ounce of dried, ground chilis
1 pound of sugar
1 quart of vinegar
salt

Broil the peppers over the fire until the skin blisters. Wrap them in a cloth for 10 minutes, then peel them. Slit one side, remove seeds and veins. Leave the stems. Stuff them with cheese and raisins. Beat the egg whites until they are thick. Add the yolks and beat again until they are fluffy. Add the salt. Dredge the chilis and dip them in the egg. Fry them until they are golden. Fry the onion and add the tomato

sauce you have prepared earlier. Add the oregano and the salt and pepper. Cook over a low flame for 5 minutes.

(To make the tomato sauce, cut up the tomatoes, add a little water, cook for ½ hour. Put through a sieve. Grind the raisins, nuts, garlic, ginger, and chilis. Add to the tomatoes. Add sugar, vinegar, salt. Cook until thick.)

9

There is a woman in La Jolla who tried to organize the maids, cooks, and gardeners, the legal ones, because even they make less than $2 an hour without any job security. If they get sick or their bosses go on vacation there is no work. I have even gone to some of their meetings, and it was there that I found out various things. I learned that the inspectores no longer pay $50 for information about illegals and that they do not care about the women, only the men. Some of them have illegal maids themselves. But even so, we all know that for each one of us there are hundreds of hungry and desperate people in Mexico who would gladly take our jobs for half the pay. Especially now, with such hard times. I was one of them.

Now that I'm independent I could have spent more time with my kids but two weeks ago my big fear was realized because they took away my mica. They took 20 or 30 away from us while I was there, all at once, without asking any questions. They said we would get them back after they were checked, but almost never are they returned and now they are hard to get. I missed work for days, and finally I paid $50 to those men with cars. This time they passed a bunch of us, one at a time, from one man to the other along the border. There were so many snakes that I thought I'd get bitten before I made it across.

10

Now I'm looking for a job with a family that will let me bring my kids. I know I'll make less, but it's worth it. I have a friend who is marrying a gringo she does not love, but he wants a good Mexican wife and cook, and he will adopt her daughter. I would rather live in Mexico but there is no work by which I can support myself and my kids. If I get a job in the U.S. where I can keep my kids I won't have to face the border troubles. It is true I will still have the other things to worry about, like other people's messes, or the señoras who ask me, sometimes in English and sometimes in Spanish, am I going to cook them a Mexican dinner? Or like their husbands, who don't ask but who wish to get from me something else.

11

Bien Cocina la moza, pero mejor la bolsa.
(The maid cooks well, but the pocketbook cooks better.)
—Mexican saying, quoted in *Elena's Mexican Cookbook*

TITLE: Tijuana Maid food novel 3
COST: postcards: paper $10.77
postage $300.
printing: $20.
miscellaneous: $5.

11 units, run of approx. 350; originally printed by the artist on ElectroGestetner and by Moonlite Blueprint, La Jolla. Orig. cost, about $1/set.

SOURCES: Women's stories as represented in articles by Laurie Becklund in the San Diego *Evening Tribune* of Oct. 10 & 11, 1973; talks with Josefina Foulks, Laurie Becklund, Cecilia Duarte, Iris Blanco & others on both sides of the mistress-servant relationship, some of whom can't be named; many "Mexican" cookbooks for Americans, among them George Booth's *Food & Drink of Mexico* and Elinor Burt's *Olla Podrida*; and of couse, *Home Maid Spanish* and *Home Maid Spanish Cook Book*.

ATTRIBUTIONS: Margaret Storm & Elsie Ginnett, *Home Maid Spanish Cook Book,* Apron Pocket Press, La Jolla, 1968.

Homage to Ousmane Sembene's film *Black Girl* (Senegal, 1966).

Translated with Oscar Chavez, Victor Zamudio, and Norma Quintero-Peters; and Cecilia Duarte, Alda Blanco, Iris Blanco and Esther Guerrero-Catarrivas.

"Recent converts to the Chicano movement, like gringos, want to learn tortilla making from a cookbook recipe. Impossible!"—Jose Angel Gutierrez, *Gringo Manual on How to Handle Mexicans*.

*The third part of a trilogy sent out as postcard novels, that also includes *a budding gourmet* and *McTowersMaid*; to be published early 1977 as *Service: A trilogy on colonization* by Printed Matter Inc., New York.

Martha Rosler is an artist living in Encinitas. She writes: "I grew up in Brooklyn, in a lower-middle-class milieu. I have lived in Manhattan and, for most of the past 8 years, in California. Much of my work centers on women's roles and occupations, particularly on how consciousness and language reflect social circumstance. I have paid special attention to the use of food in the context of affluent bourgeois culture, looking at the producers as well as the consumers. I work with video, photos, texts, and film; I do some critical writing and I teach movie and photo criticism."

Women in the Community Mural Movement

Eva Cockcroft

Women's role in the community mural movement is much greater than is generally recognized. Major city-sponsored mural programs in Boston (Adele Seronde and Summerthing), New York (Susan Shapiro-Kiok and Cityarts), and Los Angeles (Judy Baca and Citywide) have been initiated and directed by women artists, who have given these programs much of their character and philosophy. Women have led school mural projects, mural collectives, and mural-work with street youth. Whether working as individual muralists, members of coalitions, or in collectives, women have increasingly dominated the mural movement as a force for non-elitism, collectivity, and the practice of social philosophies ranging from humanism to Marxism.

Murals on urban walls reflecting the aspirations of neighborhood residents began as part of the more general social upheaval of the 1960s. Artists found themselves dragged into the social arena and forced to consider questions beyond those of pure form. By the late 1960s they could no longer avoid confronting questions concerning the relevance, audience, and uses of their art. A number of movements arose that tried to enlarge the audience and scope of contemporary art. Minority-group and politically active artists felt both a demand and an opportunity to create an art responsive to their special heritage and relevant to their own ethnic group, community, or movement. Mainstream artists attempted to bring art out of the museums and into the cities in the form of urban supergraphics, environmental sculptures, streetworks, and happenings. Out of the coincidence of these social and artistic forces the community mural movement began in 1967-68.

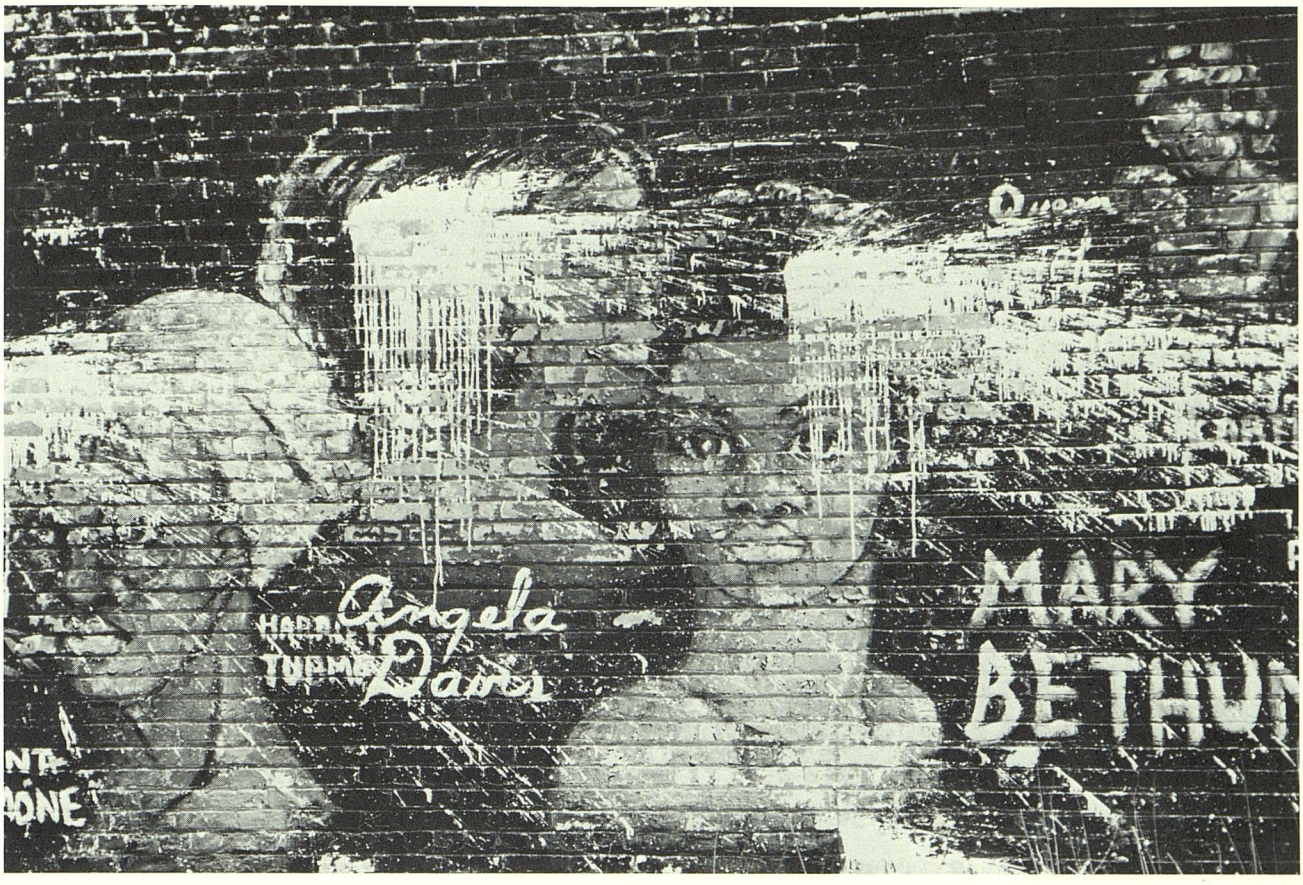
The mural movement took on different forms in different locations, depending on which particular combination of social forces spurred its beginnings. The first mural in Chicago, the 1967 *Wall of Respect,* was painted by 21 Black artists from the Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC) and celebrated Black history and culture. It was a political-art happening involving musicians and poets who played and read as the painting progressed. Although women artists participated in the *Wall of Respect,* they were not among those who continued the movement in Chicago and went from the OBAC wall to paint in Detroit.

For a long time Vanita Green's *Black Women* (1970) served as the token of women's participation in the Chicago mural movement. Green was 17, a high school dropout, when she saw William Walker painting the *Peace and Salvation Wall of Understanding* near the Cabrini-Green projects where she lived. After watching for a time, she asked Walker for paints and brushes and on a storage shed nearby painted portraits of famous Black women from Aunt Jemima to Angela Davis. Almost immediately afterwards, the wall was defaced with large splashes of white paint, practically the only defacement in Chicago up to that time. When Green saw what the vandals had done, she commented, "Before, it was just a pretty picture, but it says more now." In general, though, during those early years women found their place largely as assistants and apprentices in one of the two major community-based Chicago mural groups: Public Art Workshop, led by Mark Rogovin, and Chicago Mural Group, a multi-ethnic coalition led by William Walker and John Weber.

In Boston, on the other hand, women played an important role in introducing the mural idea. Boston artist Adele Seronde's proposal calling for the use of neglected city sites to transform the city into a museum was the start. Through the collaboration of Kathy Kane of the Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs, the Institute of Contemporary Art, a number of Black artists, and Seronde, Summerthing was launched. It was the largest and most productive of the early mural programs, beginning in 1968 and peaking in 1970. The Summerthing program combined elements of three distinct phenomena which had emerged the preceding year—the renaissance in Black culture (*Wall of Respect*), the "Summer in the City Paint-in Festival" and various clean-up programs, and the desire of environmental artists to work in urban spaces. Summerthing sponsored Black Power murals, children's playground and pocket-park projects, and decorative walls—all within a framework allowing for neighborhood control. Under Seronde's direction, the program emphasized the sociological rather than the decorative aspect of public art. Many impressive walls were painted from 1968 to 1970, especially in the Black communities of Roxbury and South End—including the first women's wall, Sharon Dunn's *Black Women,* painted in 1970.

Seronde is only one of many women who

Vanita Green. *Black Women.* 1970. Chicago, Illinois.



have made important contributions as organizers and administrators. Judy Baca, a leading Chicana muralist in Los Angeles, obtained City funding for a similar neighborhood-oriented large-scale mural program (Citywide Murals) in 1974. Shelly Killen heads a program for murals in prisons in Rhode Island, which has operated in the correctional institutions there for the past two years. Sandy Rubin's Alternate Graffiti Workshop in Philadelphia pioneered techniques for developing the artistic potential of graffiti writers; several of her workshop graduates have become muralists in their own right. Ruth Asawa and Nancy Thompson developed the Alvarado School-Community Program in San Francisco, which brings community artists into the public schools to enrich the school experience and has helped to open the doors to "Artists in the Schools" programs around the country. In fact, at the present time, the majority of the mural programs throughout the nation are directed by women.

The major influx of women artists into the mural movement did not take place until 1971-73 when news about the community walls had become better known outside the actual mural communities. This was also a time of expansion for the Women's Liberation Movement. Many women artists tried mural work, but not all of them became muralists. Community mural work, although highly rewarding, requires a certain kind of openness and great dedication. It also demands physical labor, community organizing, going to meetings, and an ability to deal with the great variety of people who come up to talk or make comments. However, a number of the women who did become involved in the early 1970s now identify themselves as muralists and are recognized for their artistic contributions.

The development of Caryl Yasko, one of the best muralists in the nation and a leader of the Chicago Mural Group, illustrates this process. Like Green, Yasko was introduced to the mural movement through William Walker when she volunteered as a parent-assistant for a mural he was directing with children at her neighborhood school. After this experience, Yasko and her partner in a small art enterprise, Kathy Judge, a ceramicist, worked with small children to paint *Walls of Hope*. Yasko and Judge were then invited to join the Chicago Mural Group. In the summer of 1972, Yasko directed her first major project, *Under City Stone,* a mural that runs throughout the 55th Street underpass in Hyde Park. Painted from Yasko's design with the help of a team recruited from passers-by, it shows hundreds of figures walking around and, above them, the machinery, technology, and pollution of today's city. Yasko painted herself in the

Caryl Yasko. *I Am the People.* 1974. 2659 N. Milwaukee, Chicago, Illinois. (Photo: Eva Cockcroft.)

crowd—a slim young woman, paintbrushes in hand, a baby on her back.

The following year, Yasko painted in the heart of the Black-Belt South Side with a team of young Black people. Located on a prenatal clinic wall, this mural depicts statuesque, larger-than-life women with their children. In 1974 Yasko broke new ground for the Chicago muralists. Although murals had become commonplace in many areas of Chicago, certain white working-class areas peopled by Polish and other Middle-European immigrants remained untouched. The question of whether murals were valid only for minority-group ghetto areas or would also be meaningful in white working-class neighborhoods was in the air. In those cities where the murals had begun with the Black Power thrust of the late sixties, a movement toward more general themes was beginning. In 1974 Yasko began a mammoth mural in the Logan Square area of Chicago. The mural uses symbolic figures and images to identify the values of the largely Polish and Bielorussian residents of the area and to depict them working together to maintain control in a highly technical, mechanized world. This major wall has opened the door for a number of other murals in this and similar neighborhoods.

Yasko, however, is only one of many women muralists who have made important artistic contributions. Lucy Mahler's vivid mural at the Wright Brothers School in New York is one of the earliest murals on a public school building. Astrid Fuller, with her distinctive combination

Marie Burton, director. *Celebration of Cultures.* 1975. Milwaukee, Wisconsin. (Photo: Weber.)

Mujeres Muralistas. *Latinoamerica.* 1974. 25th and Mission Streets, San Francisco, California. (Photo: Eva Cockcroft.)

of a primitive literalism with surrealist images, has created a series of ambitious underpass murals in the Hyde Park area of Chicago. Holly Highfill, who painted an anti-war mural in the Loop area of Chicago (1973), has gone on to do several succeeding walls with gang youth. Marie Burton, who with Highfill and Rogovin co-authored the *Mural Manual,* works primarily with teenagers. Her *Bored of Education* in Chicago (1971) and the *Celebration of Cultures* in Milwaukee (1975) are among the most impressive of the school murals. And these are just a few of the women muralists working on community walls in a way that might be called the "Chicago model" (others are Justine DeVan, Esther Charbit, Ruth Felton, and Celia Radek).

In the Chicago model, the artist-leader of a mural team, using community and youth input, designs the wall and directs the painting of it. The community participates as a new class of patrons who help to pay for the mural and are consulted on the design. In spite of the change in patronage, and participation of community people as team members, the Chicago model's emphasis on professionalism is fairly close to the mural tradition through the ages. Murals, after all, have rarely been painted by individuals; mostly they are done by a group of assistants working under a master.

This hierarchical process has been challenged by several developments within the mural movement. One is the experimentation with artists' collectives. A collective is a very difficult and highly unstable form of organization in a society emphasizing individualism, and few last longer than a year or two. Many women muralists have come into the movement as organizers or members of a collective group. The mutual support and shared responsibility the collective offers an individual is often necessary to provide the courage to attempt a first mural (and some of the labor power to finish it). Especially in the case of women this factor can be decisive.

Within the Latin culture, *machismo* often reaches rather extreme forms, yet this is countered by a strong communal tradition. It is not surprising therefore that in 1974 a group of Latin American women muralists—Mujeres Muralistas—was formed in San Francisco. Most of the women were students or recent graduates of the San Francisco Art Institute and connected with the Galeria de La Raza, the center for Chicano artists in the Mission district. Their philosophy was simple and very positive:

> Our cultures, our images are strong. It is important that the atmosphere of the world be plagued with color and life. Throughout History there have been very few women who have figured in art. What you see is proof that women, too, can work at this level. That we can put together scaffolding and climb it. We offer you the colors that we make.

People's Painters. *Women.* 1972. Women's Center, Livingston College, New Jersey.

Judy Baca, director. *Hollenbeck Park Bandshell.* Los Angeles, California. (Photo: Citywide Murals.)

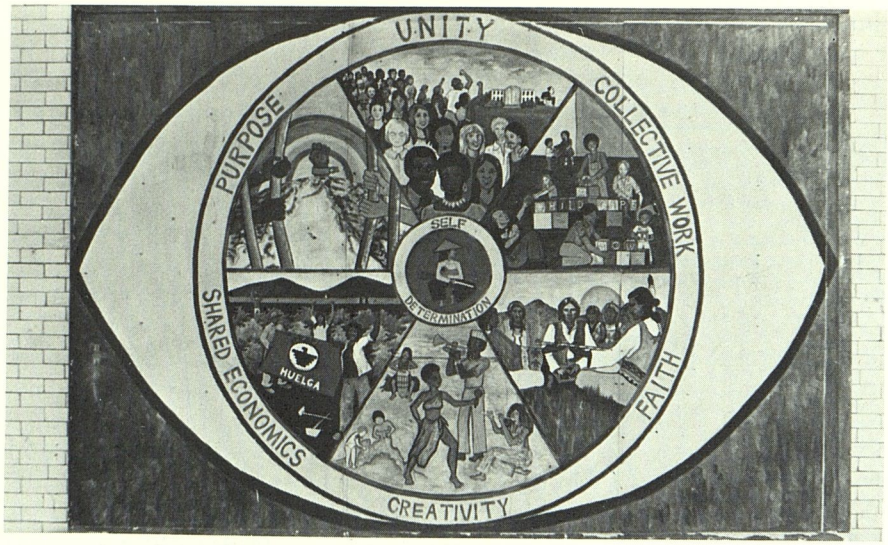
Their two best-known walls, *Latinoámerica* and the Paco's Tacos Stand mural were both done in the spring and summer of 1974. They celebrate the beauty and richness of the Latin tradition. For *Latinoámerica,* the four women comprising the original core of Mujeres Muralistas—Patricia Rodriguez, Consuelo Mendez Castillo, Irene Perez, and Graciela Carrillo de Lopez—worked together to create the design. Different parts of the mural are painted by each artist in her individual style; yet the mural succeeds as a unified work because of the clear organization, and the distinctively bright, clear color that is characteristic of the group. In the Paco's Tacos mural the unity is more tenuous. The wall divides into two distinctly different halves reflecting the different artistic styles of Consuelo Mendez Castillo and Graciela Carrillo de Lopez. In many ways Mujeres Muralistas was never really a "collective", but rather a group of women who came together to work on a particular wall mural. An almost instant fame forced them into a prematurely formalized existence as a "collective group," while leaving them little time to resolve differences in political consciousness between members of the group, or cultural differences between Chicana and Latin American women. The problem of individualism was never really tackled, although there was an attempt to make decisions by a consensus of the group. Internal differences caused the group to dissolve formally early in 1976. The women who comprised Mujeres Muralistas are now working as individual muralists.

Many mural-painting collectives, including most of those that grew out of the largely white counterculture and anti-war movements, either start with women who then invite male artists in, or simply include both women and men. Often led by women with roots in Marxism and feminism, these collectives tend to be strongly anti-sexist, anti-imperialist, and to use overtly political images in their artwork. One of these groups was the People's Painters of New Jersey, who "muralized" Livingston College from 1972 to 1974. Modeled after the Ramona Parra Brigades of Allende's Chile, the People's Painters were concerned equally with the political effects of their murals and with trying to overcome individualism and a sense of personal ego. Their first wall was for the Livingston Women's Center, which was very appropriate since the founders of the group—Julia Smith, Kathy Jones, and myself—considered ourselves activists in the Women's Liberation Movement. We worked on the design collectively, discussing ideas first and then finding the images. We chose to work in a simple style, using heavy black outlines and flat color, so that the women at the Center could help us paint. We also consciously worked over parts of the mural that others had originated to combat the tendency to say at the end of the project, "And this part is mine." While we did not wholly succeed in eliminating our sense of personal ego, we did find that by consciously emphasizing collectivity in our work we could overcome personal insecurities and achieve stronger political and artistic results. We went on to incorporate men into our group and painted eight other murals before agreeing to disperse in 1974, when some of our members graduated and others decided to go on to other things.

The Haight-Ashbury Muralists in San Francisco, a collective led by Jane Norling, see themselves as "anti-imperialist cultural workers." Their first mural, *Rainbow People,* was painted in 1972 as part of a large anti-war demonstration. A Haight landmark, *Rainbow People* was repainted and updated in 1974. *Unity Eye* (1973) diagrams the ingredients for creating a revolutionary culture in the United States. The mural shows a revolution peopled and led by women, and was painted by an all-female team. Most recently, the Haight-Ashbury Muralists have been working on a 300-foot-long history of the class struggle in San Francisco.

The most radical and problematic challenge to tradition has been the development of collective murals in which non-artist members of a community work with an artist-facilitator who helps them to create their own mural. While a strong emphasis on community participation characterizes all community mural projects, this particular emphasis reflects an attempt to create a "people's art" in every sense of the word. Simply providing paint and a wall to teenagers and young adults is not the answer. There must be a direction, a method for working cooperatively, and a technique that makes it possible to bypass the need for years of study of drawing and design.

The most complete method, and the model for much related work elsewhere in the nation, was developed by Susan Shapiro-Kiok and the Cityarts staff in New York City. This method begins with a number of concept meetings during which the theme is discussed. In the early Cityarts Workshop murals, scenes were acted out and developed, photographed, and then projected and traced. When the mock-up was complete, it was enlarged by an opaque projector and painted in. *Black Women of Africa Today* (1971), designed and executed by teenage girls at "The Smith" housing project on the Lower East Side, is typical of the early silhouette style. Later murals became more complex as the technique came to include the use of drawings and slides as well as photographs and the opaque projector. The Jewish ethnic mural at the Bialystoker Old People's Home is a collage of images designed and painted by a group of Jewish teenagers under the direction of Susan Caruso-Green (current director of Cityarts Workshop).



Haight-Ashbury Muralists. *Unity Eye.* 1973. Haight and Shrader Streets, San Francisco, California. (Photo: Tim Drescher.)

Eva Cockcroft. *Warrensburg.* 1976. Oddfellows Temple, Main Street, Warrensburg, New York. (Photo: Oren Lane.)

Tomi Arai, director, with Lower East Side women, *Wall of Respect for Women.* 1974. East Broadway and Rutgers Street, New York City. (Photo: Cami Homann, Cityarts Workshop.)

Two other collective walls were painted in 1974 and 1975 by Lower East Side women under the direction of Tomie Arai. *The Wall of Respect for Women* (1974) epitomizes the non-antagonistic type of feminism portrayed on non-white community walls dealing with the theme of woman. Rather than condemning more traditional women's roles (e.g., mother, telephone operator), this mural celebrates all the roles played by women. The second wall, *Women Hold Up Half the Sky* (1975), painted by many of the same women who worked on the earlier wall, as well as some men, portrays women's oppression within the context of the larger social struggle. Although most of the images come from a generalized women's experience, the figures breaking out of oppression are of both sexes. In both walls women are shown performing their traditional jobs and, with few exceptions, this is the way women are portrayed in community walls.

Some murals about women emphasize the biological factor, and almost all include the mother-child theme. Yet these would be considered highly conservative images by the Women's Liberation Movement. The use of such stereotypical images of women is not the result of ignorance on the part of women muralists. In part it reflects the goals of Third World feminism, in which women's rights are seen as one part of the more general social struggle, and great care is taken to keep feminism from appearing to be a divisive force.

Within political organizations like the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP), political education courses discuss the need to overcome *machismo* and the oppressive role definitions which make it difficult for men and women to work together as *compañeros*. Some of the verses from the song "Quiero decirte" (I Want to Tell You Something), written collectively by Suni Paz, Juana Díaz, and other Puerto Rican sisters in 1972 and often sung at political rallies and community events, state the changes in the male-female relationship for which they are struggling:

A la mujer me dirijo:
tu también debes luchar
para salir de una vez
de tu gran pasividad.

Al hombre le toca ahora:
entiende que la mujer
sabe pensar y sentir
*y tiene derecho a ser.**

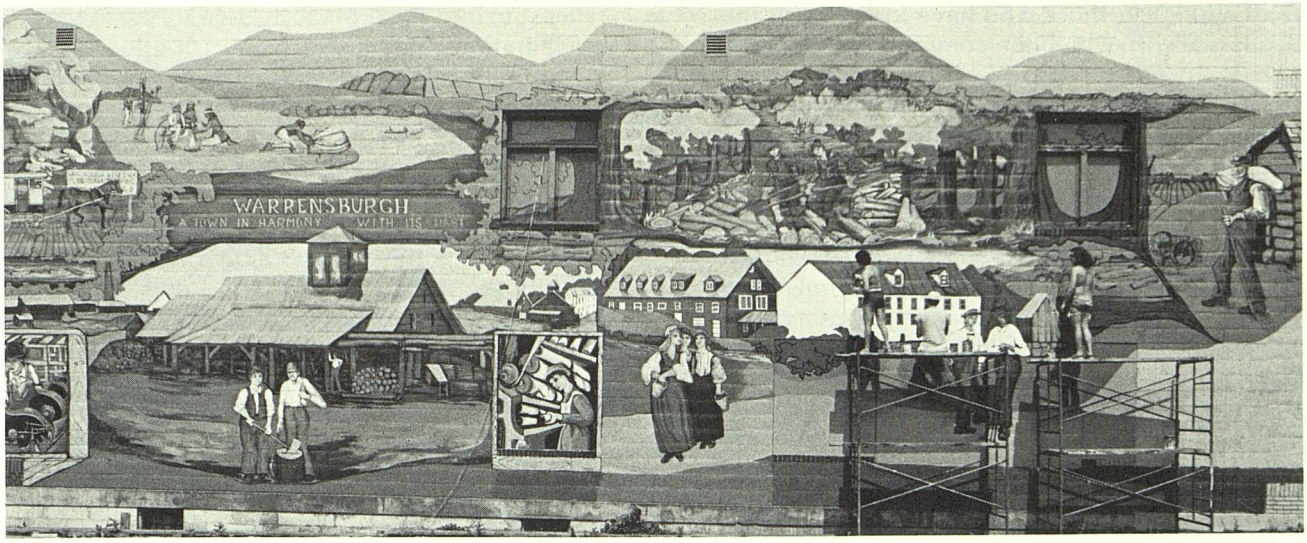
(To the woman I say
you must struggle to abandon
your conditioned passivity
and to leave it behind.

To the man I say
try to understand
that a woman can think and feel,
and has a right to exist.)

The mother in Latin culture is seen as the moral leader of the household and the authority in the education of her children. The forced sterilization of women by the U.S. government in Puerto Rico and other Latin American countries (as well as the poor at home) has served to intensify the felt need for women to bear children in order to preserve their race. This creates certain differences in attitude about population control and the family structure between Third World feminism and the rest of the Women's Liberation Movement.

Overtly feminist murals are found primarily on Women's Center walls, within the university world, and in certain selected city neighborhoods—Haight-Ashbury, for example—where a base of support exists. Most often, the feminist consciousness of women muralists is expressed by the substitution of female for male as a symbolic or heroic figure, or even by the mere inclusion of women as active figures in any mural.

The problem of responsibility to the perma-



nent audience, those who have to live with the art, is one with which the community muralist is constantly faced. The ideal is to work constantly at the cutting edge of issues—neither too far ahead nor too far behind. This is a continual struggle involving a constant series of difficult decisions and has been a direct part of my own recent experience as a muralist. After several years of working in a relatively radicalized university setting, I undertook some murals in a very different environment—a conservative small town in the Adirondack mountains. My problem was how to paint a bicentennial mural that would be accepted by the permanent residents as their history and yet not violate my convictions, or the truth. Just as I began work in early 1976, the very town authorities who were my sponsors whitewashed a youth mural on ecology I had directed in 1974, which was critical of the town's dumping sewage into the Schroon River. I conceived my design as a compromise: the ancestors of the present residents are shown as workers in the logging industry, the saw mill, and the textile factories—a working-class history, but one with only positive images. I began painting the wall with great misgivings. It was the reaction of the "locals," and their enthusiastic hunger for their own history, that made me realize that it is not just minority-group people or urban ghetto residents who have been deprived of their history and their right to their own art expression, but every segment of America's working people.

Communication between muralists around the nation has increased greatly since 1974. Three major mural conferences have occurred and the exchange of information and techniques has furthered experimentation. Many muralists who previously worked alone have begun to experiment with collective techniques and vice versa. In 1975, for example, five muralists from the Chicago Mural Group (Caryl Yasko, Mitchell Caton, Celia Radek, Justine DeVan, and Lucyna Radycki) worked on a collectively designed and painted wall. *Prescription for Good Health Care*. The muralists were a mixed group—racially, sexually, and in terms of previous mural experience. This was their first collectively designed wall, although they had helped each other to paint on other walls. The location at 57th and Kedzie is near the headquarters of the American Nazi Party in Chicago. Initially, there was some fear that racial attacks might prevent the group from working, but there were no disturbances during the time the mural was being painted. Acceptance in this white working-class neighborhood of a racially mixed group of muralists reflects the prestige that murals have achieved in Chicago.

The continuing attempt at collectivity and away from the individualistic "genius" concept of the artist prevalent in the art world has been one of the major distinctions pioneered by women in the mural movement; it derives at least in part from the influence of the Women's Liberation Movement. The non-hierarchical structures of the early women's organizations, as well as the direct experience of consciousness-raising groups, with the sisterhood and support they provided, became a part of the outlook of a number of the women muralists. The changes resulting from their individual experiences with Women's Liberation led them to bring the same egalitarian and collective practices to the mural groups they joined or helped found.

While ideas from feminism and Marxism are implicit in the attempt to create a people's art—especially in murals by women—the level of politicization and consciousness among muralists varies greatly. Most community muralists, however, if they were familiar with Mao's words at the Yenan Forum, would agree that:

> In the world today all culture, all literature and art belong to definite classes and are geared to definite political lines. There is in fact no such thing as Art for art's sake, art that stands above classes, art that is detached from or independent of politics.

If that is true, one must choose—and they have chosen.

*From "Brotando del Silencio" (Breaking Out of the Silence), songs by Suni Paz, Paredon P-1016, Paredon Records, Box 889, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11202.

Eva Cockcroft is a muralist and co-author (with John Weber and Jim Cockcroft) of the forthcoming book, *Towards a People's Art: The Contemporary Mural Movement* (E.P. Dutton).

Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying

Adrienne Rich

(*These notes are concerned with relationships between and among women. When "personal relationship" is referred to, I mean a relationship between two women. It will be clear in what follows when I am talking about women's relationships with men.*)

The old, male idea of honor. A man's "word" sufficed—to other men—without guarantee.

"Our Land Free, Our Men Honest, Our Women Fruitful"—a popular colonial toast in America.

Male honor also having something to do with killing: *I could not love thee, Dear, so much / Lov'd I not Honour more* ("To Lucasta, On Going to the Wars"). Male honor as something needing to be avenged: hence, the duel.

Women's honor, something altogether else: virginity, chastity, fidelity to a husband. Honesty in women has not been considered important. We have been depicted as generically whimsical, deceitful, subtle, vacillating. And we have been rewarded for lying.

Men have been expected to tell the truth about facts, not about feelings. They have not been expected to talk about feelings at all.

Yet even about facts they have continually lied.

We assume that politicians are without honor. We read their statements trying to crack the code. The scandals of their politics: not that men in high places lie, only that they do so with such indifference, so endlessly, still expecting to be believed. We are accustomed to the contempt inherent in the political lie.

To discover that one has been lied to in a personal relationship, however, leads one to feel a little crazy.

Lying is done with words, and also with silence.

The woman who tells lies in her personal relationships may or may not plan or invent her lying. She may not even think of what she is doing in a calculated way.

A subject is raised which the liar wishes buried. She has to go downstairs, her parking-meter will have run out. Or there is a telephone call she ought to have made an hour ago.

She is asked, point-blank, a question which may lead into painful talk: "How do you feel about what is happening between us?" Instead of trying to describe her feelings in their ambiguity and confusion, she asks, "How do *you* feel?" The other, because she is trying to establish a ground of openness and trust, begins describing her own feelings. Thus the liar learns more than she tells.

And she may also tell herself a lie: that she is concerned with the other's feelings, not with her own.

But the liar is concerned with her own feelings.

The liar lives in fear of losing control. She cannot even desire a relationship without manipulation, since to be vulnerable to another person means for her the loss of control.

The liar has many friends, and leads an existence of great loneliness.

The liar often suffers from amnesia. Amnesia is the silence of the unconscious.

To lie habitually, as a way of life, is to lose contact with the unconscious. It is like taking sleeping pills, which confer sleep but blot out dreaming. The unconscious wants truth. It ceases to speak to those who want something else more than truth.

In speaking of lies, we come inevitably to the subject of truth. There is nothing simple or easy about this idea. There is no "the truth," "a truth"—truth is not one thing, or even a system. It is an increasing complexity. The pattern of the carpet is a surface. When we look closely, or when we become weavers, we learn of the tiny multiple threads unseen in the overall pattern, the knots on the underside of the carpet.

This is why the effort to speak honestly is so important. Lies are usually attempts to make

everything simpler—for the liar—than it really is, or ought to be.

In lying to others we end up lying to ourselves. We deny the importance of an event, or a person, and thus deprive ourselves of a part of our lives. Or we use one piece of the past or present to screen out another. Thus we lose faith even with our own lives.

The unconscious wants truth, as the body does. The complexity and fecundity of dreams come from the complexity and fecundity of the unconscious struggling to fulfill that desire. The complexity and fecundity of poetry come from the same struggle.

An honorable human relationship—that is, one in which two people have the right to use the word "love"—is a process, delicate, violent, often terrifying to both persons involved, a process of refining the truths they can tell each other.

It is important to do this because it breaks down human self-delusion and isolation.

It is important to do this because in so doing we do justice to our own complexity.

It is important to do this because we can count on so few people to go that hard way with us.

I come back to the question of women's honor. Truthfulness has not been considered important for women, as long as we have remained physically faithful to a man, or chaste.

We have been expected to lie with our bodies: to bleach, redden, unkink or curl our hair, pluck eyebrows, shave armpits, wear padding in various places or lace ourselves, take little steps, glaze finger and toe nails, wear clothes that emphasize our helplessness.

We have been required to tell different lies at different times, depending on what the men of the time needed to hear. The Victorian wife or the white southern lady, who were expected to have no sensuality, to "lie still"; the twentieth-century "free" woman who is expected to fake orgasms.

We have had the truth of our bodies withheld from us or distorted; we have been kept in ignorance of our most intimate places. Our instincts have been punished: clitorectomies for "lustful" nuns or for "difficult" wives. It has been difficult, too, to know the lies of our complicity from the lies we believed.

The lie of the "happy marriage," of domesticity —we have been complicit, have acted out the fiction of a well-lived life, until the day we testify in court of rapes, beatings, psychic cruelties, public and private humiliations.

Patriarchal lying has manipulated women both through falsehood and through silence. Facts we needed have been withheld from us. False witness has been borne against us.

And so we must take seriously the question of truthfulness between women, truthfulness among women. As we cease to lie with our bodies, as we cease to take on faith what men have said about us, is a truly womanly idea of honor in the making?

Women have been forced to lie, for survival, to men. How to unlearn this among other women?

> "Women have always lied to each other." "Women have always whispered the truth to each other." Both of these axioms are true.
>
> "Women have always been divided against each other." "Women have always been in secret collusion." Both of these axioms are true.

In the struggle for survival we tell lies. To bosses, to prison guards, the police, men who have power over us, who legally own us and our children, lovers who need us as proof of their manhood.

There is a danger run by all powerless people: that we forget we are lying, or that lying becomes a weapon we carry over into relationships with people who do not have power over us.

I want to reiterate that when we talk about women and honor, or women and lying, we speak within the context of male lying, the lies of the powerful, the lie as a false source of power.

Women have to think whether we want, in our relationships with each other, the kind of power that can be obtained through lying.

Women have been driven mad, "gaslighted," for centuries by the refutation of our experience and our instincts in a culture which validates only male experience. The truth of our bodies and our minds has been mystified to us. We therefore have a primary obligation to each other: not to undermine each other's sense of

reality for the sake of expediency; not to gaslight each other.

Women have often felt insane when cleaving to the truth of our experience. Our future depends on the sanity of each of us, and we have a profound stake, beyond the personal, in the project of describing our reality as candidly and fully as we can to each other.

There are phrases which help us not to admit we are lying: "my privacy," "nobody's business but my own." The choices that underlie these phrases may indeed be justified; but we ought to think about the full meaning and consequences of such language.

Women's love for women has been represented almost entirely through silence and lies. The institution of heterosexuality has forced the lesbian to dissemble, or be labelled a pervert, a criminal, a sick or dangerous woman, etc., etc. The lesbian, then, has often been forced to lie, like the prostitute or the married woman.

Does a life "in the closet"—lying, perhaps of necessity, about ourselves to bosses, landlords, clients, colleagues, family, because the law and public opinion are founded on a lie—does this, can it, spread into public life, so that lying (described as *discretion*) becomes an easy way to avoid conflict or complication? Can it become a strategy so ingrained that it is used even with close friends and lovers?

Heterosexuality as an institution has also drowned in silence the erotic feelings between women. I myself lived half a lifetime in the lie of that denial. That silence makes us all, to some degree, into liars.

When a woman tells the truth she is creating the possibility for more truth around her.

The liar leads an existence of unutterable loneliness.

The liar is afraid.

But we are all afraid: without fear we become manic, hubristic, self-destructive. What is this particular fear that possesses the liar?

She is afraid that her own truths are not good enough.

She is afraid, not so much of prison guards or bosses, but of something unnamed within her.

The liar fears the void.

The void is not something created by patriarchy, or racism, or capitalism. It will not fade away with any of them. It is part of every woman.

"The dark core," Virginia Woolf named it, writing of her mother. The dark core. It is beyond personality; beyond who loves us or hates us.

We begin out of the void, out of darkness and emptiness. It is part of the cycle understood by the old pagan religions, that materialism denies. Out of death, rebirth; out of nothing, something.

The void is the creatrix, the matrix. It is not mere hollowness and anarchy. But in women it has been identified with lovelessness, barrenness, sterility. We have been urged to fill our "emptiness" with children. We are not supposed to go down into the darkness of the core.

Yet, if we can risk it, the something born of that nothing is the beginning of our truth.

The liar in her terror wants to fill up the void, with anything. Her lies are a denial of her fear; a way of maintaining control.

Why do we feel slightly crazy when we realize we have been lied to in a relationship?

We take so much of the universe on trust. You tell me: "In 1950 I lived on the north side of Beacon Street in Somerville." You tell me: "She and I were lovers, but for months now we have only been good friends." You tell me: "It is seventy degrees outside and the sun is shining." Because I love you, because there is not even a question of lying between us, I take these accounts of the universe on trust: your address twenty-five years ago, your relationship with someone I know only by sight, this morning's weather. I fling unconscious tendrils of belief, like slender green threads, across statements such as these, statements made so unequivocally, which have no tone or shadow of tentativeness. I build them into the mosaic of my world. I allow my universe to change in minute, significant ways, on the basis of things you have said to me, of my trust in you.

I also have faith that you are telling me things it is important I should know; that you do not conceal facts from me in an effort to spare me, or yourself, pain.

Or, at the very least, that you will say, "There are things I am not telling you."

When we discover that someone we trusted can

be trusted no longer, it forces us to re-examine the universe, to question the whole instinct and concept of trust. For a while, we are thrust back onto some bleak, jutting ledge, in a dark pierced by sheets of fire, swept by sheets of rain, in a world before kinship, or naming, or tenderness exist; we are brought close to formlessness.

The liar may resist confrontation, denying that she lied. Or she may use other language: forgetfulness, privacy, the protection of someone else. Or she may bravely declare herself a coward. This allows her to go on lying, since that is what cowards do. She does not say, *I was afraid,* since this would open the question of other ways of handling her fear. It would open the question of what is actually feared.

She may say, *I didn't want to cause pain*. What she really did not want is to have to deal with the other's pain. The lie is a short-cut through another's personality.

Truthfulness, honor, is not something which springs ablaze of itself; it has to be created between people.

This is true in political situations. The quality and depth of the politics evolving from a group depends in very large part on their understanding of honor.

Much of what is narrowly termed "politics" seems to rest on a longing for certainty even at the cost of honesty, for an analysis which, once given, need not be re-examined. Such is the dead-endedness—for women—of Marxism in our time.

Truthfulness anywhere means a heightened complexity. But it is a movement into evolution. Women are only beginning to uncover our own truths; many of us would be grateful for some rest in that struggle, would be glad just to lie down with the sherds we have painfully unearthed, and be satisfied with those. Often I feel this like an exhaustion in my own body.

The politics worth having, the relationships worth having, demand that we delve still deeper.

The possibilities that exist between two people, or among a group of people, are a kind of alchemy. They are the most interesting things in life. The liar is someone who keeps losing sight of these possibilities.

When relationships are determined by manipulation, by the need for control, they may possess a dreary, bickering kind of drama, but they cease to be interesting. They are repetitious; the shock of human possibility has ceased to reverberate through them.

When someone tells me a piece of the truth which has been withheld from me, and which I needed in order to see my life more clearly, it may bring acute pain, but it can also flood me with a cold, sea-sharp wash of relief. Often such truths come by accident, or from strangers.

It isn't that to have an honorable relationship with you, I have to understand everything, or tell you everything at once, or that I can know, beforehand, everything I need to tell you.

It means that most of the time I am eager, longing for the possibility of telling you. That these possibilities may seem frightening, but not destructive, to me. That I feel strong enough to hear your tentative and groping words. That we both know we are trying, all the time, to extend the possibilities of truth between us.

The possibility of life between us.

Adrienne Rich is a well-known poet and feminist who has published 9 books. The most recent one, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (W.W. Norton & Company), she described as coming "from the double need to survive and to work; and I wrote it in part for the young woman I once was, divided between body and mind, wanting to give her the book she was seeking. . . ."

Elizabeth Zelvin

Adman

twelve years later, how funny running into you
i remember you in glasses and a bowtie
before mad avenue bought space
in the revolution

you are conscientiously updated
you have let your hair grow longer
in that slick packaged heaven
where good admen go
you will play electric harp

you have remembered every moment
all this time
and remind me of it over steak
which you have paid for
your revolution balks at going dutch
mine will be vegetarian by next week
but just this once i'll buy your buying me
my steak
i'm curious to remember how it feels

i took my diaphragm everywhere in those days
the only part i remember is when you said
why don't we go ahead, do what we've both been thinking
but i hadn't, honestly, or i would never
have put my flannel nightgown on
sorry, i don't remember
anything that happened after that
it was all so long ago
and meant so little

twelve years ago, before the revolution
it was usually too much trouble to say no
especially when the man had bought you
steak
you are curious to remember how it feels
but i have chewed and sat with downcast eyes
letting you tell some patent Barbie me
that i'm more womanly (sic) than your ex-wife
and feel i've paid enough
thanks for the steak, good seeing you again
i mouth, *let's get together soon*
i do not say, *there's been a revolution*
and there have been too many one night stands

Zucchini Poem

the zucchini crouches
behind a broad green leaf
patient in her camouflage

imperialist tentacles of vine
are taking over the garden
shouting *mine mine*

like a woman waiting
for the revolution
the zucchini bides her time

rain falls in the night
first stealthy
then triumphant like a coup d'état

come morning
the zucchini squats
swollen in the sunlight

proud of her belly
covering the earth
with a yellow flower behind her ear

Elizabeth Zelvin is a writer living in New York who has poems appearing in *Womanspirit* and *13th Moon*. She has recently completed a book about an alternative marriage, and among her other interests are "singing and song-writing, teaching creative movement, and trying to understand the synthesis of anarchism and feminism."

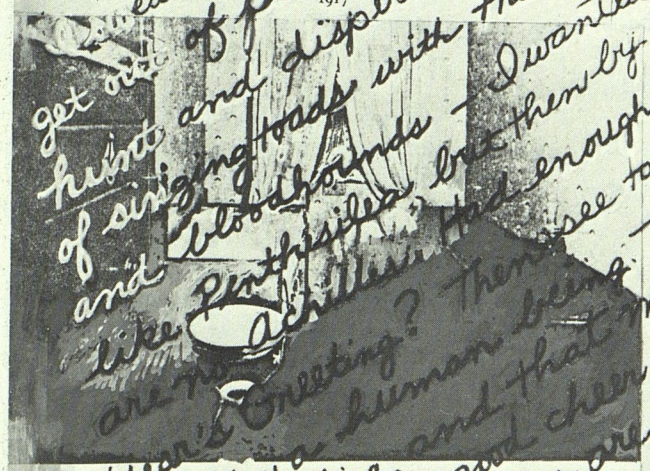
Rosa Luxemburg. Secret letter to her friend, Fanny, written from prison in urine on a page of French poetry, dated probably 1917. Her cell at Wronke 1916–1917. Her murderer, Runge, the man in the center with the drooping moustache, at the Eden Hotel, Berlin, January 16, 1917.

Rosa Luxemburg

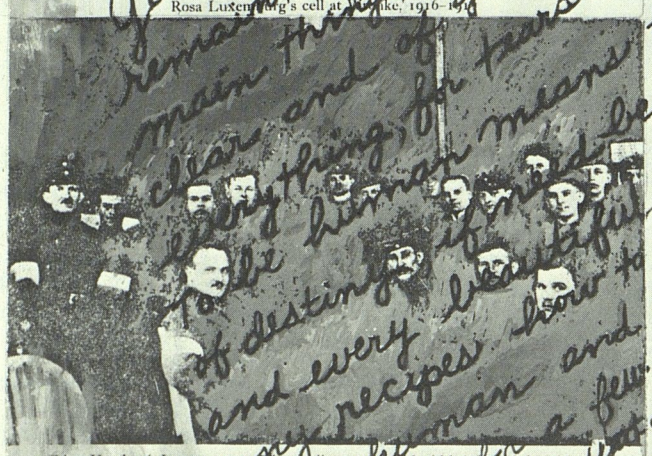
CHANT IV 123

Mais aussi pardonnez, si, plein de ce beau zèle,
De tous vos pas fameux observateur fidèle,
Quelquefois du bon et je sépare le faux,
Et des auteurs anciens j'attaque les défauts;
Censeur un peu fâcheux, mais souvent nécessaire,
Plus enclin à blâmer que savant à bien faire,

Secret letter from Rosa Luxemburg to Fanny Jezierska written from prison in urine on a page from a book of French poems, dated probably 1917



Rosa Luxemburg's cell at Wronke, 1916–1918



Eden Hotel, 16 January 1919. The soldier at the table (third from left, with drooping moustache) is Rosa Luxemburg's murderer, Runge.

May Stevens 1976

May Stevens. Above: *Two Women.* 1976. Collage. 10½ X 13½. Left: *Tribute to Rosa Luxemburg.* 1976. Collage. 16½" X 10". (Photos: Bevan Davies.)

May Stevens is a New York artist best known for her *Big Daddy* paintings, in which "the personal and the political are fused in autobiographical images which are also symbols of authority and patriarchy."

The Art of Not Bowing: Writing by Women in Prison

Carol Muske

Who the hell am I anyway
Not to bow?
(Assata Shakur/Joanne Chesimard)

In July 1973 I wrote an article for *The Village Voice* about a hunger strike then taking place at the Women's House of Detention (New York City Correctional Institution for Women, housing around 400 detention and sentenced women) on Riker's Island. I used a pseudonym for the article because I was working at the time at the prison as a mental health worker as well as teaching a poetry class, and I wanted to keep both occupations. Many of the women in my class were involved in the strike and were emphatic about the significance of their stand, although traditionally women at Riker's were notoriously apolitical, even downright reactionary. Strikes had taken place before, but on issues such as cosmetics (the women had wanted an Avon lady), more dances and recreation time or flashier products in commissary.

This strike was different. The women were demanding, among other things, a legal library, an end to massive and lax prescription of "diagnostic" medication, decent food, and limitation of solitary confinement to three days. At the Women's House, where an old adage ran "all riots end at mealtime," this was pretty heady stuff.

The article in *The Village Voice* (July 26, 1973) was supposed to get the world (or at least Manhattan) listening and to familiarize people with a woman's situation in prison:

> . . . incarceration for women is a somewhat different experience than it is for men. Male prisoners are expected to be political in one form or another, they are far better legally informed, and an atmosphere of "bonding" is prevalent. (They are also considered more "trainable"—more vocational rehab programs exist for men on Riker's Island.)

The administration broke the back of the strike in its sixth day by separating the ringleaders, transferring them to different housing areas, or locking them in the "bing" (solitary). But it was too late. The article appeared and provoked a reaction from the community: pressure was put on the warden. A few of the women's demands were met: a legal library was established, kitchen conditions were improved, and other steps were taken. Someone from the class hand-printed a sign and put it up in the classroom: WORDS CAN TURN THEM AROUND.

This was a milestone. I had been teaching the class for about a year and felt that although the women's response had been overwhelmingly enthusiastic, I was getting nowhere in the actual teaching of writing. It wasn't that the women were intimidated by the act of writing. Far from it. They wrote to keep mentally alive, to keep sane. When I first suggested the idea of a writing workshop to the warden, she scoffed at it. "These women don't write," she said. "They don't read. The overall educational level is poor. Reading, writing, comprehension . . . all very low." At the first class, I learned that all the women "wrote"—they came to class lugging diaries, journals, manuscripts full of long poems, ballads, stories. Everyone had a poem to "tell"; poetry was a tradition; poems were written, read, copied by hand, and passed around—a publishing network. No one owned a poem. All the poems rhymed, and all were either sentimental love/religious verse or political rhetoric. My failure had been the inability to let them see alternatives: a poem was not always an escape, a fantasy, or a slogan, but a way into yourself, an illumination. Somehow the article, which was about them, about their very real lives in clear, simple language, did it. Someone said that a poem could be like reporting on your life, telling the story of your life—journalism of the soul.

They tried out this approach. Millie Moss, who sat all day in front of the television watching commercials about getting away from it all and listening to the planes (one every three minutes) take off from La Guardia a few hundred yards across the water from the prison, wrote the first. (Millie had been a "hearts and flowers" verse writer: her poems were filled with "giggly sunsets"):

Fly Me, I'm Mildred

Finger my earring as I lean low
over your bomber cocktail
I've been known
to put you on a throne
send you off alone (not united)
through the tomb-boom roar
you get what you're asking for
when you fly me, honey,
I'm Mildred.

Personally

So you spoke to me in silence
in the ice man's choir
and I dangled all the while

You said (in silence)
live each day
spittin' on Fifth Avenue
fox-trottin' in hell . . .

So we ain't home—
we're together

Smile:
I take it personally

They were on fire. I told them about Mandelstam, Dostoyevsky, the long tradition of writers in prison. I read them poems. Another woman, Elizabeth Powell, came to class with a poem about homosexuality which was explicit, honest, and skillfully done. The class praised it—Elizabeth left the class that night, made a sheaf of copies by hand, and passed it "on the vine."

The next time I arrived at the prison, I was called into the warden's office. A member of my class, the warden said, had written a poem about her "unique perversion" and had implied, she said, that there were also correction officers who were homosexual, one in particular. She spoke of libel, telling me that I should have confiscated the poem immediately, or at least made sure that it didn't go beyond the class. (Though homosexuality was indeed common—the "only game" in the prison, the warden steadfastly refused to admit that she had any more than a few "deviants" on her hands, whom she described as hard-core—in other words, gay even on the outside. Actually, as is the case in most women's prisons, homosexual relationships were standard even for straights, for the simple reason that human beings need physical intimacy and affection when they are confined to correctional institutions and cut off from relationships available to them outside the walls.

Definitions of personal sexuality tend to change behind bars. Upon release, some women remain "changed," while the majority of former prisoners return to heterosexual lifestyles. The warden deeply feared homosexuality; any manifestation of "butch" conduct was enough to tag an inmate a troublemaker and "male attire" was expressly forbidden in the rules guide. Correction officers were warned not to wear pants to work, and thus their uniform remained skirted. (Although many C.O.'s were, in fact, gay, the atmosphere reflected the warden's artificial notion of femininity.)

After this incident, I was informed that the poem had been confiscated and that Elizabeth Powell had been placed in solitary confinement pending a hearing by the disciplinary board. I was told that I would be allowed to continue the poetry class for the time being, but that if another incident like this took place, I would be asked to leave the prison. The warden sincerely hoped that I had "learned a lesson."

I had. It was just as I had told them: a dramatic testimony to the power of words—and, I thought, one of the stupidest things I have ever done. It was easy for me to drop in and talk about "getting it down right" and being honest in writing—I went home every night. For me, there was no danger of being thrown in solitary, having my personal papers raided, or worse. It occurred to me that even when I had written my ever-so-honest article, I had used a pseudonym to protect myself. There were obviously bigger risks than job loss at stake for women or men who chose to write while incarcerated; risks I had clearly not understood. Words could indeed turn around the authorities, but could also turn them into the oppressors they actually were.

Elizabeth Powell was in the bing for three weeks. When she came back to class, she was ready to go another round (she had written 25 poems, all dealing with homosexuality, while in lock), but I had made a decision. I explained how I felt as an outsider, with no right to tell them how to write in this volatile situation, but I asked that they make a distinction between public and private poems to protect themselves from exactly this kind of censorship/punishment. Private poems were, obviously, ones you could get thrown in the bing for; public poems could be "published." At this point, I also went back to the warden and told her she should not be surprised at some "emotional" poems; I described the class as "therapy" and she agreed that that was a good way of viewing it.

The class flourished. The women began to express *themselves*, to find words underneath and in the midst of the gloss of everyday language. Some discovered (recovered?) a subterranean language like subway graffiti: the poem became a Kilroy, a zap: "I was here."

I had quit my mental health worker job and was concentrating on expanding FREE SPACE, as the class had come to be called. The NEA had given us some funding, as did Poets & Writers and some local banks. Linda Stewart of The Book-of-the-Month Club mailed boxes of overstocked paperback books; we amassed our own library and Ted Slate of *Newsweek* donated supplies and equipment.

Tom Weatherly taught a second poetry class, Gail Rosenblum taught fiction, and Fannie James, an ex-inmate, ex-student of the Space whom the warden actually allowed to come back to work with us, taught poetry and library skills. Each teacher learned to cope in his or her own way with the trials of trying to run a writing class in a prison. Each class was like a hypothetical leap: it would take place 1) IF the officer in

the housing area remembered to announce it; 2) IF the women were there and not a) in court b) in solitary c) in another part of the prison d) watching television e) sleeping and/or drugged f) transferred to another floor g) transferred to another prison h) out on bail (good news); 3) IF the officer on hall duty okayed the passes; 4) IF the warden had not scheduled something else in your classroom (usually a course in etiquette); 5) IF there was no "contraband," i.e., spiral notebooks (the wire is a potential weapon), chewing gum (jams locks), tweezers, or snap-top pens (another weapon—only ball points or pencils allowed).

Somehow, the class took place and thrived. Visitors came to read and comment on student work: poets Mae Jackson, Daniela Gioseffi, Daniel Halpern, Audre Lorde. For a long time, everyone learned. Information was taken in, absorbed—classes were spent writing and rewriting, letting off steam.

Almost four years later, most of the women from the old class had been transferred or freed (detention women often spend two years waiting for trial), but emphasis was still placed on "getting along." We all stressed writing as craft. Classes were run as any *outside* workshop would be, except no one ever published anything.

The poetry class at this time was full of women who were considered potential security threats—in other words, intelligent, outspoken, and funny. Some were "controversial" cases: Juanita Reedy, about to have her first child behind bars; Carole Ramer, who had been busted with Abbie Hoffman and who had a lot to say about everything; Gloria Jensen, whose imagination was like a vaudeville show; Assata Shakur/Joanne Chesimard—alleged leader of the Black Liberation Army, brilliant and talented, with a *Cool-Hand Luke* aura of insouciance, compassion, and tenacity. (Assata was considered so dangerous that the prison required her to have a continual guard-escort.) These women were all good writers. They had learned craft and practiced it—and wanted more. They wanted to go further than "therapeutic" writing or workshop poems. They were writing dynamite.

After four years, there was a huge pile of handwritten poems, Fannie's log with the names of every woman who had come to class, some incredible memories, and that was all. We went to the prison week after week and no one ever saw or heard what the women wrote: the voices were never heard outside, and on the inside, only in class. I began to feel that something had to give—no matter what risks were involved for the women (if they should decide to publish)—and for FREE SPACE as a writing program. It was Catch 22—we were losing either way. At this stage, the women were denied the natural fulfillment of self-expression, which is publication. If we published their writing, however, we stood to lose the writing program itself. I began to fantasize about getting the word out: if people could only *hear* some of this stuff, I thought, no one would ever ask me again about either the *quality* of prisoners' writing or the reasons for running workshops in prisons. We would have evidence in writing. Best of all, the women would have the audience they deserved. I began to draft a rough script, a framework for some of the poems.

What happened to Juanita Reedy made up everybody's mind about publication. Juanita went to Elmhurst Hospital to have her child and was treated so inhumanely that she refused to let prison doctors touch her upon her return. She wrote a poem about her experience, which she developed into a longer "Birth Journal." She published it in *Majority Report*, the feminist journal. In the same issue there was an article about FREE SPACE and a poem by Carole Ramer. The issue began to circulate in the prison.

Assata, inspired by Juanita, wrote her own "Birth Journal" and sent it to a major magazine. One night in class she read this poem:

Butch

You should have told me
About your dick
Stashed inside your bureau drawer
I woulda believed you

Ya say ya wanna be my daddy
Ya say ya wanna be my daddy
Ya say ya wanna be my daddy

Yeah! Run it! I'm ready!
My mamma warned me about you
She taught me about you
She beat me about you

But I thought you were a man . . .

And I lower my eyes
And I lower my back
And I swivel my hips
And I lighten my voice
And I powder my nose
And I blue up my eyes
And I redden my cheeks
And I jump when you call
And I cook and I knit

And I clean and I sew
And it is all so cozy
You lying in my arms
(If I am not being too forward,
too unladylike)

But who will know, anyway,
That you were in my arms
Not me in yours

And if it comes to it
To save face
You can lie
I'll back you up
I've gotten very good at it lately

You should have told me
About your status—
I would have bowed to you
What's one more bow, anyway?

I bow to the dollar
I bow to the scholar
I bow to the white house
I bow to the church mouse
I bow to tradition
I bow to contrition
I bow to the butcher
I bow to the baker
I bow to the goddamn
lightbulb maker—

Who the hell am I anyway
Not to bow?

What else do I know how to do?

But you should have told me baby
You should have hipped me momma
I didn't know you would pull it out
And strap it on

Fucking me mercilessly
Long stroking me
So that even my shadow is moaning

But damn baby
I didn't know
You coulda saved me the trip—

I thought I was on my way
To a garden
Where fruit ain't forbidden
Where snakes do not crawl to seduce
I thought for a second
That earth was a good thing
That acting had played out
And cotillions were outlawed
That bingo was over
And ladies had drowned in their tea

But now that I'm hip momma
Come, fuck me.

(©Assata Shakur/Joanne Chesimard)

Some of Assata's poems were accepted for publication in a literary magazine. Poets & Writers gave us a grant to do an anthology of students' writing which Gail and I compiled. We published it through the Print Center in Brooklyn and called it *Songs from a Free Space: Writings by Women in Prison*. The anthology was sold in New York bookstores and distributed to the women in the classes. It contained some of the best work done in the classes.

By now I had handed over a rough script to the poetry class and an idea about doing some kind of theater piece. The women put together a revue of loosely scripted poems, songs, and vignettes called *Next Time*. They memorized lines and improvised costumes. Karen Sanderson, a friend and videotape expert, arrived at the prison one Sunday with a crew of women (after endless haggling for permission; we told the Corrections Department that we needed the videotape as a rehearsal tool for a play) and taped for nine hours straight. Finally, after months of editing, a half-hour tape emerged which documents the poems, songs, love, and exasperation of some of these incredible women. (This tape is available to anyone interested.)

In September 1975, FREE SPACE merged with ART WITHOUT WALLS, another arts project for women in prison. Now we were able to offer graphic arts and dance, in addition to having a larger staff. The publishing idea had fulfilled itself, a renaissance. Juanita had begun a book about her experiences; another woman, Isabelle Newton, was collecting her poems in manuscript. Then Assata, who had been held in solitary for one year in New Jersey, whose cell was raided by guards every day in search of contraband, and who had been beaten by the prison goon squad on numerous occasions, completed her book of poems and wrote two chapters of a book, an account of her arrest and life in prison. The warden stopped me in the hall one day and told me that she knew we were collaborating on a book with Assata and Juanita. She told me she hadn't forgotten the Elizabeth Powell case.

On November 26, 1975, Gail was preparing to leave home to go to her fiction class (filled with new students) when the phone rang. It was Deputy Freeman, the WHD Program Director, who advised her not to come to class: the program had been cancelled. We were not allowed to do anything after that except to pick up our books and any program belongings; we couldn't say good-bye to anyone or discuss plans for any of their work.

Naturally, we are contesting this decision, but there isn't much hope in appealing a warden's whim. It is, after all, her turf. Official reasons for the cancellation were said to be duplication of services (they stated that the public school provided the same type of classes) and irregularity of classes. The warden refused, however, to put these reasons in writing for us.

It is clear that the writing classes were taken seriously only when the women wrote seriously about their lives and *published* those writings. Poetry is safe, women are safe until they begin to make sense and communicate. Still, ART

recognizes the possibilities of self-expression, perhaps the walls crack a little. *Perhaps*. Words can, indeed, turn them around, but sometimes having all the right words is small change.

"Before despairing, speak of it," said a woman one day in class. Even when writing of despair, there's the fact—named and held to the light for a moment—maybe even understood.

WITHOUT WALLS/FREE SPACE is continuing to work at a children's center, a drug clinic, and another women's prison. It's important to maintain the lifelines between people on the outside and those inside.

But what happened at the Women's House of Detention can easily happen again. Especially if publishing is, as it should be, part of the writing project. Prison writers have a right to be heard as does any writer. Their voices are too important to be missed. Publishing is part of the art of not bowing. Each time a man or woman in a cell

Next Time
(group poem from the videotape of the same name)

You don't hear me
You don't see me

I'm the one just a step behind
you
a split second before the light changes on the corner.
The face that breaks the glass without a sound
The hands that take your money on a screaming train uptown.

Ladies. I had nowhere to take myself tonight
Except to myself
To my own face
Reflected in yours
And my own voice
telling me
THERE IS NO NEXT TIME FOR ANY OF US

Just the husbands and families waiting
Just the habits and fast money waiting

The kids in the street
The kids in strangers' homes
The kids in our bellies
The kids we are inside

And the lies we tell ourselves
To go on living

LISTEN

No one got over on you tonight
No one lied here tonight

We told the truth
And the truth is what you see before your eyes
Ladies
Before you forget, ladies,
Till the "next time"....
My best.

Carol Muske is a New York poet and assistant editor of *Anteus*. Her book, *Camouflage*, was published in 1975 (University of Pittsburgh Press). She directs the prison program Art Without Walls/Free Space at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility for Women.

Songs from a Free Space*

Astrology Hype

Carole Ramer

While in prison six months
my horoscope predicted:
"Travel to exciting places.
New career opportunities.
Romance and adventure."

So far—I've traveled from jail
to Manhattan Supreme Court.
My pay scale has increased from 10 to 25¢ per hour.
Numerous other inmates have made
overtly sexual advances to me
in vacant stairwells.

Honey,
that's not my idea of a rising sign.

Alone

Deborah Hiller

She who walks alone and dreams
will remain lonely.

She who sleeps with her pillow
only dreams of her pillow as partner.

But she who sits in her cell,
and writes
will master this world.

Ten Ways of Looking at Prison Lunch

Gloria Jensen

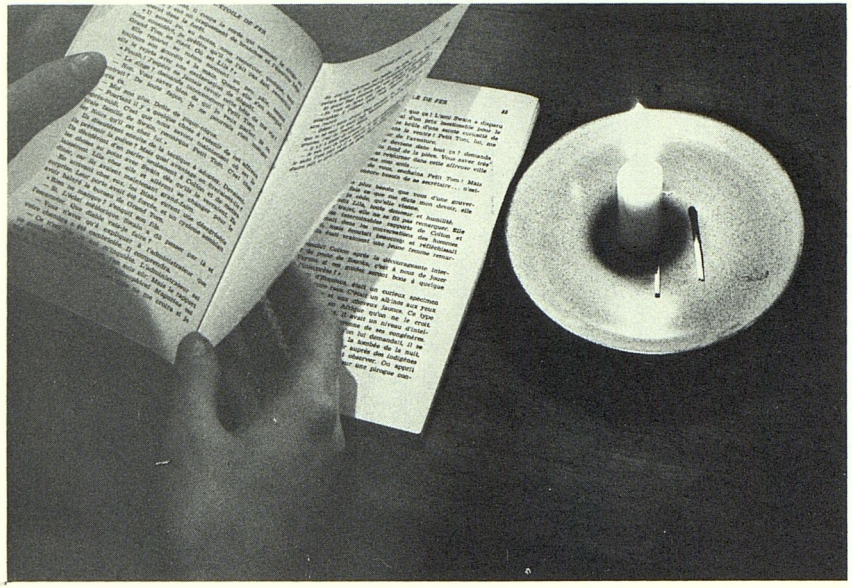
(With apologies to Wallace Stevens)

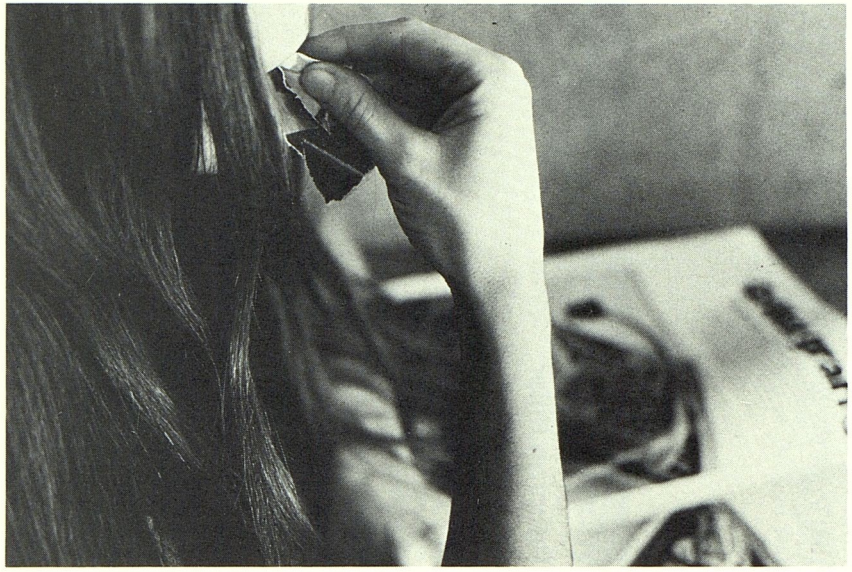
1. With both hands over your eyes, releasing one hand slowly to peep.
2. Through the eyes of a friend you have by the hand—who reads braille.
3. In the bing [solitary] where you can refuse to have the thing brought in at all and just lie there and sleep.
4. From across the steam line, where people marvel at your petite body (if only they knew it's not by *choice* you prefer to remain frail and cautious).
5. From a prison visitor's point of view—when suddenly, miraculously, all one sees is steak, greens and potatoes.
6. From your window late at night as you watch one man run with a rake, followed by another with a sack, followed by a corrections officer, followed by a ruckus you've not seen but heard—then all three returning, dragging a heavy sack.
7. Witnessing something come ashore in the bay and thinking: my, but it gave up a great fight.
8. Wondering why they have signs saying DO NOT PEE ON THE GRASS. Then seeing the kitchen girls go out, mow it down and bring it in.
9. "Good Friday"—when all the world's generous and the relief truck pulls up to the kitchen door to drop off loads of potatoes they couldn't unload anywhere else.
10. Seeing more clearly the lunch of steak, greens and potatoes—as you attack the steak first and realize the fight you witnessed (#6) is not yet over, for the beast is biting you now too.

*From *Songs From a Free Space/Writings by Women in Prison*, edited by Carol Muske and Gail Rosenblum, New York, n.d.

La Roquette, Women's Prison

Groupe de Cinq





The Group of Five is a Paris-based collective consisting of Martine Aballea, Judy Blum, Nicole Croiset, Mimi, and Nil Yalter, who include among their skills video, painting, sculpture, drawing, and poetry; and among their nationalities French, Turkish, Canadian, American. This work on La Roquette began when Judy and Mimi met through their children at a day-care center. Judy mentioned her collaboration with Nil on the theme of living conditions in each of Paris' 20 arrondissements, for which the prison had been suggested to represent the 11th arrondissement. Mimi, it turned out, had been detained there, and she offered an elaboration of her experiences. Martine, whose writing is based on her own memories and dreams, also joined the project, while Nil offered her use of video to universalize the narrative elements, in collaboration with Nicole, who concentrated on the esthetic/sociological aspects of the research. The result is a visual representation of the prison and of the personal experiences of many women, centered around the group's increasing consciousness of the meaning of Mimi's story: "Bonds of friendship, constantly confirmed, played the most cohesive role on the level of the work itself, resulting in the combination of apparently disparate means connected to each other by mutual understanding within the group." The following narrative accompanies a videotape from which most of the images are taken.

The other women were mostly in the prison for bad checks, prostitution, or, like me, for robbery. There were also some murderers; I knew one in my workshop. Another had been accused of stealing a painting. The first days we asked each other, but afterwards we didn't really say "What are you doing here?" except to our best friends.

These women came from all classes. In general, relations between inmates were pretty good. There were a lot of lesbians; the nuns' attitudes toward them was to turn a blind eye. They couldn't not have known about it. The girls hid it a little—and even a lot—but it was too obvious. As for me, I was not a lesbian, but I nevertheless flirted here and there to pass the time. It could have certain advantages: when you didn't have any money, your friends could buy things at the canteen for you. Or, at one time, I went out with an English girl who was the favorite of a nun who didn't like me, and from that day on, that nun was very nice to me, and I got certain favors I shouldn't have had.

But still there were lots of fights, sometimes for no reason at all, just because the girls felt like fighting. Sometimes it was a question of class. Some girls felt superior to others: it wasn't a question of money, but of intellect. . . . So sometimes one girl would insult another, or feel insulted, and there would be a fight. We were a whole gang; some had to be in charge. And if you knew how to fight, you were respected. There was nothing you could do about it.

Sometimes fights started over cigarettes. For example, I got into a fight with a girl over that. Every Wednesday we had the right to buy four packs of cigarettes at the canteen. This girl didn't smoke, so, with my money, I had bought her something she needed, and she, with her money, was going to buy me four more packs, which would have made eight for the week. She bought me the cigarettes, but another girl told her to give them to her. She was very weak and she didn't dare refuse. That night I waited for her in her cell and I beat her up. The week after that she bought me cigarettes, and she didn't even ask me for money. Afterwards—it's stupid, she was a coward—she would pick up butts in the yard for me, when I really didn't expect that from her. When the other girls saw that, they all turned against her. When I saw that, I stood up for her, because I don't like to take sides. I'd hit her a little, but I didn't have a grudge against her.

Another time there was a fight in the mess hall, in front of the nun. There was blood on the floor: one girl had had a nosebleed, and the other had been hurt elsewhere. I was drawing; with my finger I picked up some drops of blood and put them on my drawing.

But there was also a feeling of solidarity among the inmates. One time, for example, a girl had been punished and locked up in the mess hall toilets. I didn't know what she had done, I don't even know if she had really done anything; in any case it was totally unjust to lock her up like that. So, with my friend, I climbed onto the ledge over the mess hall door and we said that we would stay there until they let this girl out. Normally we should have done two weeks in the cooler for that, but we didn't get anything. We would have done it anyway because it was unjust.

Or one day a girl gave me a little piece of candle about two inches long. We were forbidden to have candles, but there were a lot of things like that that went around the prison. I don't know how she got it; that was the sort of question you didn't ask. She gave it to me because she knew that I liked to read.

We also managed to pass notes from cell to cell by what we called the "yoyo" system. You tied the note to a piece of string and you put it through the window. We did that for certain girls who were in the cooler when we were in the yard. We would send them a note

from their best friends or something like that.

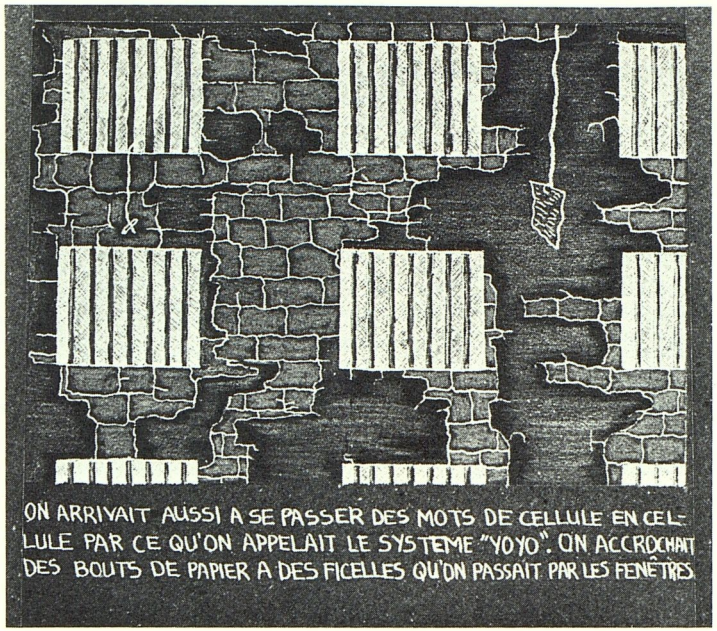
As for the nuns, apart from some who were especially mean, they were mostly indifferent. But they had, of course, their favorites. It was a question of personality: they liked the docile inmates. In the beginning they didn't like me because I was stubborn and rude to them. Afterwards, I sometimes behaved better. But in any case, being with the English girl, I could do things that were forbidden and not get punished. Sometimes, for example, I would go into the yard to pick up butts that the richer girls had left; we weren't allowed to do that other than at recess. Or I tried doing all kinds of things so I could go to the cooler, because I had a friend who sang in church and in the cooler there was a lot of echo. But despite all I did I never got sent, while some girls did nothing at all and got sent right away.

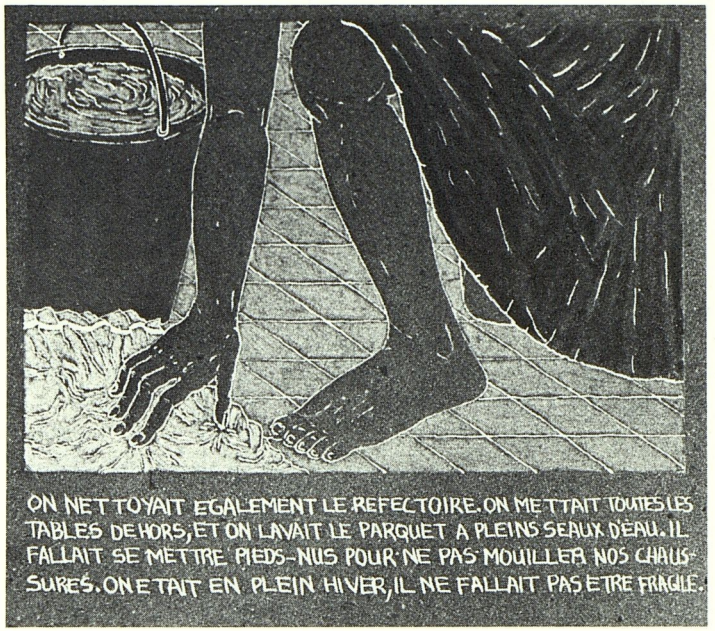
Down in the cooler you were isolated from everybody. You got no mail or visits. You never left your cell, except once a day when you had a walk, alone, in the yard. You only had one meal a day which was brought to you in your cell.

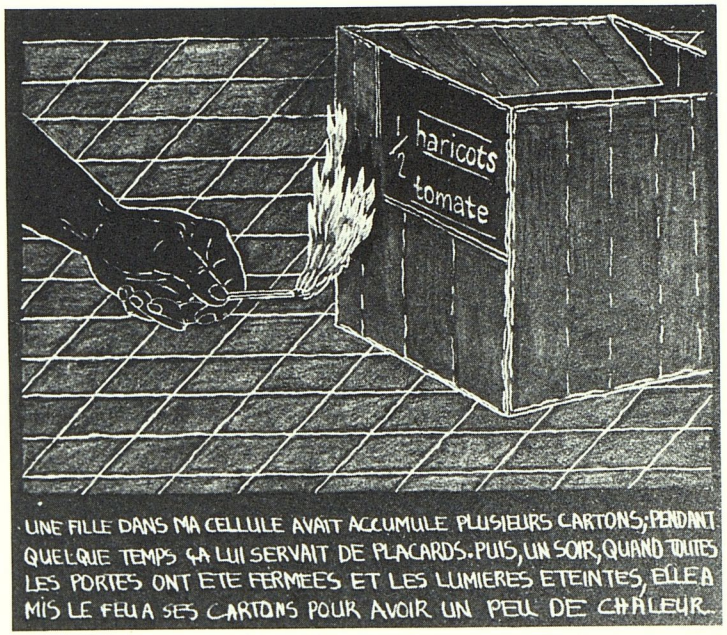
Generally speaking, it took a certain amount of time to make friends. I didn't have this problem because there were already two people there whom I knew when I arrived. But for the others who had no soap, no handkerchiefs (the prison gave you nothing, not even sanitary napkins; all they gave me when I came in was a rag to wash myself with), if they weren't resourceful, if they didn't get some friends to help them, they couldn't make it. You had to work about ten days before having enough money to buy things at the canteen.

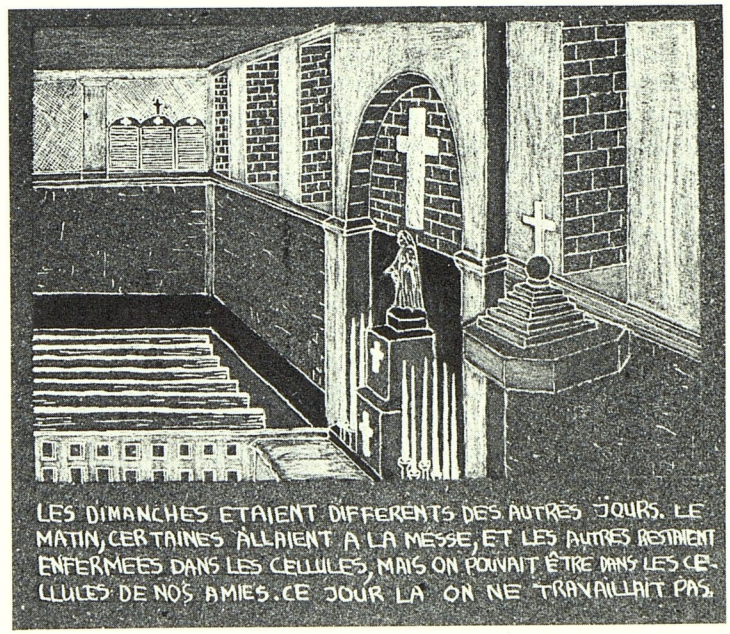
The money that you made working, making key rings, was only just enough to buy cigarettes. You were paid 80 centimes (15 cents) for one hundred key rings, about a day's work. Those who worked really fast managed to make two hundred. I started working the second day after my arrival, but I lost the tool I had been given. I got yelled at by the nun, and I saw that it was badly paid, so I stopped. Instead, I spent my days reading. I could do this because I was not sentenced yet, while those who were had to work. The catalogue from the library was passed in the workshop and we had the right to two books a week; I would ask some girls who didn't read to order some for me. I read everything—Pearl Buck, books on explorations. I also spent a lot of time drawing, and sometimes I would go out. My seat was at the end of the workshop, near the door, so it was easy for me to go out in the yard when the nun wasn't looking.

The money that you had on you on entering the prison was kept; you could only use it in the canteen. Some inmates received money orders; many of them, actually, got money. As for me, my brother









sent me a hundred francs (20 dollars) and a little money that I had left in a book at my mother's. But for those who had no money at all, the only way to get any was to work.

At the canteen you could buy pencils, letter paper, envelopes, toilet articles, or wool. Some knitted; it was winter and it was necessary if you didn't have any clothes. You could also buy french fries, puddings and prepared dishes that you could have on Sundays. We couldn't have newspapers, but we could buy magazines like *Jours de France*.

About these magazines—we bought them for the recipes that were in them. Often there were pictures with the recipe, so we would tear them from the magazine and eat them. For example, if you liked salad, you would eat pictures of salad. We also ate pictures of chicken, cakes, or things like that.

At the meals we got mostly starchy food—potatoes, beans, or cauliflower; there was also bread. They gave us meat, but it was very tough. In fact we couldn't cut it with the blunt children's knives that we bought at the canteen. We ate it with our hands, tearing it with our teeth. At the end of the meal—which had been served by inmates—we did our own dishes. We had brought our bowls and our cutlery to the mess hall in the cardboard boxes that we took everywhere with us, and we went in little groups to wash them with cold water. To wipe them, I used the rag they had given me when I came in. . . .

About twice a week we could bring back up to the cells the rice pudding we had had for dessert at supper. I loved this and often exchanged two cigarettes for a bowl. We went up two by two, and silently. If we talked, the nun made us stop until we were silent again. Between the time we went up and the time we went to bed there was about half an hour, when we had the right to stay near the stove and toast pieces of bread. We talked, or we sang; I had a friend who sang very well, and we gathered around her. She sang some of Adamo's songs, but also some she had written herself, like one about the nuns to the tune of *Morpionibus*. She also sang in church; she had spent years in a religious boarding school and she knew the whole mass in Latin. . . . It was forbidden to sing in the cells once the doors were closed, but we did it anyway. We all sang together. The nuns couldn't put us all in the cooler; they contented themselves with yelling into the void.

On our beds we had the right to three blankets—and no more—and two sheets. In summer it might be enough, but in December I found another blanket when one of the girls in my cell left, but it was

taken away in a search. The heat was provided by a stove in the hall; there was one stove for forty cells. One girl in my cell had accumulated several cardboard boxes; for a while she used them as storage space. Then one night when all the doors had been locked and the lights turned out, she set fire to her boxes to get warm. A nun realized this and came to ask what was going on. We both pretended to sleep, but in the end I lifted my head and told the nun that I didn't know anything, that I hadn't seen anything, and that I couldn't tell her anything else.

It wouldn't stick: I was all alone with the other girl and I was saying that I hadn't seen anything. The next day the girl I was friends with said that I couldn't have done it. She knew me and she knew that I didn't have bizarre ideas like that. The other girl did two weeks in the cooler, but I could have gone too because I hadn't said anything. . . .

Every week there was a shower session. It was in cubicles that didn't close, and there were three of us in each cubicle. The water ran sometimes too hot, sometimes too cold. When it stopped, everyone had to be through, and even if your head was full of soap, there was nothing you could do about it. You had to find a way to rinse yourself with cold water afterwards; sometimes when you finally got a chance to do it, your head was already half dry.

As for clothes, pants were forbidden. Men were banished from our environment and the nuns would say "Stop wriggling!" when we saw workers from Fresnes (men's prison). We weren't supposed to look at them. We had to wear dresses or skirts. When I arrived, I was wearing pants, so to replace it they gave me a burlap dress. In the beginning I didn't have any other clothes; I wore it night and day. I couldn't wash it and until I got other clothes, my dress stayed dirty. . . . One girl had made herself a skirt from a blanket, so she went to the cooler. It was a beautiful skirt and it was a long time before they realized what she had done. I don't know where she found the needle and thread; they were among the things that circulated. . . . The sheets and rags which had been given to us were washed in the linen room. The linen maids, like those who served the meals, were inmates who had been there a long time and who had won the trust of the nuns. The sheets were changed about once a month; it was far from ideal when there were lice.

During my stay there was an epidemic of lice. The nuns told us to go to the kitchen and ask for vinegar, and we put it on our heads. When it was dry we put on some powder, and then a scarf; we stayed like that for three days. If you had lice it was considered bad and no one approached you any more. One of the nuns made fun of me; she said, "If you washed every day . . ." or something like that. I told her that she had surely had them before me. It was the first time in my life that I had them, so. . . .

The cells were searched pretty often, sometimes when we were there, but mostly during the day when we were in the workshop. The nuns looked for knives and candles we had gotten by exchange, or other things we weren't allowed to have. They also looked for mail between inmates; we had the right to write letters to each other, but not love letters. Once one of the nuns—a young one who must have been under thirty—wrote to one of my friends. She told her that she liked her and that she would like to have a closer relationship with her. The letter was found and the nun in question was expelled. This sort of thing happened from time to time.

Everything we received from the outside was also searched. We received our packages all cut up and opened. All our letters were read, those that we got as well as those we sent. Some had practically nothing in them, but they couldn't go through because they were too long. People wrote to us with the smallest writing possible because one page, written very small, went through, but 2 pages, written in large letters, didn't. As for the letters that we wrote, everything concerning prison life, the nuns, or what we ate, was censored. We could talk about the books we had read, and a minimum about what we did, but that was all. In general, what went through or not depended on the person who read the mail. Some letters that shouldn't have gone through went anyway, and vice versa.

We were also searched when we left the prison. You couldn't take out anything that might be a souvenir. One of my friends, for example, had made a drawing of a little girl taking water in her hand to offer a doe; they didn't let her take her drawing out. In these searches you couldn't really hide anything, and what was least likely to be found was what wasn't hidden. In the end they looked more often into the girls' vaginas to see if they had hidden letters than in the luggage. As for me, I had certain drawings and papers which normally I wouldn't have been allowed to take out. I just left them with my things and they weren't even seen.

It was on the eve of my departure that they told me that I was coming out. Until then I had no idea how long they were going to keep me. I could have gone out on probation before, but only on condition that they tell my mother. I preferred that they didn't. Once out, I didn't have the right to write to my inmate friends who stayed.

Sundays were different from other days. In the morning, some went to church and the others stayed locked up in their cells, but we could go into our friends' cells. Afterwards we did the cleaning up

That day we didn't work, and we could sit where we liked in the workshop-mess hall. The nuns put the radio on, but they turned it off as soon as the news came on. They didn't let us know what was going on in the outside world. To pass the time we played games. For instance, we played truth games. We asked questions about incidents that had happened a few days before and about which we hadn't managed to find out the truth. The girls were generally honest; you couldn't lie in that game, otherwise you didn't play. But the biggest pastime was cards—Tarot, Belote. Some of them were played with real cards that some girls had managed to smuggle in. The others had been made with empty packs of Gitanes on which we had drawn.

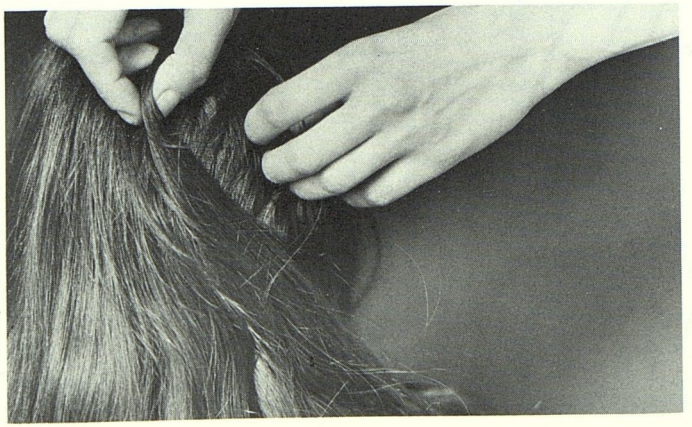
Some girls tattooed themselves. They would take ink from ball point pens and mix it with cigarette ash. This way they managed to make an ink which was pretty indelible—blue-black. Then they took two needles, one projecting in front of the other, and put a drop of ink between them. Then, with the projecting needle they made the drop slip into the hole. This made a point; they made as many points as they wanted. They made snakes, hearts, names, but mostly just three points, which means "Death to the Pigs," or five points—"Alone Between Four Walls." It was the emblem of prison.

We wrote all over ourselves with pens, and there were ways of making up your face. With ashes from the stove in the hall and water we could make mascara. There were black felt pens that we could use as eyeliner, but it was hard to take off and we usually did it with shoe polish that we got at the canteen. We mostly made our eyes up, but some girls put brown pencil around their lips.

Some girls reacted badly to prison life, but we tried to help them, and they managed to make friends, to find people who helped them overcome their distress. I wouldn't leave a poor girl by herself who arrived here and who looked completely lost. I went to see her, I talked to her. Of course there were those who had their husbands and their children outside; for them it was harder. I was told that once a girl hanged herself. Sometimes there were also attempts at escape; I was told that one inmate hid herself in a garbage can, but she didn't have time to get out and was killed inside the garbage truck.

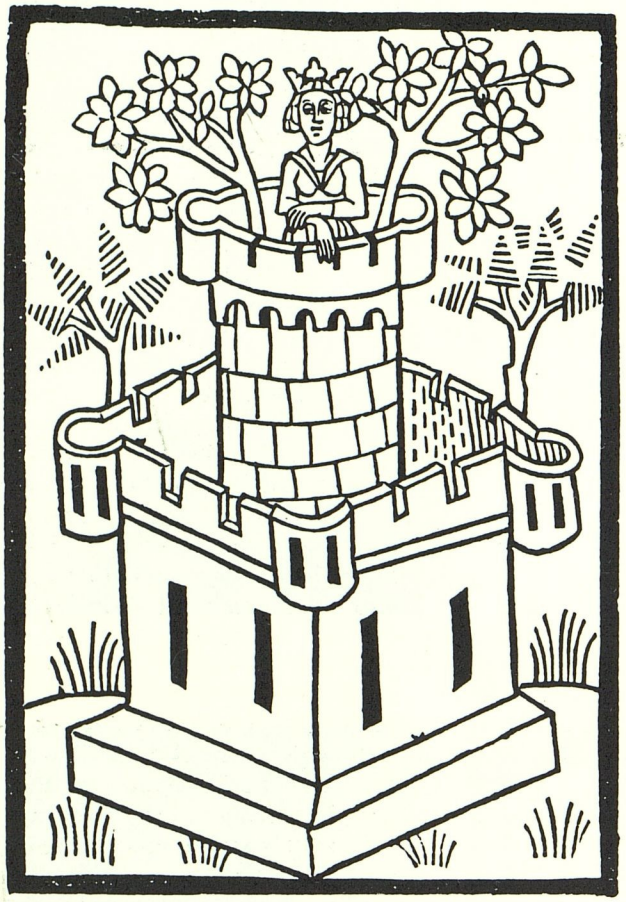
At Christmas the Salvation Army came. We got together in the mess hall and listened to them sing Christmas carols. These women were very nice. They gave each of us a towel, a handkerchief, and a pack of candy. We had a lot of fun because we weren't used to seeing this sort of woman. Everybody was laughing, but they were well received by the inmates. In the end we thought it was really nice of them to trouble themselves for us. I think a lot of the girls were touched.

For the meal, we put all the tables together to be the most together possible. Those who had saved a little money bought pastries, but almost everything was shared. I, for example, didn't have any money, but I had a little of everything like everybody else. On the part of the prison, there was nothing, except that we didn't work that day and we could go to midnight mass. A lot of people were depressed that day; all this reminded us of our families and of all the things we were trying to forget. It was nice, this party, but actually it was painful. The monotony of the other days was better. We didn't really give each other presents. We didn't have the possibility of giving anything, except cigarettes. The girl I was going out with gave me some cigarettes.



Fays, Floozies and Philosophical Flaws

Arlene Ladden



The smile of my gracious lady makes me happier than if four hundred angels laughed at me from the heavens (Raimbaut d'Orange, while some less gracious ladies chuckled from the wings.)

The attitudes in *True Romances* (and in most of our pasts) originally shone forth from 12th-century troubadour poetry, and even then they were a little tarnished. Chaste, idealistic and upper-class, medieval troubadour poetry supposedly countered a strong tradition of misogyny. It also supposedly elevated woman by upholding that same feminine mystique which, for centuries, the Christian fathers had diligently tried to demolish: "Corporeal beauty is nothing else but phlegm, and blood, and humor, and bile, and the fluid of masticated food. . . ." said John Chrysostom, a saint, in the 4th century. "When you see a rag with any of these things on it, such as phlegm, or spittle, you cannot bear to touch it even with the tips of your fingers. . . . Are you in a flutter of excitement about the storehouses and depositories of these things?"[1]

Woman was so many layers of mucous membrane. And writings from 6 and 7 centuries later attest to the muddy strides saints and clerics had taken in the interim: "If her bowels and flesh were cut open, you would see what filth is covered by her white skin. If a fine crimson cloth covered a pile of foul dung, would anyone be foolish enough to love the dung because of it?"[2] Now, woman was simply so much manure smattered across the coprophagous pages of Christian doctrine.

The wheels of progress kept on turning. A 13th-century work addressed itself specifically to women—three worthy recluses: "What fruit does your flesh yield from all its openings?" began their catechism. "Between the taste of mouth and smell of nose, aren't there holes like two privy holes? Aren't you born of foul slime? Aren't you worm-food?[3] To the Church, woman was simply full of shit. Yet this was the legacy bequeathed to the Middle Ages, where the love of woman was a cult—an absolute prerequisite for respectability. And love flourished.

Of course, misogyny continued to flourish too. Woman would still be called "a stinking rose" and "glittering mud" and "a temple built over a sewer."[4] But, as sister to Mary, she was also the mystical elevator of the masculine soul which, by its nature, gravitated toward perfection. By merely contemplating woman in her golden radiance, man could rise to spiritual heights in a kind of "gilt" by association. For somewhere between the muddy slime and the hazy castle spire, a new woman had been spawned. Like the enchanted fay (fairy) of Celtic lore, she moved softly, gliding over but never touching terra firma, surrounded by auras so fragile that they were better left unpenetrated. But these were beautiful, mysterious and promising auras, and scribes feverishly copied down the formulas for keeping them intact: "If you have ugly teeth, don't laugh with your mouth open." "Practice making pretty speeches." "Dye your hair; wear false hair if you have lost your own . . ."[5]

Andreas Capellanus, Jacques D'Amiens, Robert le Blois, Garin le Brun, Drouart la Vache, Ermangau and de Fournival—all added their instructions to the heap: *Lie. Cheat. Drop names, if you have to. Drop dead, if you have to. Anything.*

Maintaining the mystique was the important thing, and that meant keeping the distance. It meant the ecstasy was in the wooing while sex lay in the winding down. Even the ladies understood that attainment decreased their value, and many who loftily kept their suitors well below thigh level would rather have had it otherwise. After all, as even the ladies knew: a

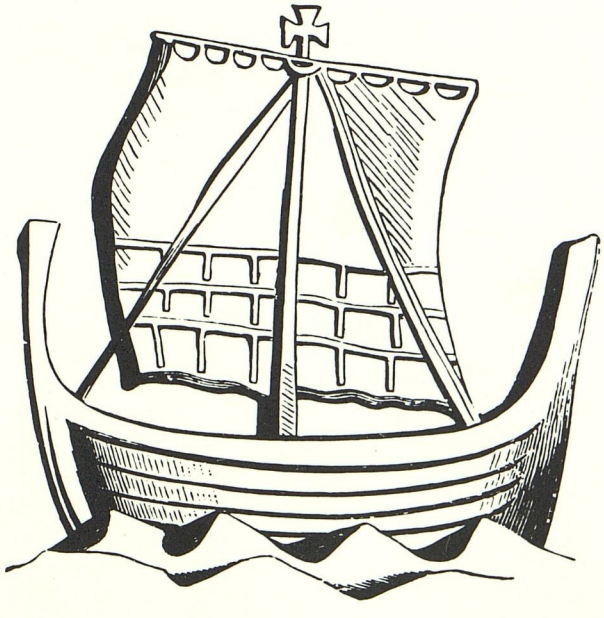
lover is a vision surrounded by auras. But flesh and blood is flesh and blood . . . and phlegm and dung and mucous and bile and etc.

Once woman ceased to be a symbol, she became a person, a passion, a robber of reason —a literal and metaphorical scum-bag.

No wonder the ladies were afraid to submit. With submission, love and its *raison d'être* became the discarded backdrop for a *fait accompli*. The love was no longer ennobling (ergo: the animal soul pawed and dragged down its rational counterpart), and the woman was no longer mounted on a pedestal (ergo: with the man on top, she was mounted, period). And man's desire—well, that often died along with his suffering.

It's natural, then, that the really legendary lovers chose the most distant and unattainable objects they could conceive of. Guilhem de la Tour, for instance, loved the woman he lived with.[6] Now, such women were worn on everyday occasions and were inevitably mundane. But Guilhem's enamorata was unearthly; in fact, she was dead. On the eve of her burial, Guilhem visited her grave and, after ten days of morbid embracing and poignant conversation (she was a good listener), he went home firm in the belief that she would rise from her tomb and come back to him. She didn't. But for years, it was only Beatrix he longed for. She was the perfect lover—mystical, ethereal and unobtrusive. It was a passion that rivaled even Jaufre Rudel's.

Jaufre Rudel was ingenious. In an age which valued prolonged desire, he contrived a wonderful device. He fell in love with the Countess of Tripoli—a woman he had never seen but whose beauty had filled his imagination so enchantingly that southern France became a glorious vantage point. And so it remained for several years until, despite the protests of his friends and patron, he resolved at last to cross the ocean to be near her.

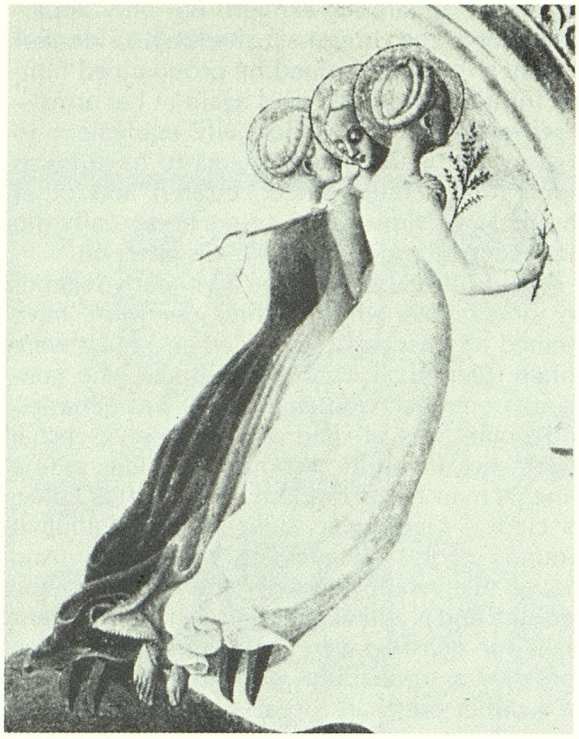


Maybe he just got sick. Or maybe, as his biographers prefer to believe, the anticipation of seeing her was too much for his little heart to bear. In any case, as the boat was approaching Tripoli, he apparently expired. But only apparently. For as the countess rushed to his side, her presence revived him and he pronounced himself fulfilled at last and died again in her arms—a self-extinction metaphorically equivalent to orgasm, but which Jaufre seems to have taken much too literally, since Petrarch and other chroniclers affirm that this time he actually *did* die, and in all probability with his pants on.[7]

True, Jaufre was a strange and nearly legendary breed. But while to him sex must have seemed an unspeakable defilement, most were not so theoretical. Even troubadours who constantly reminded women that sex was debasing and honor was all had an ultimately sensual physicality in mind. Woman was like a fine wine. A man twirls it about, observes its color, its clarity, savoring its bouquet and rolling it around on his languishing taste-buds. And though the swallow is only the means to the end, the end is still very definitely in view. Most pleas for chastity were only lip-service. Even Sordello, a troubadour who repeatedly swore he'd rather die than see a lady even taint her honor, happened to kidnap a Veronese countess and that didn't help her honor a bit. Nor did it discredit his poetry. Such scandal was irrelevant. In fact, women were irrelevant. *Love* was the important thing and the trick was to keep it alive as long as possible, feeding it little by ever-so-little in an extended and delicious tease. Men could nudge at the gates to the ovarian fortress, but entrance, they knew, should be delayed. The ultimate object was sex; men *wanted* what they waited for. They just didn't want it right away. And this largely explains why other men's wives proved such suitable candidates for adoration. Forbidden, illicit, deliciously dangerous—yet slightly damaged, they promised all the more to be ultimately affordable. They were perfectly fashioned for desire.

Desire is a tricky business. In Greece, Plutarch had admired Spartan marriages where, for years, man approached his wife in darkness, in secret and in haste "so as not to be satiated . . . there was still place for unextinguished desire."[8] It was a useful formula and was later picked up in the Middle Ages when the notion of infrequent and clandestine meetings was embraced a lot more than the ladies were. The medieval magic of love was uncertainty. Even the romances preserved this ideal. The lady could be snatched away at any moment by a darkening scandal or a jealous husband, or be absorbed into the ethers which spawned her, disappearing into the mist on a white palfrey. The knight wanted her like that: distant, pure, mysterious, virginal—a blonde Mary ascending into

heaven, looming over the castle horizon with only a little soot on her feet suggesting that she didn't belong there.



Never mind that the only pure-white creature was the post-menopausal albino rabbit—or that even the ladies depicted in romance were potentially swivers of heroic proportions. Since sex distinguished the distant fay from the dung-filled floozy, relatively sexless love became prevalent, and many women—whether they liked it or not—played along.

There were advantages, of course. Love became a rare delicacy whereas before it had been something like yesterday's leftovers. As Ovid's classical formula goes: "Pleasure coming slow is the best";[9] meaning, the longer the foreplay the better the orgasm; meaning, some courtly couples, when they finally did come, must very nearly have blown their brains out.

But some, for sure, were disappointed. Women were dropped, men bumbled like Perceval or —like some knights in the bawdier tales— they'd win their ladies with lots of pomp and peter out before they could even open the package, their worlds ending not with a bang but a whimper. These were particularly grateful for courtly love.

Courtly love was a game of foreplay whose rule was often touch and go; it was an answer (and a spur) to impotence. Some knights were barely post-pubescent and many were sexually insecure, preferring rich expectations to poor reputations and one-night stands. Better to tilt about the countryside, flaunting a passion and flailing a sword (the sword had always been a metaphor for penis—"vagina" is merely Latin for "sheath"), imagining a truly magnificent sexual prowess when the real thing was maybe limp by comparison. Love by its very nature was a test, and knights were afraid to take the exam. Or sometimes, it was better to put it off than to put it in.

Love became formalized. The knight waxed and grew pale, and waxed, and waxed, and waxed. It was blissful and aggrandizing anticipation. Too bad if a lady sometimes felt cheated—if watching her knight charging and gleaming, she secretly wished he'd get off his high horse and get down to business. What could the women do? Their iron-clad men performed in the tournaments. Ramming, sweating, thrusting and galloping. . . . Ah, those impervious men in the metal suits.

. . . The only things naked were their swords.

1. "An Exhortation to Theodore after His Fall," in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* ed. Philip Schaff et al. (New York, 1889), IX, 103-104.
2. From the *Carmen de Mundi contemptu,* quoted in *Not in God's Image,* ed. J. O'Faolain and L. Martines (New York, Harper and Row, 1973), p. xiii. St. Odo of Cluny had earlier phrased this with almost identical wording in his *Collationes,* lib. 2, cap. 9 (in J. P. Migne's *Patrologia Latina* (Paris, 1844-82), CXXXIII, 556), while *Ancrene Riwle* (below) directly refers to a similar expression in St. Bernard's *Meditationes Piissimae de Cognitione Humanae Conditionis,* cap. 3 (Migne, *op. cit.,* CLXXXIV, 489). The key phrases are "stercoris saccum" and "saccus stercorum"—literally, a bag of shit.
3. The Early English Text Society's *Ancrene Riwle,* ed. E. J. Dobson (London, 1972), pp. 202-203; author's translation.
4. Salimbene, in *From St. Francis to Dante: Translations from the Chronicle of the Franciscan Salimbene* (1221-1288), 2nd ed., ed. and trans. G.G. Coulton (London, 1907), p. 97; and Tertullian, quoted in G.L. Simons' *A History of Sex* (London, New English Library, 1970), p. 71.
5. From *La Clef d'amor* and *La Cour d'aimer* in Nina Epton's *Love and the French* (London, 1959), pp. 30ff.
6. For troubadour biographies, I have consulted Jehan de Nostredame, *Les Vies des Plus Célèbres et Anciens Poètes Provencaux,* ed. Camille Chabaneau (1913; rpt. Geneve, 1970—first published in 1575); La Curne de Sainte-Pelaye, *Histoire Littéraire des Troubadours* (1774; rpt. 3 vols. in 1, Genève, 1967); and Victor Balaguer, *Los Trovadores,* 2nd ed. (Madrid, 1883), 4 vols.
7. Jaufre was not the only fatality of romance. Andrieu of France—eulogized by at least six troubadours—also fell victim to "too much love" and he'd never set eyes on his lady either. See Jehan de Nostredame, *op. cit.,* pp. 166, 180.
8. *Plutarch's Lives,* trans. Langhorne (London, Frederick Warne, n.d.), IV, 37.
9. Ovid's *Remedia Amoris,* line 405; Rolfe Humphries' translation in *The Art of Love* (Bloomington, 1957), p. 193.

Arlene Ladden is a poet, scholar and medievalist who teaches at LaGuardia Community College in New York. She is interested in "the forces motivating culture—especially the more absurd ones," and in this spirit is now working on a cultural history of sex and power. She is also co-authoring a textbook series on literature and creative writing for children.

Attributed to Margaret van Eyck. 15th century.

The Esthetics of Power in Modern Erotic Art*

Carol Duncan

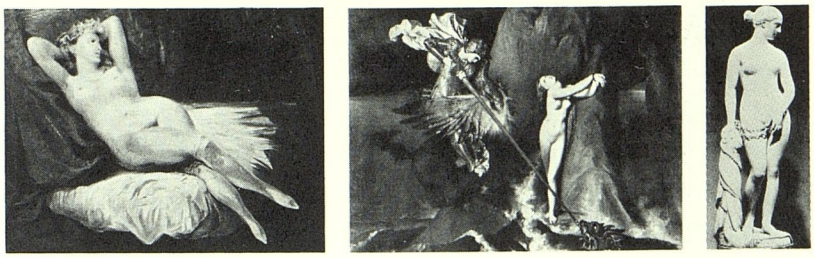
In this essay, I am using the term erotic not as a self-evident, universal category, but as a culturally defined concept that is ideological in nature. More specifically, I am arguing that the modern art that we have learned to recognize and respond to as erotic is frequently about the power and supremacy of men over women. Indeed, once one begins to subject erotic art to critical analysis, to examine the male-female relationships it implies, one is struck with the repetitiousness with which the issue of power is treated. The erotic imaginations of modern male artists—the famous and the forgotten, the formal innovators and the followers—re-enact in hundreds of particular variations a remarkably limited set of fantasies. Time and again, the male confronts the female nude as an adversary whose independent existence as a physical or spiritual being must be assimilated to male needs, converted to abstractions, enfeebled or destroyed. So often do such works invite fantasies of male conquest (or fantasies that justify male domination) that the subjugation of the female will appear to be one of the primary motives of modern erotic art.

In Delacroix's *Woman in White Stockings* (1832), for example, an artist's model (i.e., a sexually available woman) reclines invitingly on a silken mattress. The deep red drapery behind her forms a shadowy and suggestive opening. The image evokes a basic male fantasy of sexual confrontation, but the model does not appear to anticipate pleasure. On the contrary, she appears to be in pain, and the signs of her distress are depicted as carefully as her alluring flesh. Her face, partly averted, appears disturbed, her torso is uncomfortably twisted, and the position of her arms suggests surrender and powerlessness. But this distress does not contradict the promise of male gratification. Rather, it is offered as an explicit *condition* of male pleasure—the artist's and the viewer's.

The equation of female sexual experience with surrender and victimization is so familiar in what our culture designates as erotic art and so sanctioned by both popular and high cultural traditions, that one hardly stops to think it odd. The Victorian myth that women experience sex as a violation of body or spirit or both, and that those who actively seek gratification are perverse (and hence deserving of degradation), is but one of many ideological justifications of the sexual victimization of women devised by the modern era. In the 20th century, the theory and practice of psychology has given new rationalizations to the same underlying thesis.

The visual arts are crowded with images of suffering, exposed heroines—slaves, murder victims, women in terror, under attack, betrayed, in chains, abandoned or abducted. Delacroix's *Death of Sardanapalus* (1827), inspired by a poem by Byron, is a *tour de force* of erotic cruelty. Ingres' *Roger and Angelica* (1867) also depicts woman as victim. Here, an endangered and helpless heroine—naked, hairless and swooning—is chained to a large, phallic-shaped rock, immediately below which appear the snake-like forms of a dragon. This fantastic but deadly serious statement documents a common case of male castration anxiety. But the artist-hero (he is Ingres-Roger) masters the situation: he conquers the dangerous female genitals. First he desexualizes Angelica—reduces her to an unconscious mass of closed and boneless flesh; then he thrusts his lance into the toothy opening of the serpent—Angelica's vagina transposed. Given the fears such an image reveals, it is no wonder that Ingres idealized helpless, passive women. The point here, however, is that neither Ingres' fears nor his ideal woman were unique to him.

Americans, too, thrilled to images of female victims. Hiram Power's *The Greek Slave* (1843) was probably the most famous and celebrated American sculpture in the mid-19th century. Overtly, the viewer could admire the virtuous modesty with which Powers endowed the young slave girl, as did critics in the 19th century; but covertly, Powers invites the viewer to imagine himself as the potential oriental buyer of a beautiful, naked, humiliated girl who is literally for sale (he specified that she is on the auction block). The narrative content of this sculpture supports the same underlying thesis we saw in the Delacroix: for women, the sexual encounter must entail pain and subjugation, and that subjugation is a condition of male gratification. But even in paintings where nudes are not literally victims, female allure is treated in terms related to victimization. For Ingres, Courbet, Renoir, Matisse and scores of other modern artists, weakness, mindlessness and indolence are attributes of female sexiness. Germaine Greer's description of the female ideal that informs modern advertising could as well have been drawn from modern nudes:



Left to right: Eugene Delacroix. *Woman in White Stockings*. c. 1832. The Louvre; J.D. Ingres. *Roger and Angelica*. 1867. The National Gallery, London; Hiram Powers. *The Greek Slave*. 1843. Marble. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

> Her essential quality is castratedness. She absolutely must be young, her body hairless, her flesh buoyant, and *she must not have a sexual organ*.[1]

That is, in the modern era, woman's desirability increases as her humanity and health (relative to male norms) are diminished.

The need to see women as weak, vapid, unhealthy objects—while not unique to the modern era—is evidently felt with unusual intensity and frequency in bourgeois civilization, whose technical advances so favor the idea of sexual equality. Indeed, as women's claims to full humanity grew, the more relentlessly would art rationalize their inferior status. For while literature and the theatre could give expression to feminist voices, the art world acknowledged only male views of human sexual experience. In that arena, men alone were free to grapple with their sexual aspirations, fantasies and fears. Increasingly in the modern era, artists and their audiences agreed that serious and profound art is likely to be about what men think of women. In fact, the defense of male supremacy must be recognized as a central theme in modern art. Gauguin, Munch, Rodin, Matisse, Picasso and scores of other artists, consciously or unconsciously, identified some aspect of the sexist cause with all or part of their own artistic missions. Art celebrating sexist experience was accorded the greatest prestige, given the most pretentious esthetic rationales, and identified with the highest and deepest of human aspirations.

Nudes and whores—women with no identity beyond their existence as sex objects—were made to embody transcendent, "universally" significant statements. In literature as in art, the image of the whore even came to stand for woman in her purest, most concentrated form, just as the brothel became the ultimate classroom, the temple in which men only might glimpse life's deepest mysteries: "A Henry Miller, going to bed with a prostitute [in *Tropic of Cancer*], feels that he sounds the very depths of life, death and the cosmos."[2] Picasso's famous brothel scene, the *Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907), where the viewer is cast as the male customer, makes similar claims—claims that art historians advocate as "humanistic" and universal.[3] Art-making itself is analogous to the sexual domination of whores. The metaphor of the penis-as-paintbrush is a revered truth for many 20th-century artists and art historians. It also insists that to create is to possess, to dominate, and to be quintessentially male.

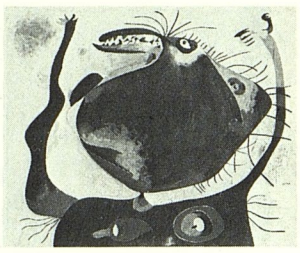
> I try to paint with my heart and my loins, not bothering with style (Vlaminck).[4]

> Thus I learned to battle the canvas, to come to know it as a being resisting my wish (dream), and to bend it forcibly to this wish. At first it stands there like a pure chaste virgin . . . and then comes the willful brush which first here, then there, gradually conquers it with all the energy peculiar to it, like a European colonist. . . . (Kandinsky).[5]

The kind of nudes that prevail in the modern era do not merely reflect a collective male psyche. They actively promote the relationships they portray, not only expressing but also shaping sexual consciousness. For the nude, in her passivity and impotence, is addressed to women as much as to men. Far from being merely an entertainment for males, the nude, as a genre, is one of many cultural phenomena that teaches women to see themselves through male eyes and in terms of dominating male interests. While it sanctions and reinforces in men the identification of virility with domination, it holds up to women self-images in which even sexual self-expression is prohibited. As ideology, the nude shapes our awareness of our deepest human instincts in terms of domination and submission so that the supremacy of the male "I" prevails on that most fundamental level of experience.

Twentieth-century art has equally urged the victimization and spiritual diminution of women, shedding, however, the narrative trappings and much of the illusionism of the 19th century. The abandoned Ariadnes, endangered captives and cloistered harem women of 19th-century art become simply naked models and mistresses in the studio or whores in the brothel. In nudes by Matisse, Vlaminck, Kirchner, Van Dongen and others, the demonstration of male control and the suppression of female subjectivity is more emphatic and more frequently asserted than in 19th-century ones. Their faces are more frequently concealed, blank or mask-like (that is, when they are not put to sleep), and the artist manipulates their passive bodies with more liberty and "artistic" bravado than





Left to right: Edvard Munch. *Madonna*. 1849-95. Nasjonal Gallieret, Oslo; Willem de Kooning. *Untitled Drawing*. 1969; Joan Miro. *Woman's Head*. 1938. Private Collection; Pablo Picasso. *Seated Bather*. 1929. Museum of Modern Art, New York; Maurice Vlaminck. *Bathers*. 1907 Private Collection. Kees van Dongen. *Reclining Nude*. 1904. Private Collection.

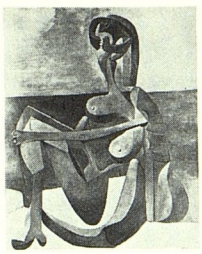
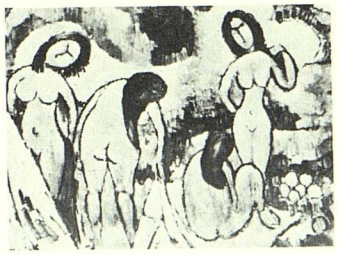
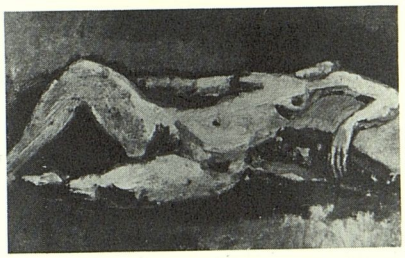
ever.

The image of the femme fatale, especially popular at the turn of the century, would seem to contradict the image of woman as victim. Typically, she looms over the male viewer, fixing him with a mysterious gaze and rendering him will-less. Yet she is born of the same set of underlying fears as her powerless, victimized sisters, as the depictions often reveal. Munch's *Madonna* (1893-94), a femme fatale *par excellence,* visually hints at the imagery of victimization. The familiar gestures of surrender (the arm behind the head) and captivity (the arm behind the back, as if bound) are clearly if softly stated. These gestures have a long history in Western art. The dying *Daughter of Niobe,* a well-known Greek sculpture of the 5th century B.C., exhibits exactly this pose. The raised arm is also seen in numerous 5th-century statues of dying Amazons and sleeping Ariadnes, where it conveys death, sleep or an overwhelming of the will. It may also convey the idea of lost struggle, as in the Amazon statues or in Michaelangelo's *Dying Captive* (The Louvre), themselves masterpieces of victim imagery with strong sexual overtones. But in the modern era, the raised arm (or arms) is emptied of its classical connotation of defeat with dignity and becomes almost exclusively a female gesture—a signal of sexual surrender and physical availability. Munch used it in his *Madonna* to mitigate his assertion of female power; the gesture of defeat subtly checks the dark, overpowering force of Woman. The same ambivalence can also be seen in the spatial relationship between the figure and the viewer: the woman can be read as rising upright before him or as lying beneath him.

However lethal to the male, the late 19th-century femme fatale of Munch, Klimt and Moreau ensnares by her physical beauty and sexual allure. In the 20th century, she becomes bestial, carnivorous and visibly grotesque. In images of monstrous females by Picasso, Rouault, the Surrealists and de Kooning, the dread of woman and male feelings of inferiority are projected, objectified and universalized. Yet here too the devouring woman implies her opposite, combining features of both the powerless and the threatening. The women in Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon,* although physically mutilated and naked (vulnerable), aggressively stare down the viewer, are impenetrably masked, and display sharp-edged, dangerous-looking bodies. Picasso ambivalently presents them with sham and real reverence in the form of a desecrated, burlesque icon, already slashed to bits. De Kooning, in his continuing *Woman* series, ritually invokes, objectifies and obliterates the same species of goddess-whore. Here too a similar ambivalence finds its voice in shifting, unstable forms whose emergence and destruction are accepted in the critical literature as the conscious "esthetic" pretext for his work. The pose his figures usually take—a frontal crouch with thighs open to expose the vulva—also appears in the *Demoiselles d'Avignon* (in the lower right figure), which, in turn, derives from primitive art. Like Picasso's figures, de Kooning's women are simultaneously inviting and repelling, above and below the viewer, obscene modern whores and terrifying primitive deities.

The pronounced teeth in de Kooning's *Woman and Bicycle* (1950)—the figure actually has a second set around her throat—also speak of primitive and modern neurotic fears of the female genitals. The *vagina dentata,* an ancient fantasy into which males project their terror of castration—of being swallowed up or devoured in their partner's sexual organs—is commonly represented as a toothed mouth. The image, which appears frequently in modern art, is a striking feature of Miró's *Woman's Head* (1938). The savage creature in this painting has open alligator jaws protruding from a large, black head. The red eye, bristling hairs and exaggerated palpable nipples, in combination with the thin weak arms, help give it that same mixture of comic improbability and terribleness that characterize Picasso's *Demoiselles* and de Kooning's *Women*. But in addition—and true to Miró's love of metamorphosing forms—the image can be read literally as the lower part of a woman's body, seen partly as if through an X ray. Inverted, the arms become open legs, the dark, massive head a uterus, and the long, dangerous jaws a toothed vaginal canal. The predatory creature in Picasso's *Seated Bather* (1929) not only has saw-toothed jaws, but several features of the praying mantis.

The praying mantis, who supposedly devours her mate, was a favorite theme in Surrealist art and literature. In paintings by Masson, Labisse, Ernst and others, the cannibalistic sexual rites of this insect become a metaphor for the human sexual relationship, and the female of the spe-

cies becomes the Surrealistic version of the femme fatale. More subhuman and brutal than her 19th-century predecessors, she testifies to the higher level of sexual anxiety and hostility experienced by the 20th-century male. For as women increasingly demanded a share of the world, the defense of male authority became more desperate:

> Now become a fellow being, woman seems as formidable as when she faced man as a part of alien Nature. In place of the myth of the laborious honeybee or the mother hen is substituted the myth of the devouring female insect: the praying mantis, the spider. No longer is the female she who nurses the little ones, but rather she who eats the male.[6]

Pictures of nudes in nature also affirm the supremacy of the male consciousness even while they ostensibly venerate or pay tribute to women as freer or more in harmony with nature than men. From the *Bathers* of Delacroix to those of Renoir and Picasso, nude-in-nature pictures almost always ascribe to women a mode of existence that is categorically different from man's. Woman is seen as more *of nature* than man, less in opposition to it both physically and mentally. Implicitly, the male is seen as more closely identified with culture, "the means by which humanity transcends the givens of natural existence, bends them to its purposes, controls them in its interests."[7]

This woman/nature-man/culture dichotomy is one of the most ancient and universal ideas ever devised by man and is hardly new to modern Western culture. However, in Western bourgeois culture, the real and important role of women in domestic, economic and social life becomes ever more recognized: increasingly, the bourgeoisie educates its daughters, depends upon their social and economic cooperation and values their human companionship. Above all, the idea that women belong to the same order of being as men is more articulated than ever before. In this context, to cling to ancient notions of women as a race apart from men—as creatures of nature rather than of culture—is to defend blatantly an ideology that is everywhere contested and contradicted by experience. Nevertheless, the majority of nude-in-nature pictures state just this thesis.

In countless 19th- and 20th-century paintings—Romantic, Symbolist or Expressionist—female nudes in outdoor settings are treated as natural inhabitants of the landscape. Although modern artists have characterized it differently, they agree that this woman-nature realm is an inviting but alien mode of experience. It both attracts and repels the male. It beckons him to step out of rationalized, bourgeois society and to enter a world where men might live through their senses, instincts or imaginations. But the condition of entry—shedding the social identity of the bourgeois male—also entails loss of autonomy and of the power to shape and control one's world. The male artist longs to join those naked beings in that other imagined realm, but he cannot because he fails to imagine their full humanity—or his own. While he values his own instincts, or that part of himself that responds to nature, he regards this portion of his nature as "feminine," antagonistic to his socialized masculine ego, and belonging to that other, "natural" order. Nor can he acknowledge in women a "masculine principle"—an autonomous self that knows itself as separate from and opposed to the natural, biological world. Like Munch before his *Madonna,* he hovers before his dream in ambivalent desire.

Rarely do modern artists imagine naked men in that other realm. When they do, as in works by Cézanne or Kirchner, the male figures tend to look uncomfortable or self-conscious. More often, the male in nature is clothed—both in the literal sense or metaphorically—with a social identity and a social or cultural project. He is a shepherd, a hunter, an artist. Matisse's *Boy With Butterfly Net* (1907) is a magnificent image of a male in nature (or rather a male acting against nature), highly individualized and properly equipped for a specific purpose. In beach scenes by the Fauves and the Kirchner circle, males—when they are present—are not "bathers," i.e., placid creatures of the water, but modern men going swimming in bathing suits or in the raw. They are active, engaged in a culturally defined recreation, located in historical time and space. The female bather, who has no counterpart in modern art, is a naked existence, outside of culture. Michelet, the 19th-century historian, poetically expressed the ideas implicit in the genre: man, he wrote, creates history, while woman:

follows the noble and serene epic that Nature chants in her harmonious cycles, repeating herself with a touching grace of constancy and fidelity. . . . Nature is a woman. History, which we very foolishly put in the feminine gender, is a rude, savage male, a sun-burnt, dusty traveller. . . .[8]

Even in Matisse's *Joy of Living* (1906), where men and women share an Arcadian life, cultural activities (music-making, animal husbandry) are male endeavors while women exist merely as sensual beings or abandon themselves to emotionally expressive but artless and spontaneous dance.

How we relate to these works becomes a compelling issue once their sexual-political content is apparent. The issue, however, is difficult to grasp without first coming to terms with the ideological character of our received notions of art. For in our society, art—along with all high culture—has replaced religion (that is, among the educated) as the repository of what we are taught to regard as our highest, most enduring values. As sanctified a category as any our society offers, art silently but ritually validates and invests with mystifying authority the ideals that sustain existing social relations. In art, those ideals are given to us as general, universal values, collective cultural experience, "our" heritage, or as some other abstraction removed from concrete experience. Physically and ideologically, art is isolated from the rest of life, surrounded with solemnity, protected from moral judgement. Our very encounters with it in museums, galleries and art books are structured to create the illusion that the significance of art has little or nothing to do with the conflicts and problems that touch common experience. Established art ideologies reinforce this illusion. According to both popular and scholarly literature, true artistic imaginations transcend the ordinary fantasies, the class and sex prejudices and the bad faith that beset other human minds. Indeed, most of us believe that art, by definition, is always good—because it is of purely esthetic significance (and the purely esthetic is thought to be good), or because it confirms the existence of the imagination and of individualism, or because it reveals other "timeless" values or truths. Most of us have been schooled to believe that art, *qua* art, if it is "good" art, is never bad *for* anyone, never has anything to do with the oppression of the powerless, and never imposes on us values that are not universally beneficial.

The modern masterpieces of erotic art that I have been discussing enjoy this ideological protection even while they affirm the ideals of male domination and female subjugation. Once admitted to that high category of Art, they acquire an invisible authority that silently acts upon the consciousness, confirming from on high what social customs and law enforce from below. In their invisible and hence unquestioned authority, they proclaim—without acknowledging it—what men and women can be to themselves and to each other. But once that authority is made visible, we can see what is before us: art and artists are made on earth, in history, in organized society. And in the modern era as in the past, what has been sanctified as high art and called True, Good and Beautiful is born of the aspirations of those who are empowered to shape culture.

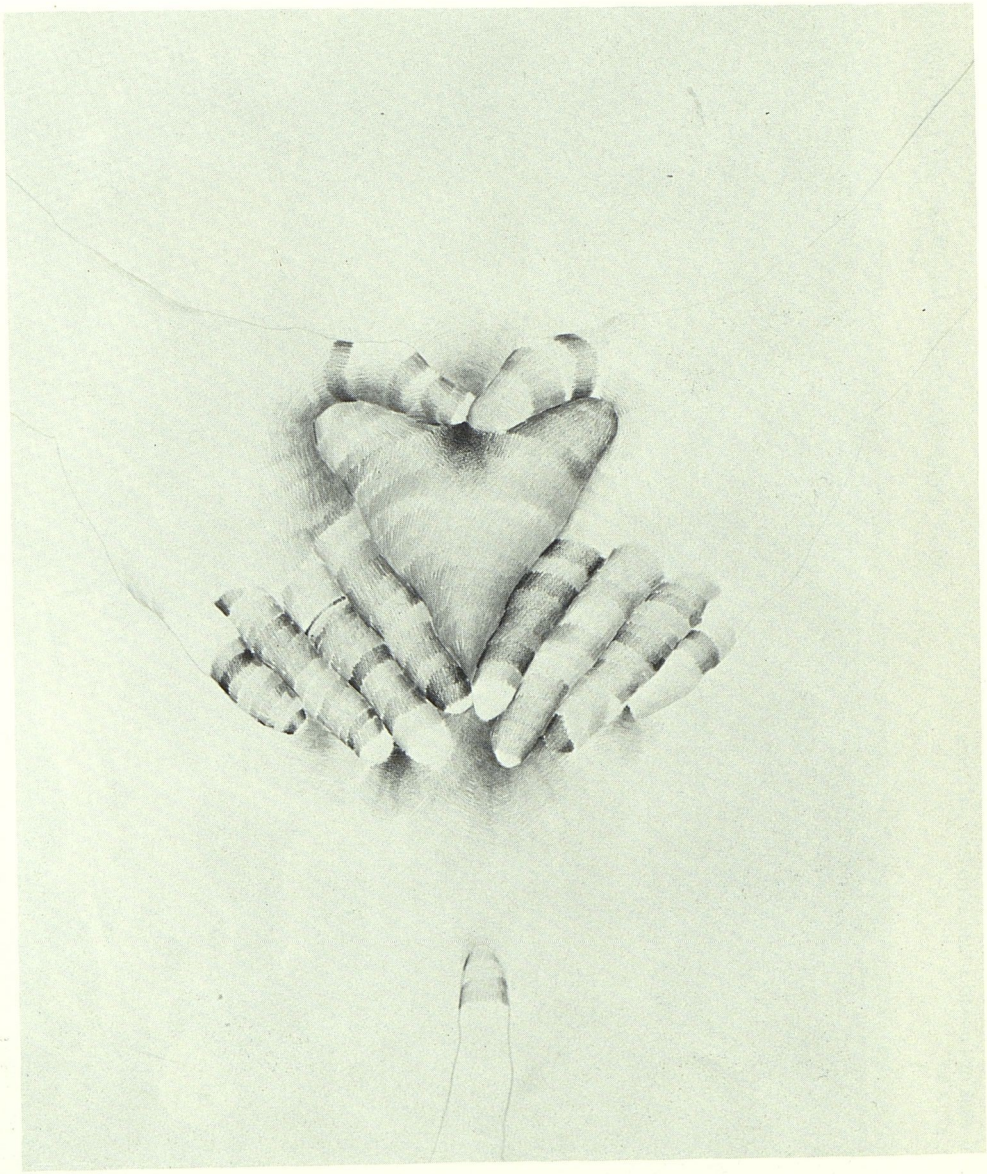
My gratitude to Flavia Alaya and Joan Kelly-Gadol, whose own work and conversation have enriched and clarified my thinking.

1. *The Female Eunuch* (New York, 1972), p. 57.
2. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York, 1961), p. 181.
3. Leo Steinberg, "The Philosophical Brothel, Part I," *Art News* (Sept., 1972), pp. 20-29; and Gert Schiff, "Picasso's Suite 347, or Painting as an Act of Love," in *Woman as Sex Object*, ed. Thomas B. Hess and Linda Nochlin (New York, 1972), pp. 238-253.
4. In Herschel B. Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley, 1970), p. 144.
5. Quoted in Max Kozloff, "The Authoritarian Personality in Modern Art," *Artforum* (May, 1974), p. 46. Schiff, *op. cit.*, actually advocates the penis-as-paintbrush metaphor.
6. De Beauvoir, *op. cit.*, p. 179.
7. Sherry Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" *Feminist Studies*, 1, No. 2 (Fall, 1972), p. 10.
8. Jules Michelet, *Woman (La Femme)*, trans. J. W. Palmer (New York, 1860), pp. 104-105.

*An excerpt from the forthcoming book, *The New Eros*, ed., Joan Semmel, to be published by Hacker Art Books, New York.

Carol Duncan is an art historian who teaches at Ramapo College. She has published in *Artforum* and *The Art Bulletin* and her essay "Teaching the Rich" appears in the anthology *New Ideas in Art Education* (edited by Gregory Battcock). She is also on the "anti-catalogue" committee of Artists Meeting for Cultural Change.

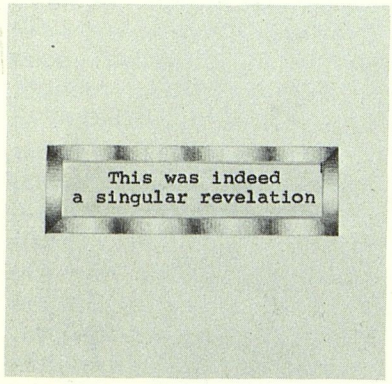
Now Women Repossess Their Own Sexuality. . . .

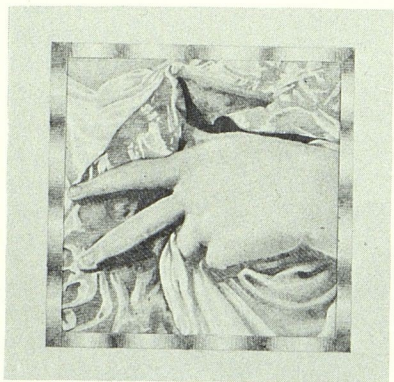


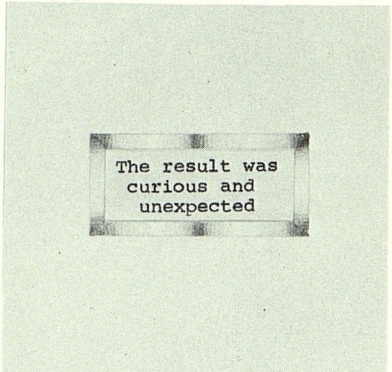
Left: Louise Bourgeois. *Femme Couteau*. 1969-70. Polished Marble. 26″ long. (Photo: Peter Moore.) above: Marisol. *Untitled*. 1968. Colored pencil. 16¾″ x 14″. (Photo: Geoffrey Clements.)

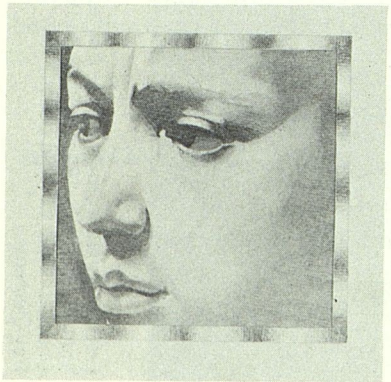
Ann Leda Shapiro. *Making Love to a Man Who Isn't All There.* 1973. Watercolor. 22" X 30"

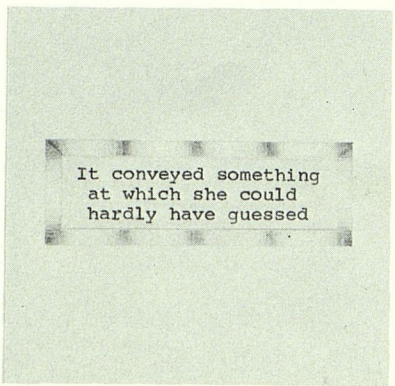
Below: Dotty Attie. Details from *Pierre and Lady Holland.*

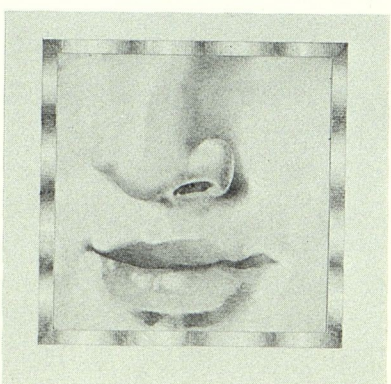




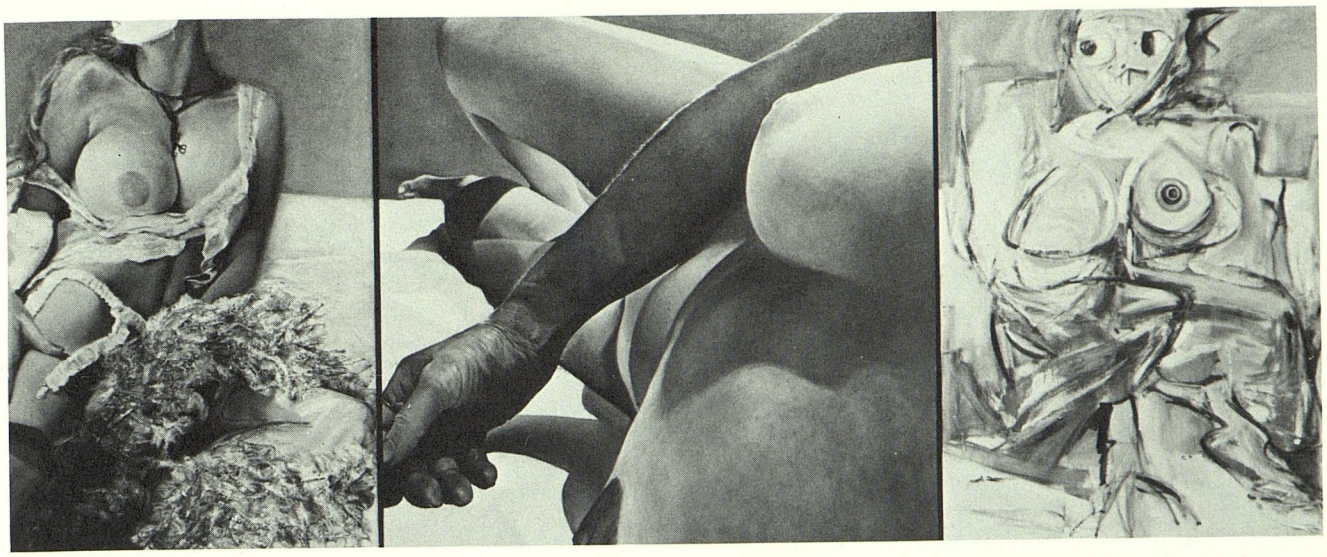




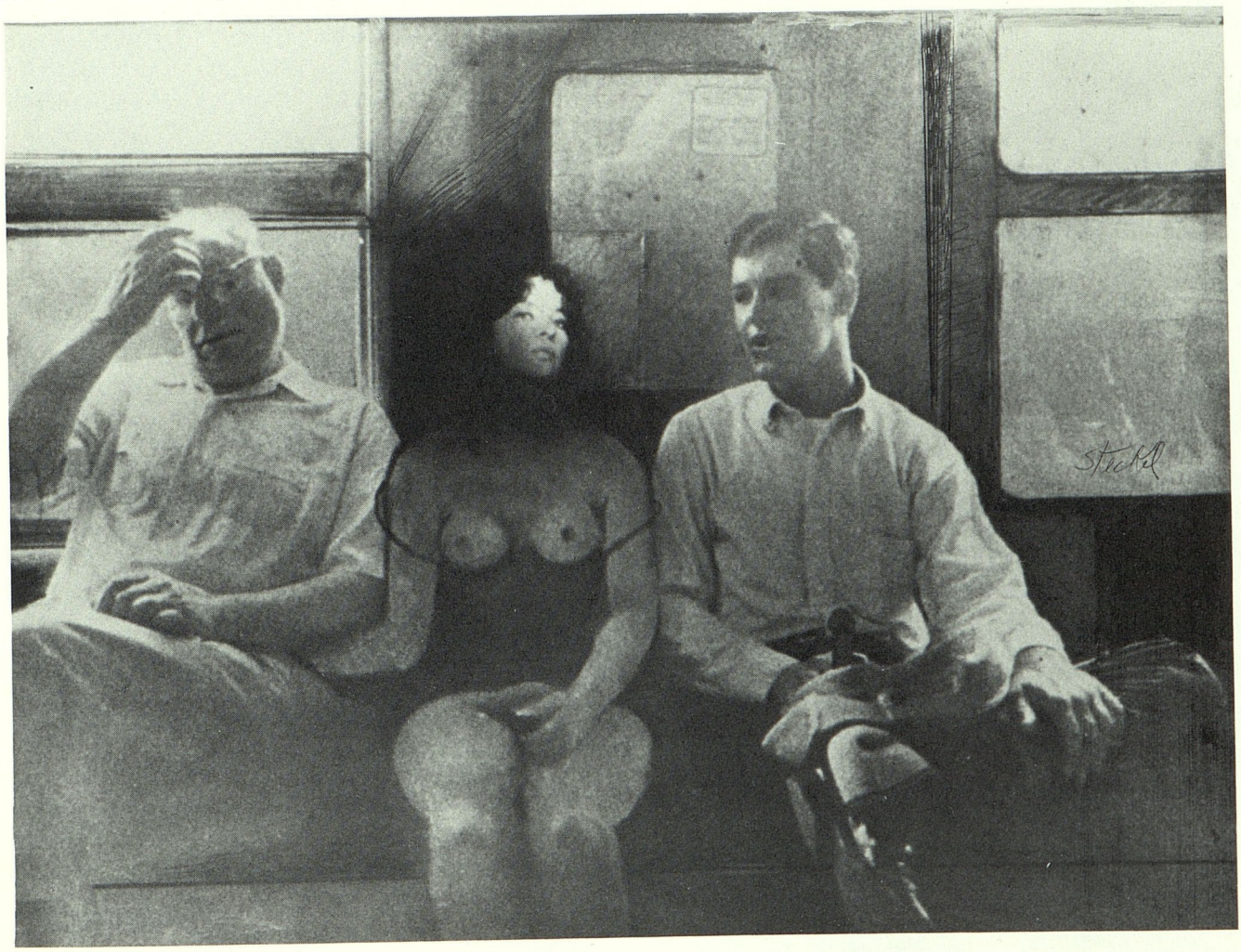




Joan Semmel. *Mythology and Me.* 1976. Oil on canvas. 60″ X 150″. (Photo: John Kasparian.)



Anita Steckel. *The Subway.* 1974. Collage. 3′ X 4′.



ABCS

Susan Yankowitz

AN APPLE

Manuelo Manchik admires the apple before devouring it. He cups the thing in the palm of his hand, turning it this way and that; the light bounces off the curves of its golden skin. O golden delicious, you make a mouth water! The fruit is round and firm and fully packed; unlike the mealy banana, it will resist his teeth just a little. Again his mouth waters as he delays the coming pleasure. He cups the thing in the palm of one hand, stroking it with the other; it is smooth and cool beneath his fingers. O golden delicious, you do tempt a man! Yes there is no doubt, you were made to be eaten. He opens his mouth wide and chomps through to the core in a single bite. Two black seeds slither in a rill of juice down his chin.

BREASTS

At a gathering of talents, artistic and profane, MM had spotted across the crowded room his own dreamed-of Olympia, half-reclining on a fat settee. The exquisite naturalness of her Manet pose enchanted him no less than her near nudity. Under her see-through blouse her breasts were classic. O wonder. O no wonder that they pushed out the silk (or was it cheap nylon?) of her blouse exactly like breasts; that to exploring hands (at other hours of course for now she was half-reclining naturally alone) they were as round and firm and full as round firm full breasts; and that the nipples which tipped these breasts resembled nothing so much as the nipples which tip such breasts. In short and in sum, her breasts were truly like breasts. But MM had no interest in the obvious. He was a man of imagination, of poetry even. The excesses of similitude multiplied by their exact number his pleasures. He saw what he saw: Olympia with breasts which were breasts and at the same time various other roundnesses not breasts. And roundness was all, preferable even to that commonplace of literature, ripeness. Only one fact was crucial and he had ascertained it, subtly brushing his fingers against her shoulders: she was not made of wax. So when MM opened his mouth wide one night days later and bit with gusto into the breast on the left, that same breast bled. Damn, he had erred in his distinctions! But Manuelo Manchik was not a man to hang fire. With a gesture of magnificent unconcern, he wiped his chin and continued eating.

CHYME

Olympia had accepted that name, accepted too the play of tongue and teeth, accepted even the discomfort of her body crushed beneath him when poing! she was punctured. Too late to cry foul! she fell, undone by mastication. Softened by saliva she travelled in mouthfuls through his gullet and into the fat sac of his stomach. There she lodges, divided against herself.

Fool, she chides herself, to have come to chyme!

Her head is separated from her body. Her legs, each in one long piece, are severed from her crotch and from each other, Her two loose breasts bounce from wall to wall, free-floating, as his stomach contracts and dilates in digestion. Pressed against the locked pyloric door she is grateful at least that she will not be further fractured by the cleaving peristaltic actions of his intestine. There is no disguising the situation: she is split, sundered, she is not in one piece. If she does not want to sour in his belly (and why would she desire such a fate?) she must somehow (but how?) reverse the process herself. But herself is not. From deep inside Manuelo's stomach, she surveys the chaos of her members and thinks: I must pull myself together!

DREAM?

Maybe it's all a dream, she reasons reasonably enough, and when I wake up I'll find myself me again, just me, no one's Olympia, in toto. And so she falls to sleep so she can fall awake. This is the dream she finds: she is standing in water being fucked in the ass by the shameless beak of a crane. His long legs pinion her hips. He wades and fishes, taking his time. It hurts. What can she do but submit? Her name is not Leda; the power is all his.

ESCAPE

She wakes up gagging with her left foot in her mouth. No use sucking on the toes, they're not sour balls, they won't dissolve or sweeten her palate. Her mouth is dry with sleep and anxiety; she could have suffocated during that nighttime shift. There is no escaping the fact now: she must escape! But how? She wags her head a few times to float the foot free as she ponders the ins and outs. The nearest exit is the rear. Can she deliver herself through there? MM is

notoriously tight-assed. She experiments, jamming her foot in the door; MM jumps. Assured of the flexibility of that aperture, she glances upward to the other hole, further away but far less foul. Keeping her foot wedged in the crack she sticks a finger up his throat; MM gags.
Both routes are open to her.
Which out should she take?

FLATULENCE

MM ejects a fart and holds his nose in indignation. The cream of the art world thins around him. Many noses are held. How could she, the bitch, upset him so? He excuses himself gracefully from the room, leaving his smell behind. Is he stuck with her forever? Must he pay with his immaculate reputation for one night's overindulgence? O she is lodged there in his gut, forcing him to take strong measures.

GLUTTONY

"I'd like to eat you up," he had said. She had been enthusiastic. Whose sin was it then? Definitely food for thought, his and hers.

HIS AND HERS

HIS: She tempted me.
HERS: He ate.

INDIGESTION

"I'm carrying her around. She weighs me down. Really, I'm not a free man anymore," Manuelo confided to his friend the doctor, picking his teeth with an indigestible sliver of fingernail.
"You must get her out of your system," replied the learned doc. "May I prescribe a laxative?"

JUSTICE MORE OR LESS POETIC

She hadn't cared who drove into her. He had had a full set. It was good sport yes. And what a ball! He had swung hard, lifted high and, rimming the cup first with a brilliant display of control, had dropped right in: hole in one. Manuelo Manchik was not the sort to putter around. Well, neither was she.
"You're a real swinger," he complimented her.
"Just par for the course," she replied, refering of course to her life.
Now she was teed-off, finding herself in the trap. O she had been green in those green days, but she would lie in the roughage no longer. With a method to her madness she slices into his intestine with her teeth. MM howls then doubles over, squeezing her (according to plan) more closely together; his cramp adheres her. When he straightens up she delights to see the connections: her legs secured to her groin and her groin to her torso, o classic venus though still not Olympia for her breasts and arms are still somewhere adrift. And her head, that obstinate be-bumped ball, is lying slightly off-course, planning the next shot.

KIDDING

When she reached twenty-five, her psychiatrist had said (though gently): "All kidding aside, my dear, you are no longer a child prodigy."
She had run home crying to her mother, blurting the tragic news. "So? What are you going to do with yourself?" mother had asked, heart-to-heart.
"I gotta grow up sometime, ma. He's right. So here's what: I'm gonna have a baby!"
"What? What?" disbelieving ma had hollered, flinging her daughter from her sacked-out breast. "I'm going to have a bastard?"
"No, ma, no," she calmed her mother. "*I'm* gonna have the bastard."
The child was born crying and one gulp of air later, died. The bereaved not yet a mother invited her psychiatrist to the funeral and told him then and there that they were quits. That was how he would remember her: standing gravely at the grave, dressed all in black, a grown-up color.

LIKE

"I like you," MM had said (as had others), thinking to flatter.
"No you're not," she retorted almost at once, angry almost. "You're not like me at all."

MILK OF MAGNESIA

He takes the prescribed dosage and waits.

NO ANSWERS

In the park, Abigale is lying on her belly, waiting as pre-arranged for her best friend, the putative Olympia. She pokes with a spring twig at the underside of a caterpillar, trying to hurry it out of its skin.
"Where are your wings, caterpillar?" she asks.
"And where was I before I was born?"
"And where, sky, do you get off, looking down on me?"
Everything is mute. The silence is its own question.

OSCILLATIONS

Suddenly everything starts churning. Using all anchored organs for ballast, she holds herself together; he will not shake her up, will not fragment her. His belly bloats with gases, goes into a rumble. So! He is trying to purge himself by purging her. The rejection infuriates her. She will come out when she is good and ready, and she will use the exit of her choice. Tough shit, Manuelo! She braces herself against his spasms.

P'S & Q'S

"Mind them!" her mother had warned. But what were they? She had learned the alphabet thoroughly but the deeper meanings of p's and q's had eluded her. If she had gone further in her study of letters, would she have led a simpler life?

REFLECTION

MM strains.
O resists.
The battle is in earnest. Some old words rise to the occasion. "The man who hates you and the woman who is hated are probably one and the same," her psychiatrist had suggested, maddening her (at the time) into silence.
Was he speaking of suicide?
Hers?
The thought sobers her and sheds light. After all, it is almost spring out there. The crocuses are already beginning their day-open night-close ritual. She could if she chose walk outside without a coat, breathing sunlight. Someone, also without a coat, might be coming round the corner, fated to bump chests with her. Her mind too, she realizes, can turn corners. And certainly Abigale, her old friend, must be waiting for her in the park this very moment.

SURE IS

His stomach is storming around her with a vengeance. She holds on for dear life. O yes, it is so so dear, good old life. It is indeed of the essence, hers in particular. Her imagination has never yet failed her. She will live! Out of the darkness, the closet, the belly of this male whale. The way is lighted by divine coincidence as MM opens his mouth widely to expel a belch. The light rays down his throat, a sign. Her route has been decided. Really, there are possibilities in everything, even a belch, she concludes.

TRANSLATION (AFTER RILKE)

Manuelo has thrown caution to the winds. "Do something," he pleads. "I need help."
"Yes," agrees the doctor, "you must change your life."
O but it hurts! His eyes are blind with tears. Manuelo weeps with the effort to restrain them.

UNITED SHE CAN

He falls back into his chair, trying to relax, inadvertently giving her the room she needs to maneuver. She holds herself snugly in her own arms; they mate with their respective sockets, home at last. Now, able to manipulate with her hands, the rest is easy. She catches her drifting breasts and fixes them onto her chest. She knows which is which, having observed in moments of self-criticism that the left is slightly larger than the right. It occurs to her at this juncture that nature is purposive in all plans. Nothing is very much like anything else, each thing is essentially itself and under no compulsion to be other. Goodbye then, Manuelo's Olympia! Goodbye velvet settee and languid pose! MM's ass presses down into the seat, squeezing her upward. Her body rises toward her head and miraculously naturally unites with it. He cannot keep her down. He does not want to. She is on her way.

VOYAGING

Still afraid that she will fall apart—these connections are so tenuous, so untested—she kicks her feet, gingerly at first, then with increasing vigor as she finds to her elation that they will move her. She paddles upward toward his heart. O the current there is strong; she struggles bravely; she falters, sucked into its vortex; she kicks, she flails and manages, through stratagems newly known to science, to bypass the whole throbbing mass. The worst is over. She catches her breath at his lungs and then, with a great final spurt, dives through his esophagus.

WHOOPS!

She spills out of his mouth.
"Hi, Manuelo."
"Olympia!"
They stand gaping at each other, both of them messy with blood and other slime. She sets him straight at once. "My real name's Claire. Can I take a shower?"

Claire, not Olympia then. He looks at her in this new light as he scrubs her back. How could he not have noticed those pimples on her shoulders? Perhaps that is why he was unable to stomach her. But no, no, the mystery is more than skin deep.
"Scrub harder, Manuelo."
He does, marveling at the dead skin which peels off, flake by flake. How many layers are there? He stares into the skin, lost in ponderings beneath the surface and then, with a wild cry of exultation, realizes that he has found his calling. Dermatology will teach him the topography of the flesh. Through that mundane profession he will explore the twin mysteries of desire and disgust.
"You're breaking the skin again!" shouts Claire. "Enough!"

YOU

"You have helped me to find myself," they admit simultaneously and, with a tender embrace, part forever.

ZOON

Shining in the sunlight which is shining too, she runs to the park. Abigale is asleep; a caterpillar is making a moustache on her upper lip. Claire picks it off and tosses it carelessly into the grass. It slithers away as Abigale wakes.
"Where have you been?" drowsy A asks. Claire hesitates. What words could convey the absurdity, the enormity of her adventure? An attempt is necessary. She begins to stammer a reply but her stomach, miraculously to the rescue, speaks first: loudly it rumbles, fiercely it growls. Both women laugh. The noise suffices for response.
Claire stretches out her hands to Abigale and, with a little tug, pulles her to her feet.
"It's time for another beginning," Claire says.
"It always was," Abigale grins.
And off they go, old friends hand in hand, in search of apples.

Susan Yankowitz's first novel, *Silent Witness*, was published by Knopf in May. Her play, *Still Life*, will be produced in January at the Women's Interarts Theatre, and her published plays include *Slaughterhouse Play, Terminal, Boxes,* and *The Prison Game*, among others.

Do You Think

Jayne Cortez

Do you think this is a sad day
a sad night
full of tequila full of el dorado
full of banana solitudes

And my chorizo face a holiday for knives
and my arching lips a savannah for cuchifritos
and my spit curls a symbol for you
to overcharge overbill oversell me
these saints these candles
these dented cars loud pipes
no insurance and no place to park
because my last name is Cortez

Do you think this is a sad night
a sad day

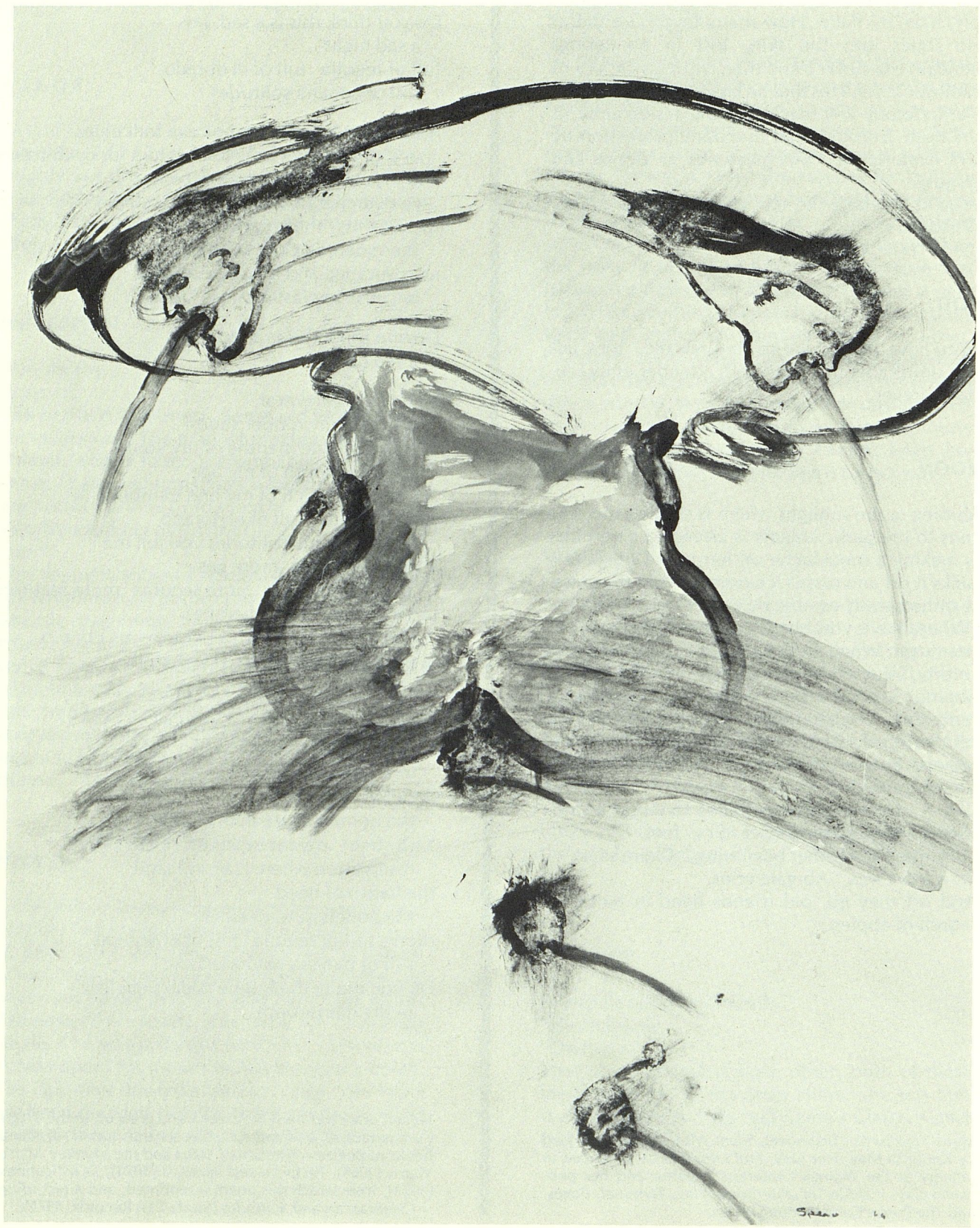
And on this elevator
between my rubber shoes
in the creme de menthe of my youth
the silver tooth of my age
the gullah speech of my one trembling tit
full of tequila full of el dorado
full of banana solitudes you tell me
i use more lights more gas
more telephones more sequins more feathers
more iridescent head-stones
you think i accept this pentecostal church
in exchange for the lands you stole

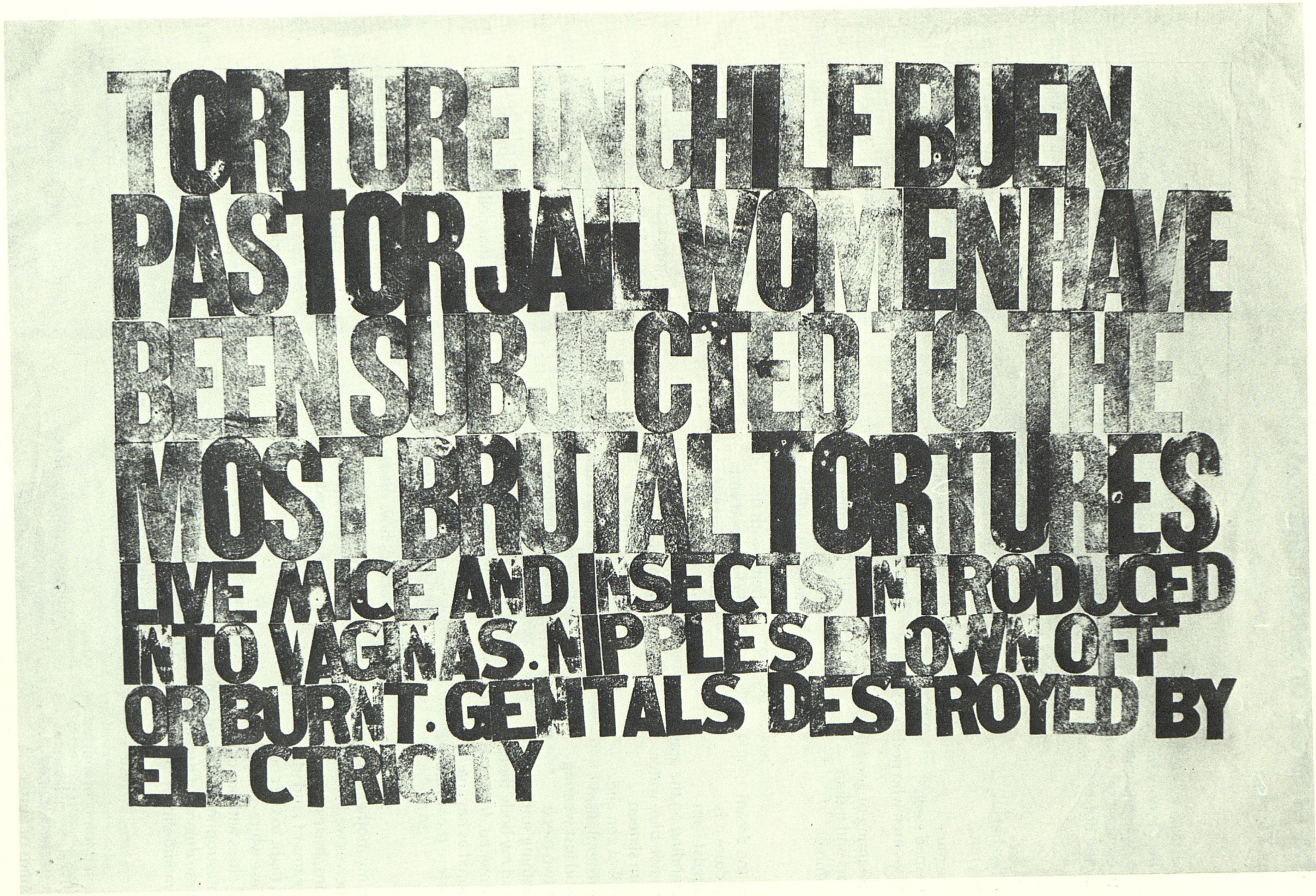
And because my name is Cortez
do you think this is a revision
of flesh studded with rivets
my wardrobe clean
the pick in my hair
the pomegranate in my hand
14th street delancey street 103rd street
reservation where i lay my skull
the barrio of need
the police state in ashes
drums full of tequila full of el dorado
full of banana solitudes say:
Do you really think time speaks english
in the mens room

Jayne Cortez was born in Arizona and grew up in the Watts Community of Los Angeles. She is the author of three books of poetry—*Pissstained Stairs and the Monkey Man's Wares* (1969), *Festivals and Funerals* (1971), *Scarifications* (1973), from which this poem is reprinted, and a recording —*Celebrations and Solitudes* (Strata East Records, 1975).

Nancy Spero is an artist living in New York who has focused on political themes since 1966.

Nancy Spero. Below: *Bomb Shitting.* 1966. Painting on paper. 36″ X 24″. Right: *Torture in Chile.* 1976. Lithograph on arches paper. 22″ X 30″





the empress anastasia in new york

Jan Clausen

Anastasia was long rumored
to be the only member of
the Russian imperial family
to escape execution
by the Bolsheviks.

1.

it has begun
the rain

the rain-
shaped sleep
of women who nod in doorways

dreaming of good times
bars and indian
summer

2.

in the dream
picture it is
august i am
standing on the grass
beside blue water
i am sixteen
full of zen and
existentialism
acid lust wearing
a two piece
bathing suit i
had my body then
browned, frowning
bored as havana
before the revolution

3.

in my mother's house there are
shelves well stocked with
cans, mixes, paper products.
dreams of land. dreams
of flight to the country.
these white-skinned dreams
of cities without color,
catastrophes we do not name,
these dreams of dreamless sleep,
remembering nothing.

4.

she hid joints of mutton
beneath her skirt
her pockets bulged
pounds of butter
whole hams in her suit-
case the good bitter
taste of real coffee
in her mouth she roamed
streets freely
the soldiers never
caught her the jews
trooped off to treblinka

5.

in viet nam arthritis
is common due to
months years spent crouched
in damp bomb shelters

and i remember my
mother's soft
face skin with the
fallout scare
shelter with the
shelves lined with
canned peaches
jugs of water
the nuclear family
in the atomic age and
SAC is in the air

the bay of pigs cuban
missile crisis got stuck in my childhood
throat my mother
moved the iron
back and forth she
listened about suez
on the radio

and mother still writes how she
hopes, keeps her shelves
stocked, how she helps
these expatriate vietnamese
who can't find jobs
in their adopted country

6.

please give me a little piece
of meat for
i cannot eat your bread
your unhulled rice

for i am a princess
in my own right
country

my grandmother's face
was famous
in the nineties
(and castro hid
in the mountains
the jungles covered
ho chi minh
and mao is whispered
change from out of the north
and lenin rode east
in a sealed train
and iskra means
a single spark
can start a prairie fire)

and we came
unto neon
dollar signed
miami

7.

the years
her mother singing
in her hair

you are the rightful
empress
anastasia

but she wakes in nightmare
screaming this word
"pretender"

mother
what really happened
in that cellar

8.

the streets get colder
she grows more weary
of lies, potatoes,
her mother
still mourning the tsar.

her room looks out
on an airshaft. the carpet
is worn. the bronx
is burning. she never saw the neva.

she pawns the last
of the icons.

9.

in spring she crosses
over, joins
the resistance.

10.

this november
city is up
tight. in midtown
the ibm selectrics
have been bolted
to the desks
of secretaries
who are afraid, now
to change jobs.
the druggists refuse
to fill medicaid
prescriptions.
a man has been shot
for going
over the turnstiles.

we slept overnight
on long island,
all the way out.
i saw each grain
of sand a different
color, stuffed shells
in my coat. i walked
as before toward rain
down a beach shining
white through the storm,
watched the tide
turn once.

locked into the city,
i plan to quit my job.
i must get a jacket
with a working
zipper, call
the exterminator,
have a gate installed
on the fire escape
access window.

(Thanksgiving, 1975)

Jan Clausen writes poetry, fiction, and critical prose. She is the author of a book of poems, *After Touch* (Out and Out Books, 1975) and "The Politics of Publishing and the Lesbian Community" (*Sinister Wisdom*, no. 2, 1977). With friends, she edits *Conditions*, a magazine of women's writing with emphasis on work by lesbians.

Dead in Bloody Snow

Meridel LeSueur

I am an Indian woman
Witness to my earth
Witness for my people.
I am the nocturnal door,
The hidden cave of your sorrow,
Like you hidden deep in furrow
and dung
of the charnel mound,
I heard the craven passing of the
white soldiers
And saw them shoot at Wounded Knee
upon the sleeping village,
And ran with the guns at my back
Until we froze in our blood on the snow

I speak from old portages
Where they pursued and shot into the river crossing
All the grandmothers of Black Hawk.
I speak from the smoke of grief,
from the broken stone,
And cry with the women crying from the marsh
Trail and tears of drouthed women,
O bitter barren!
O barren bitter!
I run, homeless,
I arrive
in the gun sight,
beside the white square houses
of abundance.
My people starve
In the time of the bitter moon.
I hear my ghostly people crying
A hey a hey a hey.

Rising from our dusty dead the sweet grass,
The skull marking the place of loss and flight.
I sing holding my severed head,
to my dismembered child,
A people's dream that died in bloody snow.

Meridel LeSueur defines herself as "a 76-year-old Midwestern writer," something of an understatement since she has published 12 books and innumerable stories, articles and poems. "Dead in Bloody Snow" is reprinted from *Rites of Ancient Ripening* (Vanilla Press, Minneapolis, 1975) in which she says, "Slogan for 76: Survival is a form of resistance."

Notes From the First Year

(for my sisters, a trilogy of revolution)

Susan Saxe

I
Patience

There is no need now to rush about my life,
I have time, each day, to unfold
carefully, my rage —
no longer impotent,
But the most powerful force in the universe.
(Do you hear me, Mother?)
Slowly like a sunflower, like a tree,
Revolution unfolds before me:
Newspaper pages beginning with world news,
and ending with the comics,
and classified ads announcing the end
of things as we know them.
Inevitably the world, the nation, the city,
the arts, society, sports
and personals
will be recycled
By patient origamists, armed with love.

II
Questionnaire

There is unfeminine (but oh, so Female)
sureness in my hands,
checking "No." to every question
in the Harris poll, Reader's Digest,
Mademoiselle,
I am an outlaw, so none of that applies to me:
I do not vote in primaries, do not wish to increase
my spending power, do not take birth control
pills.
I do not have a legal residence, cannot tell you
my given name or how (sometimes very) old
I really am.
I do not travel abroad, see no humor in uniforms,
and my lips are good enough for my lover
as they are.
Beyond that, no one heads my household, I would not
save my marriage if I had one, or anybody else's
if I could.
I do not believe that politicians need me, that Jesus
loves me, or that short men are particularly sexy.
Nor do I want a penis.
What else do you have to offer?

III
I Argue My Case

Gentlemen of the Jury:
I have had the time and opportunity to appear
before you in the guise
(disguise) of every woman:
to you, sir, I was the dumb hand
that wiped your
table,
to you, sir, a flimsy black
skirt on legs,
to you, some hard
down-on-me woman who might
(or might not) yet
be downed again.
To him, an ass,
to him, a breast, a leg
to him.
To that one, just another working bitch.
To each, another history, to each
another (partial) lie.
We women are liars, you say.
(It is written.)
But you have made us so.
We are too much caught up in cycles, you say.
But your gods cannot prevent that.
So we act out our cycles,
one or many,
in the rhythm of what has to be
(because we say so)
our common destiny.
And so, before you are taken in by one of our
perfect circles,
remember also that we are in perfect
motion.
And when you (and you will)
run counter to the flow of revolution,
the wheel of women will continue to turn,
and grind you
so fine.

Susan Saxe wrote this and other poems while she was living underground as a fugitive for 4½ years, during which time she was on the F.B.I.'s Ten Most Wanted List for "overall radical activities." On March 27, 1975, she was arrested in Philadelphia and since then has been tried for allegedly taking part in a Boston bank robbery 7 years ago in which a policeman was killed. Saxe became "a feminist, a lesbian, a woman-identified woman" while underground. She is now in prison awaiting sentence.

Reprinted from *Talk Among the Womenfolk*, Susan Saxe, Philadelphia, Pa., 1976.

Seagull. (Photo: eeva-inkeri.)

Little Eagle Spreads Her Wings. (Photo: eeva-inkeri.)

Spring Plowing. (Photo: eeva-inkeri.)

Women Hold Up Half the Sky. (Photo: eeva-inkeri.)

Feminist Abstract Art—A Political Viewpoint

Harmony Hammond

There are many articles written on feminist art which try to pinpoint and define a feminist sensibility. Few of these articles go beyond the recognition that feminist art is based on the personal experiences of women by beginning to question its larger political implications and the role it plays in feminist revolution. Most articles originating from the art world tend to be formal descriptive attempts at documenting what women are doing, and do not attempt a feminist analysis of function and meaning.

In a reactionary escape from formalist criticism, most movement writing on feminist art deals with political issues, but lacks any real understanding of the creative process, how it functions for the artist and how it affects form and content. Without such an understanding it is impossible to evaluate the work as art. While feminist poets and writers comment on each other's work and write of their own processes, we visual artists tend to remain silent and let others do the writing for us. Our silence contributes to a lack of dialogue between artist and audience, to the lack of criticism from a feminist perspective, and ultimately to the misinterpretation of our work.

In this article I wish to focus on abstract art and show that it can have a feminist basis and therefore be political. Feminists are not only people to attempt political or revolutionary art, but because certain ideas and issues occur over and over, they are of interest to us and worth exploring. I will focus on one area of abstract art by discussing concepts of marking and language in feminist drawing and painting—to show its origin, meaning, and political potential.

In "Prime Time: Art and Politics"[1] Alexa Freeman and Jackie MacMillan look at how art is viewed in this capitalist, patriarchal society and criticize activists for reacting too quickly and overlooking the revolutionary potential of art. However, they in turn react to male establishment myths about abstract (non-representational) art and exclude it from feminist and political potential. They view abstract art as private expression which is not understandable or analyzable to the audience, and therefore irrelevant to feminist political goals. Thus they incorrectly see elitism as a pre-condition of abstract art, rather than realizing that this is how abstract art has been used by men as a defense mechanism against the alienation of their own capitalist system; that as well as furthering the myth of artist as alienated and isolated genius, abstract art has offered an illusion of objectivity. Such notions suggest that the content of one's work can be separated from one's political beliefs. By sponsoring international exhibitions showing apolitical abstract paintings by former Communist Party members, the C.I.A. (via the Museum of Modern Art) has sought to impress other nations with the cultural freedom of the U.S.A. The way in which Abstract Expressionist art was defined and developed by the artists and then used by others to further cold war politics in the fifties is only one example of the manipulation of abstract art to create the illusory separation of art and politics.[2] Thus when women continue to respond to abstract art as "apolitical," they are reinforcing and maintaining myths established by men.

The Freeman/MacMillan article is typical in its analysis of art and politics. Abstract art has become taboo for most artists who consider themselves political feminists. Because of the history outlined above, it is difficult to determine abstract painting's relationship to feminist ideology. There are radical feminists who are making abstract art. Radical feminism operates from the belief that women as a class are oppressed, and that a mass political women's movement is necessary to overthrow male supremacy.[3] Therefore, we might ask, how are the visions of radical feminists analyzed and portrayed in this art?

It is necessary to break down the myths and fears surrounding abstract art and make it understandable. Women—artists and non-artists—need to talk about art, and talking about abstract art need not be more difficult than discussing portraits, nudes, vaginas, or whatever. Every work of art is understandable on many different levels. It is by talking about our work and work processes that we will not only begin to develop a new language for interpreting abstract art, but also to integrate this work with society. This language, which I see evolving from consciousness-raising techniques, will be able to be shared with any woman, regardless of class background. For artists, such a dialogue with the audience is essential, as it offers valuable feedback for the development of our art.

I want to reclaim abstract art for women and transform it on our own terms. It is interesting to note that much of women's past creativity, as

well as the art by women of non-western cultures, has been abstract. I'm thinking of the incredible baskets, pottery, quilts, afghans, lace and needlework women have created. Many of the motifs used were based on "the stitch" itself. The repetition and continuity of the stitch or weaver formed the individual shape and also the pattern resulting from its repetition. Usually these motifs and patterns were abstract and geometric. Patricia Mainardi points out that they had specific meaning for the women who made them, and in a sense formed a visual language in themselves:

> In designing their quilts, women not only made beautiful and functional objects, but expressed their own convictions on a wide variety of subjects in a language for the most part comprehensible only to other women. In a sense, this was a secret language among women, for as the story goes, there was more than one man of Tory political persuasion who slept unknowingly under his wife's 'Whig Rose' quilt. Women named quilts for their religious beliefs . . . or their politics—at a time when women were not allowed to vote. The 'Radical Rose' design, which women made during the Civil War, had a black center for each rose and was an expression of sympathy with the slaves.[4]

As we examine some contemporary abstract art by women, it is important to develop a sense of identity and connection with our own past creativity rather than that of the oppressor who has claimed "fine art" and "abstract art" for himself. In fact, the patriarchal putdown of "decorative" traditional art and "craft" has outright racist, classist, and sexist overtones. Elizabeth Weatherford states:

> Art history assigns creative products to two categories—fine arts and crafts—and then certifies as legitimate only the fine arts, thereby excluding those creative traditions of primitive people, peasants, women, and many other groups outside the mainstream of Western history.[5]

Until recently, decorative art, or craft techniques and materials, have been valid only as sources for contemporary male artists. While women working with these ideas, techniques, and materials have been ignored (Ann Wilson first painted on quilts in 1958) or put down for doing "women's work," men like Shields, Oldenburg, Stella, and Noland are hailed as innovative. But times have changed. Today many female artists are connecting to a long line of creativity by proudly referring to women's traditional arts in their own work. They are recording the ritual of women's artmaking both in the past and the present, thereby reflecting a feminist concern not only with the end product but with the daily process and function of making art. Sewing techniques and materials as both process and content are used in a variety of ways in the abstract works of Sarah Draney, Pat Lasch, Nina Yankowitz, Paula Tavins, Patsy Norvell, Rosemary Mayer, and many other women. Barbara Kruger says that she first learned to crochet and sew when she decided that these techniques could be used to make art.[6] For women, the meaning of sewing and knotting is "connecting"—connecting the parts of one's life, and connecting to other women—creating a sense of community and wholeness. Other women, drawing on women's traditional arts, make specific painterly reference to decoration and craft. Miriam Schapiro utilizes remnants of fabric, lace, and ribbon along with handkerchiefs and aprons in large collages, thus making the very material of women's lives the subject of her art. Joyce Kozloff and Mary Gregoriadis explore decoration as fine art, basing their paintings on the abstract patterning of Islamic architecture and tiles, Tantric art, Caucasian rugs, and Navaho weaving.

The way many women *talk* about their work is revealing, in that it often denies formal art rhetoric. Women tend to talk first about their personal associations with the piece, and then about how these are implemented through visual means; in other words, how successful the piece is in its *own* terms. This approach to art and to discussing art has developed from the consciousness-raising experience. It deals primarily with the work itself, what it says and how it says it—rather than with an imposed set of esthetic beliefs.

In her excellent catalogue introduction to "Changes," an exhibition by Betsy Damon and Carole Fisher, Kathryn C. Johnson comments that "intent" is most important when defining feminist art. She states that it is "a powerful oneness of subject and content" that makes certain work feminist:

> . . . Their work both *is* and tells *about* the pain of their life experiences. It is about pain and is painful, but does not present woman as passive victim. The pain is presented with deep understanding of its sources and effects, and the anger which follows confrontation with the hurt.[7]

Fisher writes:

> Betsy looked at the work and recognized the fact that I worked to survive, to keep from growing crazy, and to keep the pain from becoming too great. She recognized the pain in my work instantly! This was something I had only come to recently recognize and acknowledge in my work. Like many women in our culture, I had become adept at hiding and covering my pain. I had gotten all the messages that to be vulnerable in our culture is to be weak and despised.[8]

It is this "oneness of subject and content" that carries their work through feminist consciousness beyond the personal to the political. It is also present in abstract paintings that seem superficially more related to the male modernist tradition than to women's creativity in that they involve the physically expressive manipulation of paint on a two-dimensional surface.

In much of this work the reoccurring stitch of women's traditional artmaking becomes the repetitive mark, taking on a new form as a "visual diary." Such works are daily records of thoughts and are used as such by the artists. Just as the weaver continues from day to day, from one physical and psychic location to another, materials and dyes changing slightly, irregularities and tension showing, the painted marks also reveal daily emotional changes and tensions. They are a record of present feeling, a ritual giving in to the repetitive gesture, a language to reveal self—a woman's mantra.

Jenny Snider's nervous lines recall ancient Chinese calligraphy, which has both a letter/character reference and a body/figure reference. Her drawings are made with and are about her nervousness and vulnerability. She "is" the mark, the line. As the marks are repeated and contained in different spaces (usually grids or rectangles suggesting fabric, rooms and houses), the quality and feeling of the line changes and she becomes more comfortable in some spaces than in others. She explores her self-image and feelings about her body in relationship to other people and spaces. Snider describes these works as "figurative." To me, it is the mark and its repetition that is most important. Her works are figurative in the sense that Chinese calligraphy is figurative—in having a direct body reference. Works are sometimes combined or used interchangeably with the markings, reinforcing Snider's commitment to the diaristic mode. As she says, "The words and lines come from the same psychological place and gesture and are not intended to describe or explain what the drawings are in terms of images—but rather express the fact that they come from a nervous hand and a yakking heart." Phrases such as "little sounds arose (and it showed)"; "Well, for one thing, never step on broken glass"; and "Remember when we saw the ocean? It was just like this, wasn't it?" tell where the drawing is coming from and what the drawing is about.

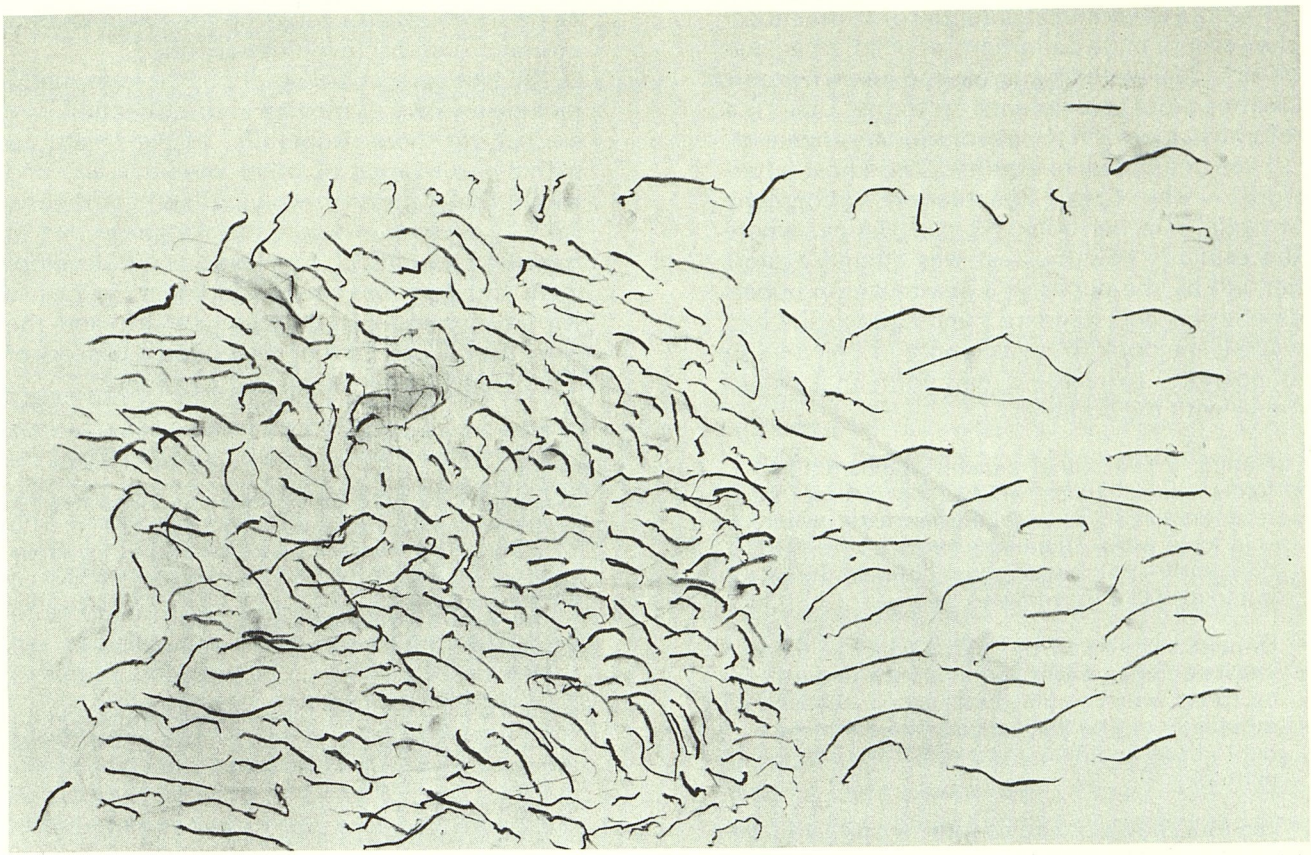
Louise Fishman's paintings also function as a place for personal confrontation and as a statement directed towards other women. Earlier, Fishman ripped up her old paintings and reconnected them by sewing and knotting them together with fragile thread. Her past was used to make a statement about her present. The strips and connecting thread formed loose grids, transformed in later work to a series of strokes or marks repeated across the page or canvas or within the confines of a "particular felt shape" (a circle or a piece of irregularly cut masonite). The marks of paint, layered on top of each other, lead eventually to a rich sensuous surface. The top layer usually consists of strong marks holding the partially revealed undermarks to the painting surface—feelings revealed and hidden. Fishman has always talked about her work in terms of hiding, guilt, vulnerability, anger, and personal individuation.

In a seven-panel reversible painting on unstretched canvas, Fishman deals with her feelings about her mother, also an artist. One side of each canvas is painted with calm strokes, while on the other side the marks explode into intensely scrawled letters reading "A letter to my mother about painting." Another canvas has the star of David and the words "I am a Jewish working-class dyke" scratched into the surface. Just as consciousness raising leads to political awareness, this work moves from the personal into the political. Titled *Angry Jill, Angry Djuna, Angry Paula, Angry Sarah,* and so on . . . they seem to be painted *with* the anger. When she made these "angry paintings" Fishman said that all she could feel was her rage. When she looked around at other women, she saw that they were crippled by their anger too. These paintings were made to force women to confront it rather than letting it turn inward and become self-destructive. Grouped together as a wall of women's anger, the paintings show a tremendous amount of energy that can now be redirected towards feminist creativity and revolution.

These women as well as others (Joan Snyder, Carla Tardi, and Pat Steir, to name a few) have used words and marks fairly interchangeably as abstract gestures with concrete feminist meanings. Words are marks and marks are words; their repetition becomes not only an interior monologue but also a dialogue with other women. Like Damon and Fisher, these artists make individual feeling and experience the *subject* of their work, while the content deals with the difficulties and ambiguities of being a feminist artist in a patriarchal society.

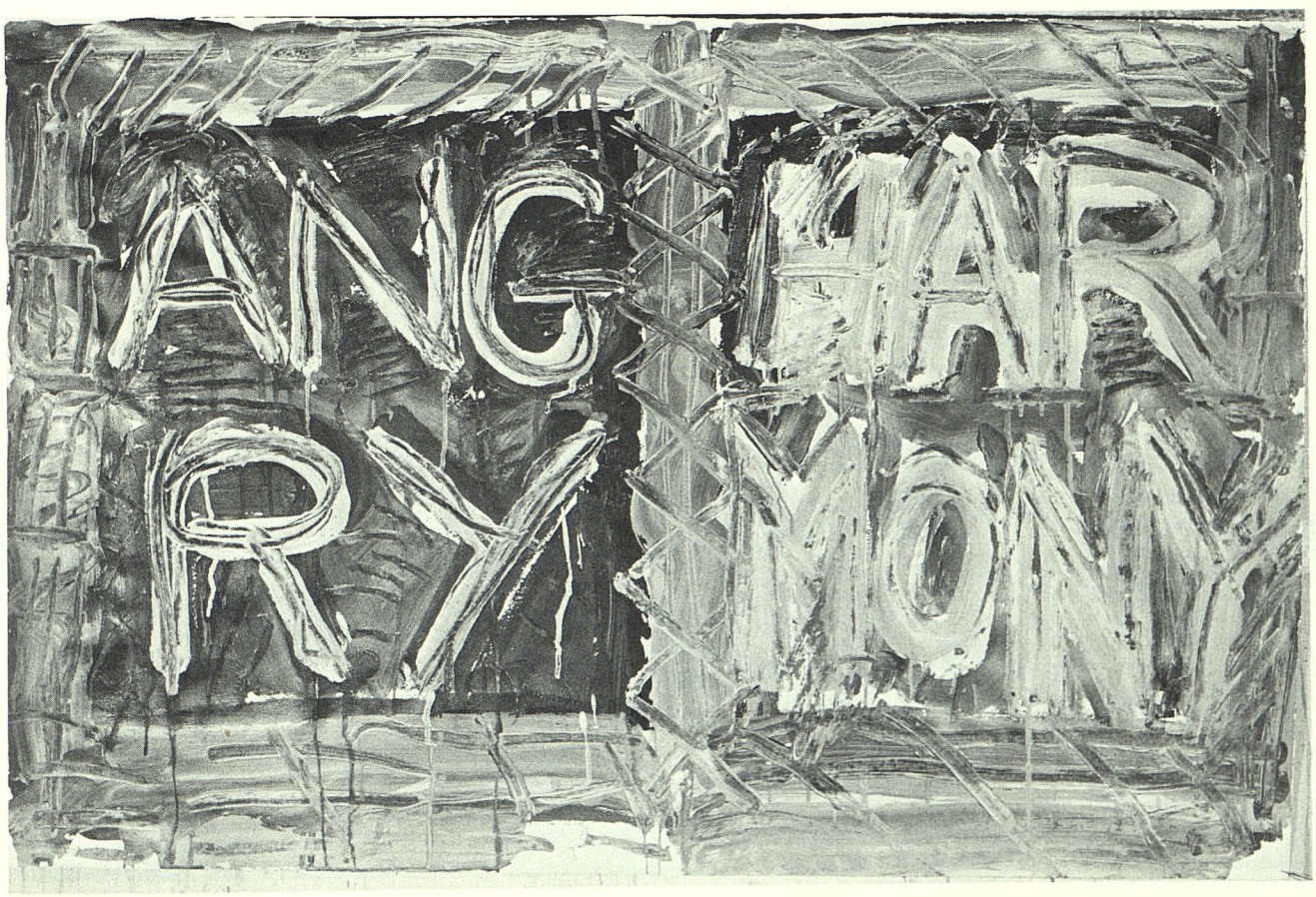
Their painting surfaces are often violated or mutilated; cut, gouged, ripped, scratched, or torn. The reversal of the usual additive process of painting refers to the violation of the traditional painting surface and also to the physical and psychic violation of women. The thick paint applied with a palette knife in Fishman's work, for instance, acts both as poultice for wounds and cement for holding self together. In Joan Snyder's recent work the marks, cuts and burning combine with words and color to make a passionate statement about sexuality.

This work is certainly political. Yet Freeman and MacMillan, in their attempt to distinguish protest from political art, to show that specific forms are more conducive to one or another,



Above: Jenny Snider. *Split Scribble.* 1972. Pencil on paper. 24″ X 38″. (Photo: Jenny Snider.)

Below: Louise Fishman. *Angry Harmony.* 1970. Acrylic and pastel on paper. 30″ X 40″. (Photo: Sarah Whitworth.)



still ignore the political potential of abstraction.[9] They accept male definitions of what art is, and do not deal with the evolution of a feminist creative process or feminist art forms. Theirs is a reformist approach to a revolutionary endeavor.

I am reminded of Andrea Dworkin's "afterword"—"The Great Punctuation Typography Struggle"—in her book *Woman Hating*, where she explains how the text was altered against her will by the publisher's insistence on uppercase letters and standard punctuation. She had wanted the book to be as empty of convention as possible, to create a new form that would merge with the content.

> reading a text which violates standard form forces one to change mental sets in order to read. there is no distance. the new form, which is in some ways unfamiliar, forces one to read differently—not to read about different things, but to read in different ways.
>
> to permit writers to use forms which violate convention just might permit writers to develop forms which would teach people to think differently: not to think about different things, but to think in different ways. that work is not permitted.[10]

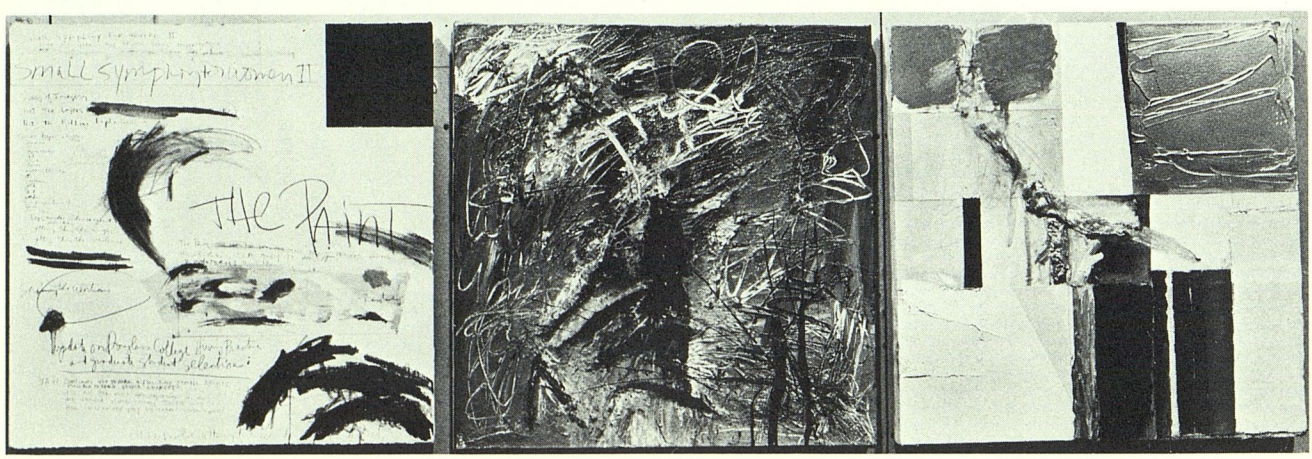
The fact that innovative form is so feared by the male establishment shows that like content it has a power of its own. If our lives and our art are connected, and if "the personal is political" in the radical sense, then we cannot separate the content of our work from the form it takes. As abstract artists, we need to develop new abstract forms for revolutionary art.

The women's work I've discussed here, and I include my own, is moving in this direction. We are not yet there. Hopefully, as we create art within the context of other women's art, and within the context of evolving feminist theory, we will develop a new visual language. Art in transition is political, for it both *is* our development and *describes* our development. In a sense we are coming out through our art, and the work itself is a record of the ongoing process of developing a feminist esthetic ideology.

1. Alexa Freeman and Jackie MacMillan, "Prime Time: Art and Politics," *Quest: A Feminist Quarterly* (Summer, 1975).
2. Eva Cockcroft, "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War," *Artforum* (June, 1974).
3. Brooke, "The Retreat to Cultural Feminism," in *Feminist Revolution*, ed. Redstockings (New York, 1975).
4. Patricia Mainardi, "Quilts: The Great American Art," *The Feminist Art Journal* (Winter, 1973).
5. Elizabeth Weatherford, "Craft for Art's Sake," *Ms. Magazine* (May, 1973).
6. *Ibid.*
7. Kathryn C. Johnson, catalogue introduction to "Changes," exhibition by Betsy Damon and Carole Fisher at the College of St. Catherine (St. Paul, Minn., 1976).
8. *Ibid.*
9. Freeman and MacMillan, *op. cit.*
10. Andrea Dworkin, *Woman Hating* (New York, 1974).

Harmony Hammond is an artist living in New York who teaches, gives workshops, and has shown her work here and elsewhere. She has also studied martial arts, Tai Chi Ch'uan and Aikido.

Joan Snyder. *Small Symphony for Women II.* 1976. Oil and mixed media on canvas. 24" X 72". (Photo: Libby Turnock.)



"Female Experience in Art": The Impact of Women's Art in a Work Environment

Ruth E. Iskin

In early summer of 1975 I was asked by the Women's Committee and the Office of Equal Opportunity of Aerospace Corporation to curate an exhibition of women's art on the subject of female experience. This seemed to me to offer the potential of reaching a broad audience and avoiding the defensive reactions often attached to "feminist art" or "female sensibility" in the art world.[1] This art has been at the heart of an ongoing, often heated controversy which has clouded the issues and obstructed direct perception of the work.

Female experience has been the starting point for the new art created by feminists since 1969. Consciousness raising and other forms of women's communication, sharing and group action, initiated as a result of the women's movement, made female experience a rich source of subject matter and sparked the fresh energy with which women are making art. For the show I selected the work of 15 L.A. artists[2] to represent both a broad scope of women's experiences and a diversity of media, ranging from large environmental pieces to paintings, drawings, photography, prints, collage, assemblage, and artists' books. In an attempt to build a bridge between the art and the creators' intentions, I requested written statements from the artists, which, along with biographical information, were available in a folder in the exhibition area.

The exhibition was on view from August 18th through September 5th in the Cafeteria Conference Dining Rooms of the Aerospace Corporation. It was the first exhibition of professional art on the company's grounds, preceded only by shows of art by employees. Although sponsored and funded by the corporation, the show was initiated by feminist employees who conceived it to offer "insight into the emotional aspects of contemporary women."[3] They scheduled it to coincide with Women's Week, a program featuring prominent speakers and entertainers.

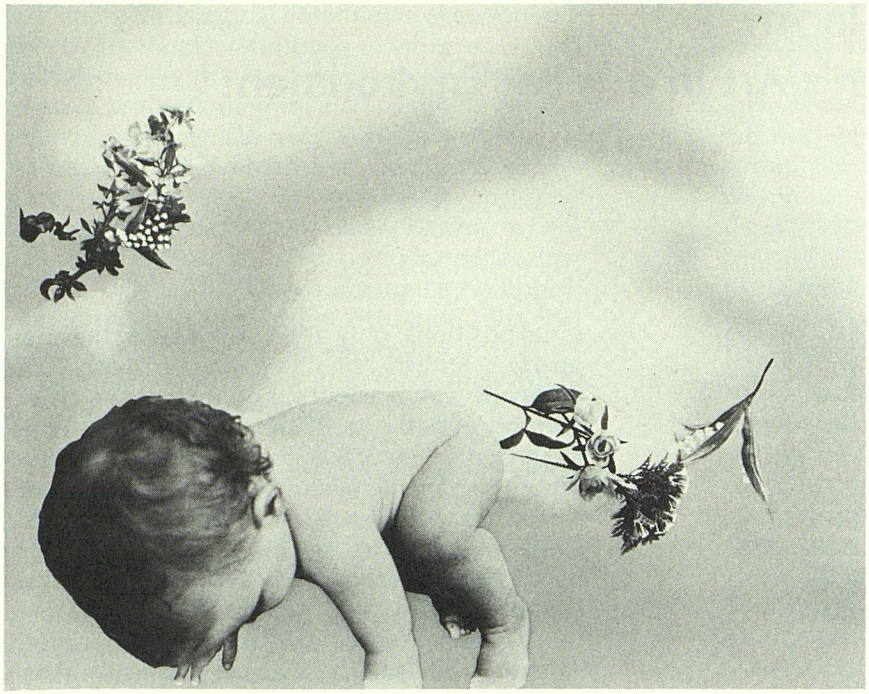
The management of Aerospace Corporation ("a non-profit research and development corporation which provides technical direction of general systems of engineering, primarily for the Air Force"[4]) had been forced to develop new policies for hiring women in order to meet affirmative-action requirements for receiving government funds. Women are in the minority, constituting only 25% of the roughly 3,200 Aerospace employees. Most of them (80%-85%) are in lower-echelon clerical and secretarial positions; only a few rank among the engineers, scientists, or chief administrators. The company was, no doubt, hoping that the art exhibition and the activities of Women's Week would go on record as testimony to their newfound good will toward women. Much to my surprise, and to the dismay of the sponsors, the exhibition became the focal point of hot debate. Violent emotional reactions, protest and support quickly assumed the dimensions of a local scandal and echoed for months in letters to the editor in *The Orbiter,* the company's newspaper.

The art in the exhibition offered a feminist point of view on subject matter usually treated from a male perspective. Though one might assume that the controversial responses arose out of an alienation from contemporary art forms, it seems that the conflict stemmed primarily from feminist content.[5] None of the works included were blatantly political protest art, yet they all reflected, to varying degrees, a new feminist consciousness. It was this consciousness—judging from the reactions of many of the female viewers—that was unfamiliar and threatening.

We are accustomed to think of political art as crude, illustrative, or plainly propagandistic, in contrast to "good/serious/modernist" art. It has of course been pointed out that no art is entirely disconnected from its historical, political, cultural, and geographical environment, and that therefore any art reflects these conditions. However, feminist art is often labeled political art because the consciousness it reflects is held by a minority, and it is at odds with the tacit beliefs of those in power. The label "political art" is used to demean the work rather than to evaluate its artistic significance.

In a recent interview with Judy Chicago, the artist articulated her thoughts and feelings about these issues:

> The issue of politics for me arises at the point where my work interfaces with culture; it does not arise at the point of origin in my studio. I never think about politics when I make my art; rather I think about being true to my own impulses, and for a woman to be true to her own impulses is, at this point in history, a political act. . . . What I challenge is the idea that masculinity is inherently better than femininity; that hardness is better than softness, that defensiveness is better than vulnerability, and



Sherie Sheer. *Putti.* From the series Heavenly Visions. 1975. Silver print with oil paint and acrylic.

Nancy Youdelman. *An Homage to Lily Bart, from Edith Wharton's "House of Mirth."* 1974. Tableau with life-cast figure. 6′ X 9′ X 12′.

that violence is better than sharing. The assertion of womanhood is a challenge to all these values that allow war, dehumanization, rape, and art that lacks relationship with reality to continue.[6]

Faith Wilding elaborated on the relation between personal and political change:

> It has always been a tenet of the feminist movement that the personal is political. It is political because when a person becomes transformed, enters into public experience, and infuses her own experience into the public, the world becomes transformed for her, but in addition she then has the possibility of transforming the world. . . . We have witnessed too many people who are in politics who have never experienced any kind of personal change or real vision. . . .

What specifically triggered the controversy? The art in the exhibition included a wide range of feminist work: parodies on public images of women (Helen Alm Roth and Carole Caroompas); private images of women and interior spaces (Margaret Neilson); women's self-images integrated with their historical and mythological references (Judy Chicago and Faith Wilding); references to women's vulnerability, powerlessness, and powerfulness (Astrid Preston); relics of admired female figures as magic talismans (Hazel Slawson); communal efforts (Maria Karras); and the quilt/grid pattern and color pink seen as tributes to women's collaborative forms (Sheila de Bretteville).

In her tableau environment *Remnants in Homage to Lily Bart from Edith Wharton's House of Mirth,* Nancy Youdelman "reconstructed" a scene from the book with theatrical grandeur and presence. The tableau represents the climax of Wharton's novel, when Lily Bart, having lost her wealth and status, kills herself. Hauntingly life-like, her full-size figure, bearing the artist's own features, reclines in bed. Her skin tone is grayish and the sleeping drops that caused her death are by the side of her bed. The floor is cluttered with remnants of her life: letters, photographs, delicate laces, dresses, corsets, and veils. Youdelman creates metaphors (sleep, passivity, death) for what have been essential aspects of female experience: economic dependence on others, lack of ultimate control over one's own life, victimization by circumstances. In the guise of a 19th-century tragedy, Lily Bart's story is emblematic for women who have remained powerless in society.

In Youdelman's photographic series *Leaves: A Self Portrait,* the artist is lying on the ground, gradually being covered with leaves (from photograph to photograph) until she is entirely buried:

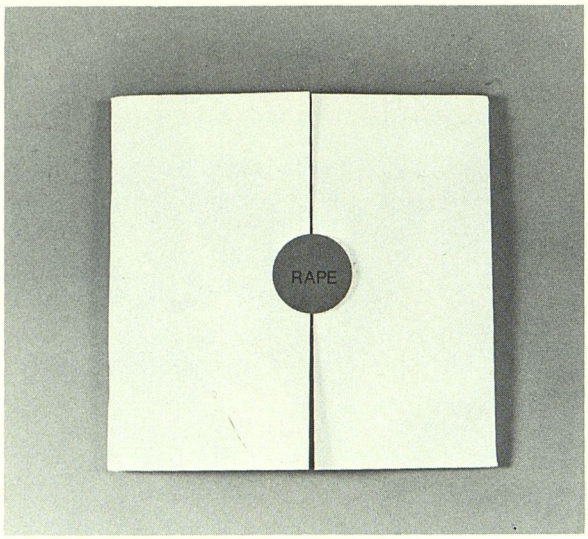
Faith Wilding. *Chrysalis II.* 1974. Graphite and watercolor. 42" X 38".

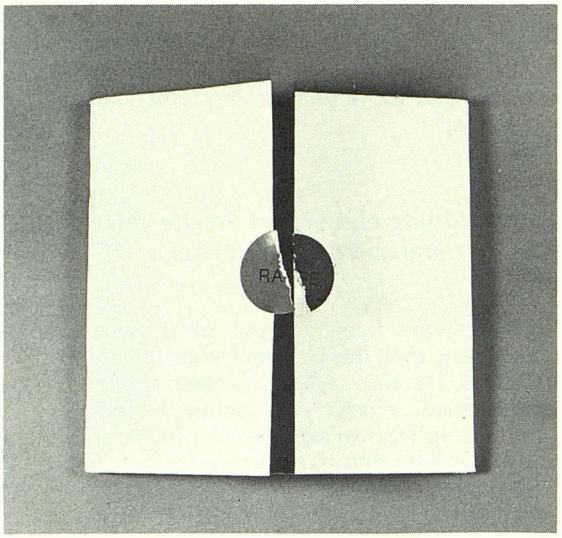
> It represented ways I felt; I felt numb all over, or like a sleepwalker, something that could just disappear, and I think that is that powerlessness in female experience, sleep. There is also something esthetic about it; I love the color of the leaves; it is about death and one could suppose that it might also mean renewal. . . .

Youdelman treads on precarious ground in presenting the passive female figure, lying unconscious, as horizontal female figures have so often been used in the history of (male) art to entice the spectator by reminding him of his vertical superiority. However, Youdelman's tableau successfully evokes the solemn empathy of the viewer, who is confronted with the *victim's* feelings about her powerlessness.

In Jan Lester's tableau environment—*Cats Enamoured Kits: Helpless Tom and Merciless Sex Kitten* (1974)—two cats are anthropomorphized to enact a sexual-encounter scene. The human environment, dress, and behavior patterns throw into relief the stereotyped patterns of men and women, only the roles are reversed. The female cat plays the determined "attacker," the seducer, while the male cat withdraws with some apprehension. At the same time, Lester sees her work as a manifestation of how women are perceived when they take an active role in a situation:

> The tableau had to do with sexual politics and with the female taking power. It goes farther than just one sexual encounter, it goes out into the world in general. It is *one* situation like a snapshot that makes it clear that this goes on in all situations in society.





Sherie Scheer's series—*Heavenly Visions*—depicts Fragonard-inspired images of her own baby as a cherub floating in an infinite blue California sky. "Wherever they go, they have no choice in it. . . . The heavenly vision in which they appear is both ideal and it is limbo." This reflects Scheer's own experience as a first-time mother:

> I found the child very sensual. It was unexpected to me what a strong female biological experience it was to have a child, and then to be absolutely in love with the child. In the course of using her as model, however, I made her cry, sometimes neglected her, and in a way I *used* her, both as a model and as inspiration. . . . I was aware that the art that makes it in L.A., or made it at the time (two years ago) was non-image-oriented and I am very image-oriented. I was also entirely aware that showing babies in one's art was really outrageous, and it gave me a devilish pleasure, because I think that a lot of art that makes it is empty formula and doesn't have any blood in it; it is not daring and it is not a turn-on either. So it was like breaking a taboo, and especially for a woman artist.

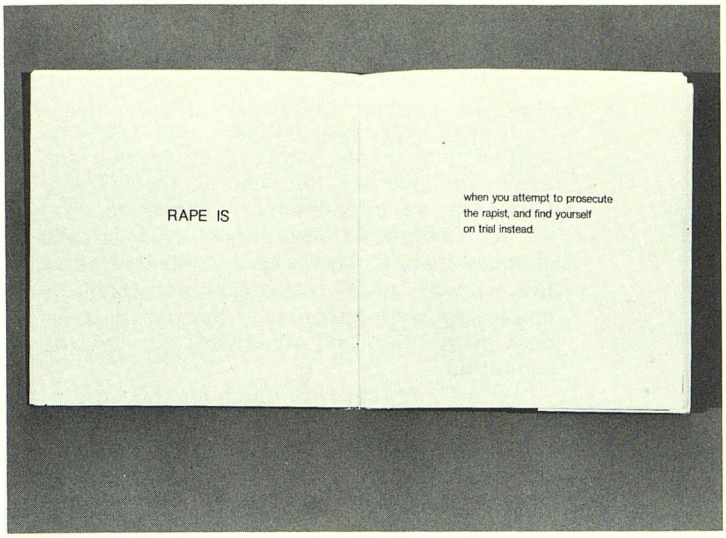
Like Scheer, Gilah Hirsch deals with female power within its traditional domain. She uses the imagery of food as "a secret biography, a metaphorical code."

> The shape and color of food itself was so completely right and ripe for my own feelings that it became a symbol for me; especially the tomato, strawberry, and egg became symbols for myself. These are expressed in scale and potency; it is a strange word to use in relationship to an egg, a potent egg. . . . The strawberry is one of the few fruits that carries its seed on the outside, it is a vulnerable fruit; it is juicy and has strength and vulnerability at the same time. . . . Rather than feminist, these paintings are, I think, more expressive of femaleness. It was a personal statement for me. . . . I can't separate my experience from a female experience; I feel powers in me, very specifically in certain centers in me.

Suzanne Lacy's book *Rape Is* (1972) has a white cover which becomes bloody red on the inside. To open the book one must tear apart a red sticker labeled "rape."[7] Lacy's book names 21 instances of rape—not only as a sexual violation but also as a series of psychological assaults:

> Rape is when you are skipping home from school, and are surrounded suddenly by a gang of large boys. Rape is when the man next door exposes himself and you feel guilty for having looked. Rape is when you're walking alone, thinking your own thoughts and a man driving by shouts "HI SWEETIE!"

Left to right: Karen Carson. *Edge of Night.* 1975. Pastel and Charcoal. 36" X 22"; *Cracking Up.* 1975. Paster and charcoal. 36" X 24"; *Shattered Dreams.* 1975. Pencil. 36" X 24".



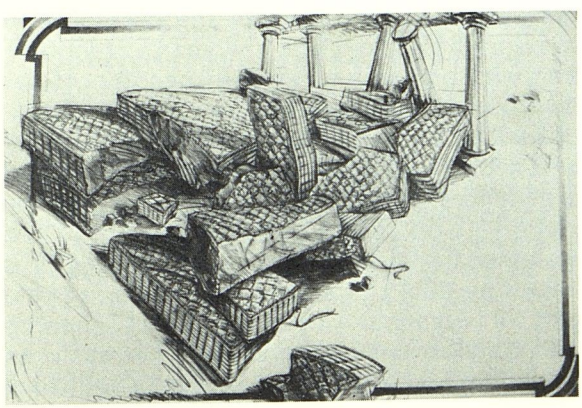
Suzanne Lacy. *Rape Is.* 1972. Printed book. 6″ square.

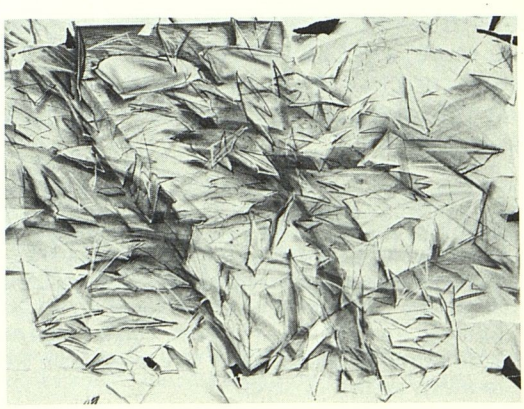
The traditional representation of rape in art (with the exception of Kollwitz[8]) represents the experience of the rapist by focusing on his strength, activity and beauty, and further removes rape from a realistic experience through mythological disguise. Lacy first forces the viewer to enact a metaphorical rape ("deflowering" the book by tearing the sticker) and then confronts the viewer with what rape means to its victim.

In Karen Carson's drawings of beds (1971-75) woman *is* the bed. The drawings are expressionistic in style and imagery, powerful as well as satirical statements about the myth of happiness in sexual relationships. In this case, too, the "disturbing" feminist content of Carson's drawings arises from the art-historical tradition of reclining female figures on beds and sofas. Many of these women become an integral part of the inanimate, passive, yet sexually inviting surface on which they are reclining. Unlike males, Carson identifies with the oppressed—the woman/bed—and at the same time, as artist, she takes active charge of that surface, penetrates it with a giant screw (*Screw*), converts it into a carton of eggs (*Easy Lay*), severs it with a saw blade (*Edge of Night*), or crowns it with a giant camera (*Easy Shot*).

These surreal visualizations are take-offs on popular puns, which function as titles and were often the starting points for the drawings. The series began as a macabre though humorous comment on popular sexist consumerism. What emerges is a violent denunciation of sexual roles, until finally the bed—former haven of consumer pleasure—disintegrates from *within* (*Cracking Up* and *Shattered Dreams*), smashing any illusions we might still have about bed and woman. In these most recent drawings the formerly inanimate object erupts uncontrollably, and its fragments fly into space. What is commonly labeled Women's Liberation is in fact, as Carson expresses it, an excruciatingly painful process beginning with the recognition of exterior oppression, leading to the experience of oppression from within, and finally building toward a complex re-integration—represented by the artist's new work—collages in which the torn and mutilated fragments are reunited on a cohesive surface.

> I would say that these drawings were intentionally propagandistic. . . . It had to do with consumer and sexual politics. . . . The frame of mind that I was in when I did these drawings was severe frustration over treatment by men. . . . The drawings were also politically charged for me because I talked about them to all kinds of groups from Valley housewives to a continuation high school culture-hour class; I thought people would be bored by these draw-





ings and they weren't. They seemed to have a good time, and related to the drawings immediately. Now, it is not necessary to have a good time when viewing art, but there was blanket recognition of the issues.

When I looked in the newspaper I noticed that you could apply sexual politics, directly or indirectly, to almost every image in the advertisement world; every image implies sexual promises. My original fantasy was that I would have enough money to take out a full page ad in the *L.A. Times,* and just change the images a little bit. Obviously the most political thing about that was my fantasy about how many people I could reach that way. It is the nature of good political art to be recognizable and understandable by a lot of people and maybe at a visceral level too. . . . Political art is often satirical, and probably most effective at that level.

The exhibition provided an opportunity to witness the heightened impact of contemporary feminist art when viewed by a "non-art" audience—a cross-section of middle America that normally would not encounter art, and specifically by a female audience alienated from feminism. (The negative response came primarily from women [9]) It can also be seen as a test case for implementing a long-desired goal—bringing art into a public daily work environment.

Had the show at Aerospace been exhibited in any number of established or alternative gallery spaces, it probably would not have caused unusual debate, and certainly it would not have prompted any doubt about the artistic merit of the work.[10] In the Cafeteria Conference Rooms of Aerospace, however, the exhibit infiltrated a male environment that ordinarily would not display women's work made from a feminist perspective and certainly would not give it public acclaim. The work was predominantly considered scandalous; it engendered passionate objections and firm negative judgments. The show was labeled *pornography* rather than *art* by people who were unlikely ever to have considered what is or isn't art.

This disclaimer was the protesters' attempt to dismiss such threatening and upsetting material. Casting it as pornography implied that the art lacked any real esthetic value and therefore need not be taken seriously. The level of naiveté of the critical responses—when opposed to the more sophisticated criticism to which we are accustomed from much of the art world—was refreshing in its directness. One letter of protest stated:

> I object to the Art Exhibition. . . . I find it degrading. As a woman, and hopefully a lady, I find it extremely offensive. . . . I am unable to lower my sights to the gutter level of this exhibit. In my opinion, it is lewd, vulgar, obscene and immoral. Since when did good taste and modesty go out-of-style?[11]

In another letter, signed by 36 people—almost a petition—the art was called:

> . . . in poor taste, bad character, and a definite infringement on the rights of all women and men who give sex the dignity, respect and honor that was intended for the human race.
>
> The Aerospace Corporation has drastically changed its practices since the 1960s to allow this type of "smut" to be exhibited, and the employees were encouraged through desk-to-desk distribution and advertising to view the exhibition.
>
> We are sure that with much less expense to the Company, the representatives . . . could have arranged for a display of pornography, pictures and books from one of the adult bookstores in the Los Angeles Area, and at a lower insurance premium. . . . The Aerospace Women's Committee does not speak for all of the female employees, as there are those of us who still adhere to the old principle that we were liberated immediately when we were born in America, we enjoy being treated as a woman, and we are definitely Miss or Mrs. and not Ms.[12]

Clearly these female viewers at Aerospace "saw" in the art their own worst fears of feminism. Their objections, though focused on the exhibition, were rooted in their alienation from the organized women's movement. Confronted by art that dealt with an oppression familiar in most of their lives, real images that did not correspond to the illusion of the American dream presented a powerful threat.

The art was perceived as offensive precisely because it was not placed in a neutralizing environment like a gallery, where viewers can easily hide behind anonymity. The art invaded their own daily working sphere where it threatened how they were viewed in their professional positions. Brought into the work context, the art reflected more directly upon them. The heightened emotional reactions caused a strong need to disassociate themselves verbally from the picture of womanhood presented in the show.

While identification with female experiences and values is threatening in any situation in a patriarchal society, such identification may be virtually impossible when introduced into a work environment dominated by male values and power. Such an environment, by implication, and as a condition for the possibility of working there, demands a woman's identification with patriarchy over a recognition of her own oppression. To admit that what was expressed in the art is real—women's powerlessness and powerfulness, their sexual feelings and experiences, and the fact that women are rape victims—is to shatter the very myth that has sustained traditional womanhood all along. It is admitting publicly to an embarrassing, private part of woman's experience, which she has attempted to conceal even from herself in an effort to preserve the "human dignity" of which

she is robbed daily. This response is one we all felt during initial stages of our feminism, when we first became conscious of the shame and self-dislike we had buried for so long, before we were ready to reshape our own feelings by taking pride in ourselves, other women, and art that dealt with these subjects.

The reactions of the women at Aerospace are not, I suspect, uncommon. I doubt very much that a minority of Black workers in a predominantly white work environment would find it any easier to respond to an exhibition of art exposing painful aspects of the experience of being Black in American society; or that Detroit factory workers, for example, readily identify with the realistic presentation in Rivera's mural of the hardships of factory work.[13] There is, however, an important difference between the situation of women and other workers. Regardless of their status, women are subject to their oppression as women which crosses class boundaries. In addition to their job or profession—whether factory worker, teacher, nurse, doctor, engineer, or scientist—women still do the unpaid, endless, menial labor of housework, bear children and carry the sole responsibility of raising them. All women are potential rape victims, and all women live in a male-dominated society which is based on various cultural versions of enslavement and denies women's culture.[14]

Those women who had not attempted to step out of female role-conditioning in their jobs at Aerospace were more oppressed than other workers because they received lower wages and had lower professional status. They were the most offended by the show. The middle-class women who rebelled against female role-conditioning in their jobs at Aerospace (the engineers, programmers, scientists) were the only ones who had developed a feminist consciousness and reacted favorably to the exhibition. For example, in a letter of support, one woman expressed her response to the exhibition and the protesters' views:

> That women have suffered personally and professionally from conditions ranging from lack of opportunity to manipulation and even exploitation on the basis that they are women is uncomfortable to face.
>
> The Art Exhibition, a high quality collection of some very honest and courageous works, was unusually rich in content for those of us who in some way or another have "been there." Although there was a deliberate intent to shock, it was as a means to focus emotionally on the art; it was not propagandistic. These are personal and esthetic interpretations of some of the hard truths encountered by women, and the obscenity lies in the fact that these wrongs arise because of wide-range departure from good human values.
>
> Those who want to oppose smut should look for it in our politics, in our mores, in the management of our corporations, in our personal relationships.[15]

In her review of the exhibition Melinda Worz concluded:

> The Female Experience in Art offers a wide panorama of contemporary women's attitudes. . . . It is gratifying to see such a high quality show outside the established sacred halls of art, as part of a working environment.[16]

In thinking now about this exhibition, I realize that it was unrealistic to expect an enthusiastic reception, or even acceptance, for art like this among female viewers who were not already feminists, or somewhat sympathetic to feminism. It might have seemed that the work was not perceived for what it was—but on the contrary it was in fact accurately perceived, and found objectionable. Such response is typical when feminism is introduced into a male-dominated culture.

For those women at Aerospace who were sympathetic to feminism, the exhibition was a positive experience providing a new awareness of the existence of women's culture created by contemporary feminists. In that sense the exhibition did broaden the audience for contemporary feminist art. For some of these women who previously had no particular interest in art, the exhibition was a beginning of what has since become an ongoing interest and commitment to women's art.

> I am still thinking about one piece in the show, which I would like to own if I had money. I decided that if I bought art, it would be women's art because of my commitment to feminist artists.[17]

Earlier that same summer, my colleagues and I in the Feminist Studio Workshop[18] had come to a collective definition of feminist art based on our goals, experiences, and observation of our students' work. We defined the function of feminist art as raising consciousness, inviting dialogue, and transforming culture. It became clear to me that both the individual art exhibited at Aerospace and the exhibition as a whole in fact realized these goals to the extent that was possible in that time and space.

1. The exhibition also provided a good starting point for sorting out my own views on the more complex issues of feminist content and female sensibility in art, though I prefer the term "female form language" to "female sensibility" or "female imagery" because the latter have come to be identified with one specific, biologically oriented theory.
2. Funding limitations did not permit the inclusion of works by artists who reside outside of the L.A. area.

3. *Orbiter*, Vol. 15, No. 20 (1975), p. 2, from a letter to the editor by the Women's Week Planning Committee.
4. Glenda Madrid (of the Aerospace Office of Equal Opportunity and Women's Planning Committee) in conversation with the author.
5. Though some of the non-feminist viewers more familiar with contemporary art forms did not share the protesters' offense, it is very unlikely that a "neutral" exhibit of contemporary art would have caused similar negative reactions. In addition, none of the protesters mentioned any criticism of art *forms*; all their comments tended to focus on *content*, and most of them made reference to a general distaste for feminism.

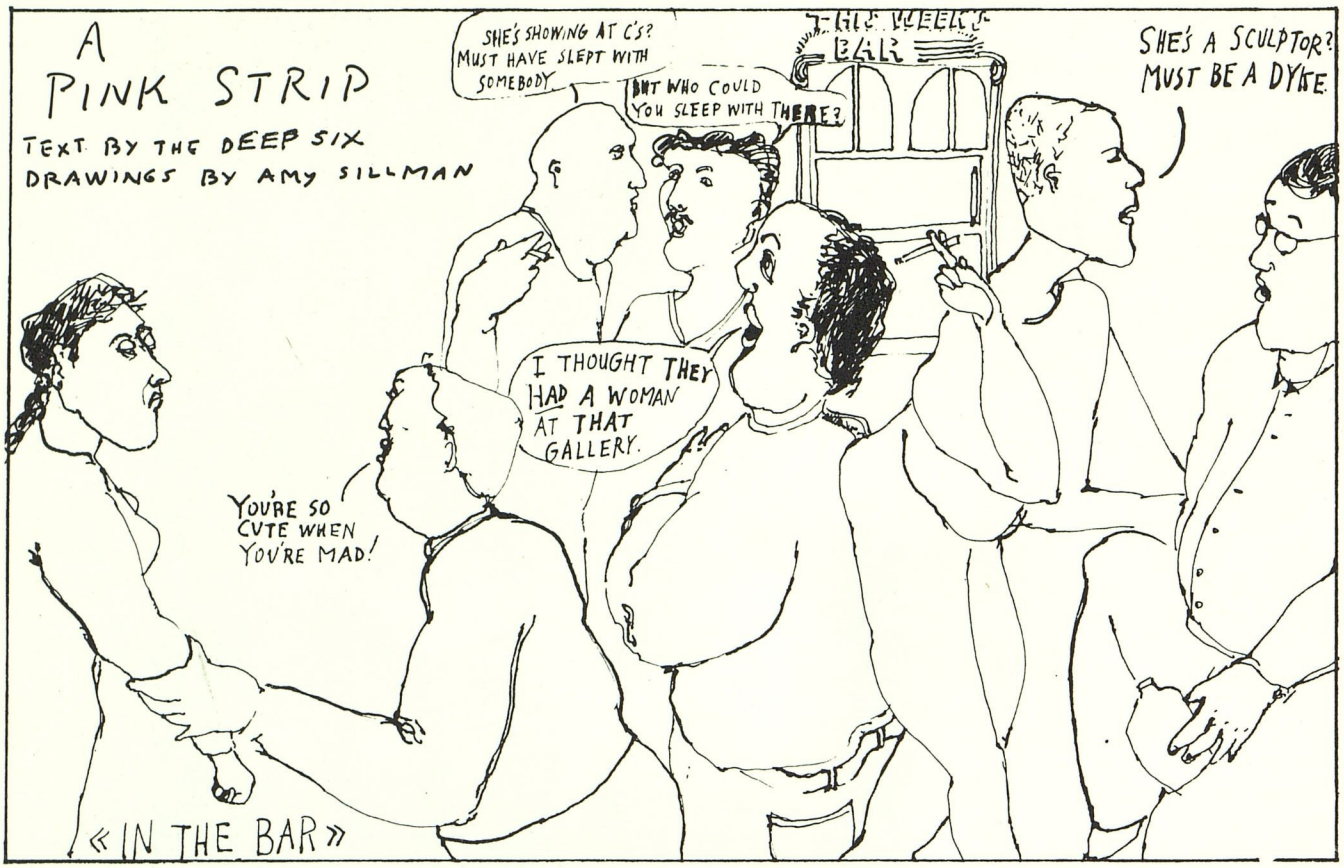
6. All the quotations from artists are from recent interviews conducted for this article.
7. The precedent for this feminist use of the sticker is Susana Torre's exhibition catalogue for "Twenty-Six Contemporary Women Artists" (Aldrich Museum, Ridgefield, Conn., April, 1971), in which tearing the seal implied not only physical violation in order to "enter" the long-hidden works of women artists, but also the destruction of a square cold black seal on a white cover, which represented the prevalent Minimal Art, to reach the warm inside covers, colored red.
8. Kollwitz's etching *Raped* is unique in its complete focus on the experience of the raped woman: she is lying on the ground, dead or unconscious. Neither the rapist nor his act are in the picture.
9. The men seemed to react neutrally to the show, probably because the art did not expose *their* experience, and possibly, as was suggested to me by Glenda Madrid, because they are more prone to intellectualize and thus more removed from the level of emotional response the show raised for women.
10. When I curated the Aerospace exhibition I did censor myself at one point: I did not include Chicago's *Red Flag* lithograph even though, dealing with menstruation, it would have fit well into an exhibit on female experience in art. Its literal character prevented me from exhibiting it in that context, as I anticipated that it would be shocking to the audience.
11. *Orbiter*, Vol. 15, No. 17 (1975), p. 2.
12. *Ibid*.
13. Joanne Parent (one of the authors of "The Fourth World Manifesto") told me the following incident. While she was working in a factory, experiencing first-hand the hardships involved, she understood how well Rivera's mural portrayed those; but when she commented on that to her fellow workers they negated or at least minimized their own experience of oppression compared to its heightened portrayal in the mural. The similarity to women's situation is that workers who (consciously or unconsciously) feel powerless in their jobs deny the pain of their experiences if its expression would jeopardize the only wage-earning option available to them. It is no accident that women all over the country first explored their oppression in the *private, safe,* and supportive context of consciousness-raising groups, removed from the institutions in which they experienced that oppression in their daily lives.
14. It is for this reason that feminism and feminist art have validity for all women. For the same reason, the Marxist model of workers' oppression does not ultimately address itself to women's oppression, beyond that of working-class women. For an extensive analysis of these issues see "The Fourth World Manifesto," reprinted in: *Radical Feminism,* Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, Anita Rapone, eds. (New York, 1973), pp. 322-357.
15. *Orbiter*, Vol. 15, No. 20 (1975), p. 2.
16. *Art Week*, Vol. 6, No. 29 (Sept. 6, 1975).
17. Glenda Madrid, in a recent conversation with the author. Madrid was also a major source of information for the responses to the exhibition and the statistics and position of women employees at Aerospace.
18. The Feminist Studio Workshop is the first alternative institution for women in the arts and humanities; it is housed in the unique context of the Woman's Building in Los Angeles. Since it was founded in 1973, over 100 women have received their education at the Feminist Studio Workshop, and several thousand students have participated in the Extension Program at the Woman's Building.

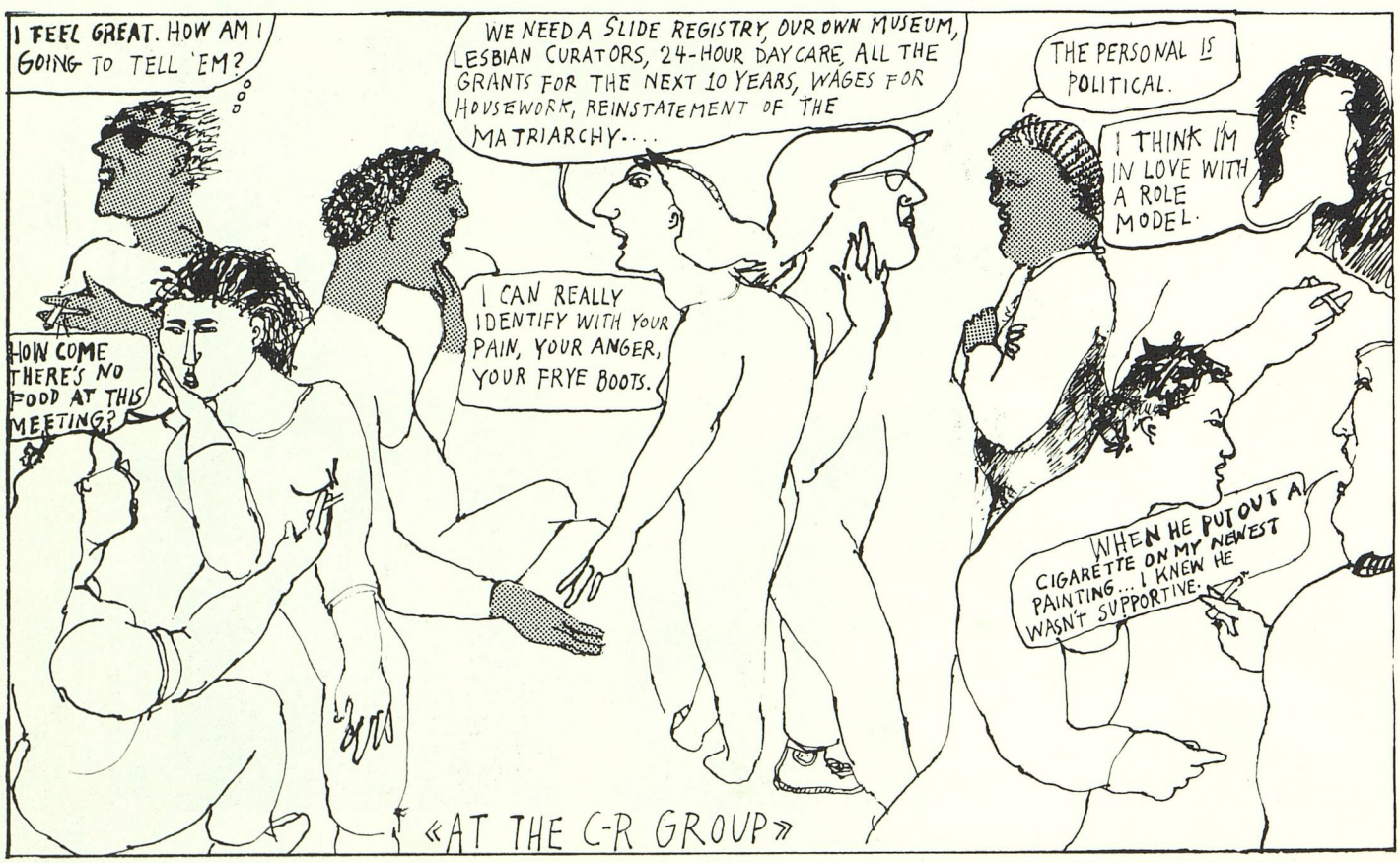
Ruth Iskin is a feminist art historian living in Los Angeles, formerly co-director of Womanspace and the editor of *Womanspace Journal*. Now she is director of the Woman's Building Galleries, on the faculty of the Feminist Studio Workshop, and an editor of *Chrysalis: A New Magazine of Women's Culture*.

Mary Beth Edelson, *Death of the Patriarchy/Heresies,* 1976. © Mary Beth Edelson.
Mary Beth Edelson is an artist living in New York who shows at the A.I.R. Gallery and is a member of the Heresies Collective.

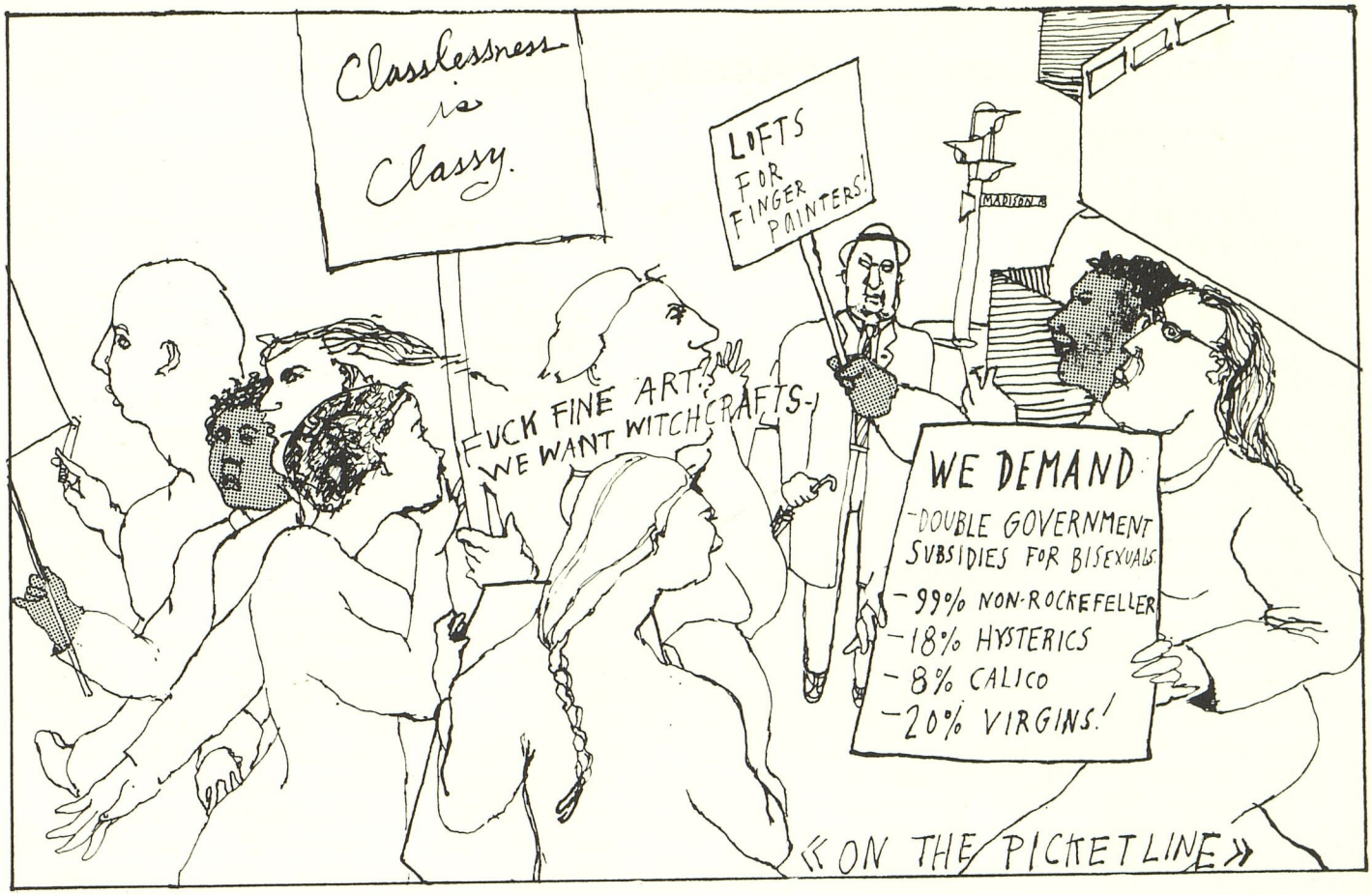
A PINK STRIP

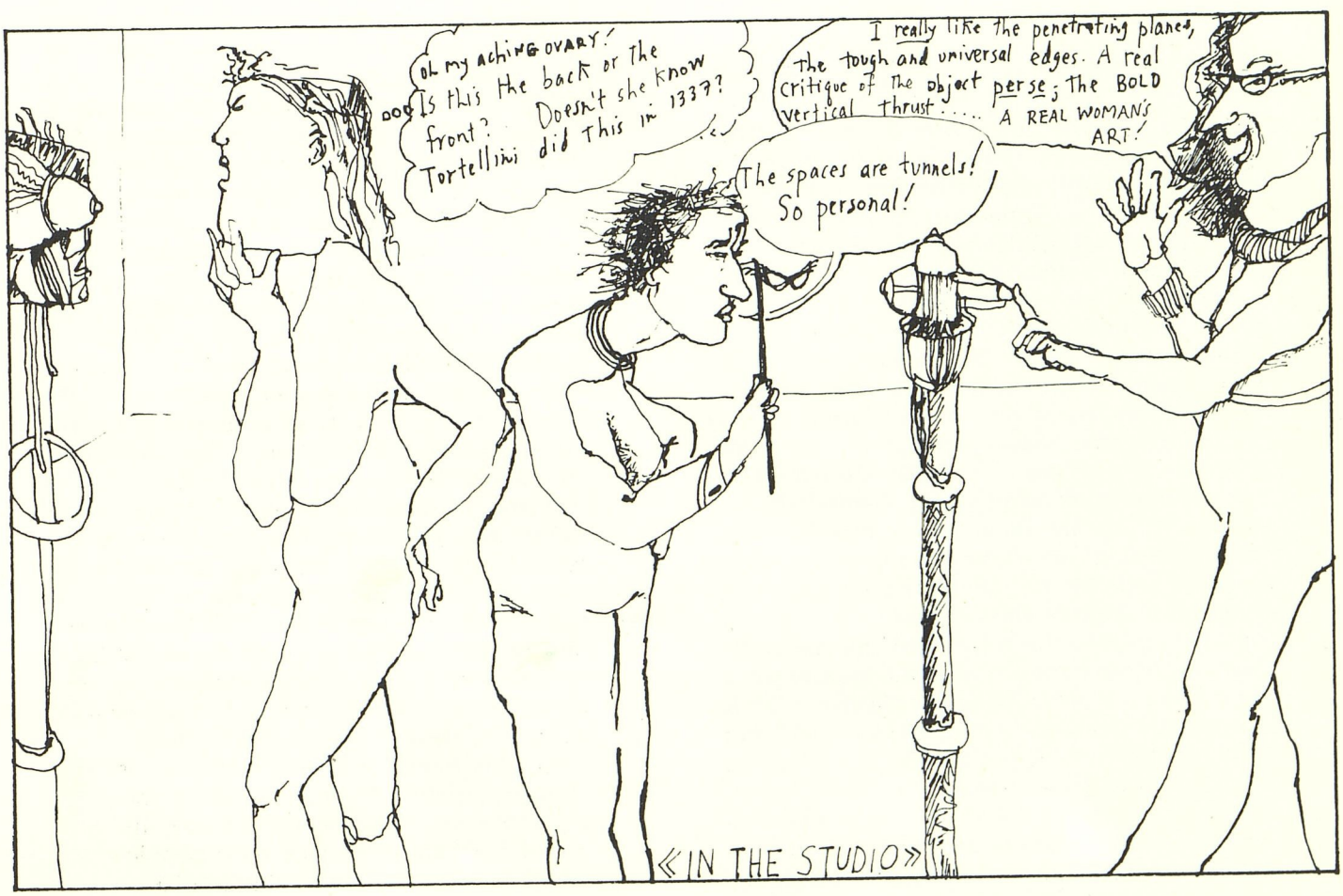
TEXT BY THE DEEP SIX
DRAWINGS BY AMY SILLMAN





Amy Sillman studies painting, makes little books, and draws pictures to amuse herself and other women.





The Pink Glass Swan: Upward and Downward Mobility in the Art World

Lucy R. Lippard

The general alienation of contemporary avant-garde art from any broad audience has been crystallized in the women's movement. From the beginning, both liberal feminists concerned with changing women's personal lives and socialist feminists concerned with overthrowing the classist/racist/sexist foundations of society have agreed that "fine" art is more or less irrelevant, though holding out the hope that feminist art could and should be different. The American women artists' movement has concentrated its efforts on gaining power within its own interest group—the art world, in itself an incestuous network of relationships between artists and art on the one hand and dealers, publishers, buyers on the other. The "public," the "masses," or the "audience" is hardly considered.

The art world has evolved its own curious class system. Externally this is a microcosm of capitalist society, but it maintains an internal dialectic (or just plain contradiction) that attempts to reverse or ignore that parallel. Fame may be a higher currency than mere money, but the two tend to go together. Since the buying and selling of art and artists is done by the ruling classes or by those chummy with them and their institutions, all artists or producers, no matter what their individual economic backgrounds, are dependent on the owners and forced into a proletarian role—just as women, in Engels' analysis, play proletarian to the male ruler across all class boundaries. Looking at and "appreciating" art in this century has been understood as an instrument (or at best a result) of upward social mobility in which owning art is the ultimate step. Making art is at the bottom of the scale. This is the only legitimate reason to see artists as so many artists see themselves—as "workers." At the same time, artists/makers tend to feel misunderstood and, as *creators,* innately superior to the buyers/owners. The innermost circle of the art-world class system thereby replaces the rulers with the creators, and the contemporary artist in the big city (read New York) is a schizophrenic creature. S/he is persistently working "up" to be accepted, not only by other artists, but also by the hierarchy that exhibits, writes about, and buys her/his work. At the same time s/he is often ideologically working "down" in an attempt to identify with the workers outside of the art context, and to overthrow the rulers in the name of art. This conflict is augmented by the fact that most artists are originally from the middle class, and their approach to the bourgeoisie includes a touch of adolescent rebellion against authority. Those few who have actually emerged from the working class sometimes use this—their very lack of background privilege—as privilege in itself, while playing the same schizophrenic foreground role as their solidly middle-class colleagues.

Artists, then, are workers or at least producers even when they don't know it. Yet artists dressed in work clothes (or expensive imitations thereof) and producing a commodity accessible only to the rich differ drastically from the real working class in that artists control their production and their product—or could if they realized it and if they had the strength to maintain that control. In the studio, at least, unlike the farm, the factory, and the mine, the unorganized worker is in superficial control and can, if s/he dares, talk down to or tell off the boss—the collector, the curator, etc. For years now, with little effect, it has been pointed out to artists that the art-world superstructure cannot run without them. Art, after all, is the product on which all the money is made and the power based.

During the 1950s and 1960s most American artists were unaware that they did *not* control their art, that their art could be used not only for esthetic pleasure or decoration or status symbols, but also as an educational weapon. In the late 1960s, between the Black, the student, the anti-war and the women's movements, the facts of the exploitation of art in and out of the art world emerged. Most artists and artworkers still ignore these issues because they make us feel too uncomfortable and helpless. Yet if there were a strike against museums and galleries to allow artists control of their work, the scabs would be out immediately in full force, with reasons ranging from self-interest to total lack of political awareness to a genuine belief that society would crumble without art, that art is "above it all." Or is it in fact *below* it all, as most political activists seem to think?

Another aspect of this conflict surfaces in discussions around who gets a "piece of the pie"—a phrase which has become the scornful designation for what is actually most people's goal. (Why shouldn't artists be able to make a living in this society like everybody else? Well, *almost*

everybody else.) Those working for "cultural change" through political theorizing and occasional actions are opposed to *anybody* getting a piece of the pie, though politics appears to be getting fashionable again in the art world and may itself provide a vehicle for internal success; today one can refuse a piece of the pie and simultaneously be getting a chance at it. Still, the pie is very small and there are a lot of hungry people circling it. Things were bad enough when only men were allowed to take a bite. Since "aggressive women" have gotten in there too, competition, always at the heart of the art-world class system, has peaked.

Attendance at any large art school in the U.S. takes students from all classes and trains them for artists' schizophrenia. While being cool and chicly grubby (in the "uniform" of mass production), and knowing what's the latest in taste and what's the kind of art to make and the right names to drop is clearly "upward mobility"—from school into teaching jobs and/or the art world—the lifestyle accompanying these habits is heavily weighted "downward." The working-class girl who has had to work for nice clothes must drop into frayed jeans to make it into the art middle class, which in turn considers itself both upper and lower class. Choosing poverty is a confusing experience for a child whose parents (or more likely mother) have tried desperately against great odds to keep a clean and pleasant home.[1]

The artist who feels superior to the rich because s/he is disguised as someone who is poor provides a puzzle for the truly deprived. A parallel notion, rarely admitted but pervasive, is that a person can't understand "art" if their house is full of pink glass swans or their lawn is inhabited by gnomes and flamingos, or if they even care about house and clothes at all. This is particularly ridiculous now, when art itself uses so much of this paraphernalia (and not always satirically); or, from another angle, when even artists who have no visible means of professional support live in palatial lofts and sport beat-up $100 boots while looking down on the "tourists" who come to SoHo to see art on Saturdays; SoHo is, in fact, the new suburbia. One reason for such callousness is a hangover from the 1950s, when artists really were poor and proud of being poor because their art, the argument went, must be good if the bad guys—the rich *and* the masses—didn't like it.

In the 1960s the choice of poverty, often excused as anti-consumerism, even infiltrated the esthetics of art.[2] First there was Pop Art, modeled on kitsch, on advertising and consumerism, and equally successful on its own level. (Women, incidentally, participated little in Pop Art, partly because of its blatant sexism, sometimes presented as a parody of the image of woman in the media—and partly because the subject matter was often "women's work," ennobled and acceptable only when the artists were men.) Then came Process Art—a rebellion against the "precious object" traditionally desired and bought by the rich. Here another kind of co-optation took place, when temporary piles of dirt, oil, rags and filthy rubber began to grace carpeted living rooms. The Italian branch was even called *Arte Povera*. Then came the rise of a third-stream medium called "conceptual art" which offered "anti-objects" in the form of ideas—books or simple xeroxed texts and photographs with no inherent physical or monetary value (until they got on the market, that is). Conceptual art seemed politically viable because of its notion that the use of ordinary, inexpensive, unbulky media would lead to a kind of socialization (or at least democratization) of art as opposed to gigantic canvases and huge chrome sculptures costing five figures and filling the world with more consumer fetishes.

Yet the trip from oil on canvas to ideas on xerox was, in retrospect, yet another instance of "downward mobility" or middle-class guilt. It was no accident that conceptual art appeared at the height of the social movements of the late 1960s nor that the artists were sympathetic to those movements (with the qualified exception of the women's movement). All of the esthetic tendencies listed above were genuinely instigated as rebellions by the artists themselves, yet the fact remains that only rich people can afford to 1) spend money on art that won't last; 2) live with "ugly art" or art that is not decorative, because the rest of their surroundings are beautiful and comfortable; 3) like "non-object art" which is only handy if you already have too many possessions—when it becomes a reactionary commentary: art for the overprivileged in a consumer society.

As a child, I was accused by my parents of being an "anti-snob snob" and I'm only beginning to see the limitations of such a rebellion. Years later I was an early supporter of and proselytizer for conceptual art as escape from the commodity orientation of the art world, a way of communicating with a broader audience via inexpensive media. Though I was bitterly disappointed (with the social, not the esthetic achievements) when I found that this work could be so easily absorbed into the system, it is only now that I've realized why the absorption took place. Conceptual art's democratic efforts and physical vehicles were cancelled out by its neutral, elitist content and its patronizing approach. From around 1967 to 1971, most of us involved in conceptual art saw that content as pretty revolutionary and thought of ourselves as rebels against the cool, hostile artifacts of the prevailing formalist and minimal art. But we were so totally enveloped in the middle-class approach to everything we did and saw, we couldn't perceive how that pseudo-academic narrative piece or that art-world-oriented action

in the streets was deprived of any revolutionary content by the fact that it was usually incomprehensible and alienating to the people "out there," no matter how fashionably downwardly mobile it might be in the art world. The idea that if art is subversive in the art world it will automatically appeal to a general audience now seems absurd.

The whole evolutionary basis of modernist innovation, the idea of esthetic "progress," the "I-did-it-first" and "it's-been-done-already" syndromes which pervade contemporary avant-garde art and criticism, are also blatantly classist, and have more to do with technology than with art. To be "avant-garde" is inevitably to be on top or to become upper-middle-class, because such innovations take place in a context accessible only to the educated elite. Thus socially conscious artists working in or with community groups and muralists try to disassociate themselves from the art world, even though its values ("quality") remain to haunt them personally.

The value systems are different in and out of the art world, and anyone attempting to straddle the two develops another kind of schizophrenia. For instance, in the inner-city community murals, as Eva Cockcroft points out elsewhere in this publication, the images of woman are the traditional ones—a beautiful, noble mother and housewife or worker, and a rebellious young woman striving to change her world—both of them celebrated for their courage to be and to stay the way they are and to support their men in the face of horrendous odds. This is not the art-world or middle-class "radical" view of future feminism, nor is it one which radical feminists hoping to "reach out" across the classes can easily espouse. Here, in the realm of aspirations, is where upward and downward mobility and status quo clash, where the economic class barriers are established. As Michele Russell has noted,[3] the Third-World woman is not attracted to the "Utopian experimentation" of the left (in the art world, the would-be Marxist avant-garde) or to the "pragmatic opportunism" of the right (in the art world, those who reform and co-opt the "radicals").

Many of the subjects touched on here come back to Taste. To a poor woman, art, or a beautiful object, might be defined as something she cannot have. Beauty and art have been defined before as *the desirable*. In a consumer society, art too becomes a commodity rather than a life-enhancing experience. Yet the Van Gogh reproduction or the pink glass swan—the same beautiful objects that may be "below" a middle-class woman (because she has, in moving upward, acquired upper-class taste, or would like to think she has)—may be "above" or inaccessible to a welfare mother. The phrase "to dictate taste" has its own political connotations. A Minneapolis worker interviewed by students of artist Don Celender said he liked "old art works because they're more classy,"[4] and class does seem to be what the traditional notion of art is all about. Yet contemporary avant-garde art, for all its attempts to break out of that gold frame, is equally class-bound, and even the artist aware of these contradictions in her/his own life and work is hard-put to resolve them. It's a vicious circle. If the artist/producer is upper-middle-class, and our standards of art as taught in schools are persistently upper-middle-class, how do we escape making art only *for* the upper-middle-class?

The alternatives to "quality," to the "high" art shown in art-world galleries and magazines have been few, and for the most part unsatisfying, although well-intended. Even when kitsch, politics or housework are absorbed into art, contact with the real world is not necessarily made. At no time has the avant garde, though playing in the famous "gap between art and life," moved far enough out of the art context to attract a broad audience—that audience which has, ironically, been trained to think of art as something that has nothing to do with life and, at the same time, tends only to like that art which means something in terms of its own life, or fantasies. The dilemma for the leftist artist in the middle class is that her/his standards seem to have been set irremediably. No matter how much we know about what the broader public wants, or *needs*, it is very difficult to break social conditioning and cultural habits. Hopefully, a truly feminist art will provide other standards.

To understand the woman artist's position in this complex situation between the art world and the real world, class and gender, it is necessary to know that in America artists are rarely respected unless they are stars or rich or mad or dead. Being an artist is not being "somebody." Middle-class families are happy to pay lip service to art but god forbid their own children take it so seriously as to consider it a profession. Thus a man who becomes an artist is asked when he is going to "go to work," and he is not-so-covertly considered a child, a sissy (a woman), someone who has a hobby rather than a vocation, someone who can't make money and therefore cannot hold his head up in the real world of men—at least until his work sells, at which point he may be welcomed back. Male artists, bending over backward to rid themselves of this stigma, tend to be particularly susceptible to insecurity and *machismo*. So women daring to insist on their place in the primary rank—as art makers rather than as art housekeepers (curators, critics, dealers, "patrons")—inherit a heavy burden of male fears in addition to the economic and psychological

discrimination still rampant in a patriarchal, money-oriented society.

Most art being shown now has little to do with any woman's experience, in part because women—rich ones as "patrons," others as decorators and "home-makers"—are in charge of the private sphere, while men identify more easily with public art—art that has *become* public through economic validation (the million-dollar Rembrandt). Private art is often seen as mere ornament; public art is associated with monuments and money, with "high" art and its containers, including unwelcoming white-walled galleries and museums with classical courthouse architecture. Even the graffiti artists, whose work was unsuccessfully transferred from subways to art galleries, were all men, concerned with facades, with having their names in spray paint, in lights, in museums. . . .

Private art is visible only to intimates. I suspect the reason so few women "folk" artists work outdoors in large scale (like Simon Rodia's Watts Towers and other "naives and visionaries" with their cement and bottles) is not only because men aspire to erections and know how to use the necessary tools, but because women can and must assuage these same creative urges inside the house, with the pink glass swan as an element in their own works of art—the living room or kitchen. In the art world the situation is doubly paralleled. Women's art until recently was rarely seen in public and all artists are voluntarily "women" because of the social attitudes mentioned above; the art world is so small that it is "private."

Just as the living room is enclosed by the building it is in, art and artist are firmly imprisoned by the culture which supports them. Artists claiming to work for themselves alone, and not for any audience at all, are passively accepting the upper-middle-class audience of the internal art world. This is compounded by the fact that to be middle-class is to be passive, to live with the expectation of being taken care of and entertained. But art should be a consciousness-raiser; it partakes of and should fuse the private and the public spheres. It should be able to reintegrate the personal without being satisfied by the *merely* personal. One good test is whether or not it communicates, and then, of course, what and how it communicates. If it doesn't communicate it may just not be very good art from anyone's point of view; or it may be that the artist is not even aware of the needs of others, or simply doesn't care.

For there is a need out there, a need vaguely satisfied at the moment by "schlock."[5] And it seems that one of the basic tenets of the feminist arts should be a reaching out from the private sphere to transform that "artificial art" and to more fully satisfy that need. For the art-world artist has come to consider her/his private needs paramount, and has too often forgotten about those of the audience, any audience. Work that communicates to a dangerous number of people is derogatorily called a "crowd pleaser." This is a blatantly classist attitude, taking for granted that most people are by nature incapable of understanding good art (i.e., upper-class or quality art). At the same time, much ado is made about art-educational theories that claim to "teach people to see" (consider the political implications of this notion) and muffle all issues by stressing the "universality" of great art.

It may be that at the moment the possibilities are slim for a middle-class art world's understanding or criticism of the little art we see that reflects working-class cultural values. Perhaps our current responsibility lies in humanizing our own activities so that they will communicate more effectively with all women. Hopefully we will aspire to more than women's art flooding the museum and gallery circuit. Perhaps a feminist art will only emerge when we become wholly responsible for our own work, for what becomes of it, who sees it, and who is nourished by it. For a feminist artist, whatever her style, the prime audience at this time is other women. So far, we have tended to be satisfied with communicating with those women whose social experience is close to ours. This is natural enough, since this is where we will get our greatest support, and we need support in taking this risk of trying to please *women*, knowing that we are almost certain to displease men in the process. In addition, it is embarrassing to talk openly about the class system which divides us, hard to do so without sounding more bourgeois than ever in the implications of superiority and inferiority inherent in such discussions (where the working class is as often considered superior as the middle class).

A book of essays called *Class and Feminism* written by The Furies, a lesbian feminist collective, makes clear that from the point of view of working-class women, class is a definite problem within the women's movement. As Nancy Myron observes, middle-class women:

> can intellectualize, politicize, accuse, abuse and contribute money in order not to deal with their own classism. Even if they admit that class exists, they are not likely to admit that their behavior is a product of it. They will go through every painful detail of their lives to prove to me or another working-class woman that they really didn't have any privilege, that their family was exceptional, that they actually did have an uncle who worked in a factory. To ease anyone's guilt is not the point of talking about class. . . . You don't get rid of oppression just by talking about it.

Women are more strenuously conditioned toward upward cultural mobility or "gentility" than men, which often results in the woman consciously betraying her class origins as a matter of course. The hierarchies within the whole span of the middle class are most easily demarcated by lifestyle and dress. For instance, the much-scorned "Queens housewife" may have enough to eat, may have learned to consume the unnecessities, and may have made it to a desired social bracket in her community, but if she ventures to make art (not just own it), she will find herself back at the bottom in the art world, looking wistfully up to the plateau where the male, the young, the bejeaned seem so at ease.

For middle-class women in the art world not only dress "down," but dress like working-class *men*. They do so because housedresses, pedal pushers, polyester pantsuits, permanents, the wrong accents are not such acceptable disguises for women as the boots, overalls and windbreaker syndromes are for men. Thus young middle-class women tend to deny their female counterparts and take on "male" (unisex) attire. It may at times have been chic to dress like a native American or a Bedouin woman, but it has never been chic to dress like a working-class woman, even if she's trying to look like Jackie Kennedy. Young working-class women (and men) spend a large amount of available money on clothes; it's a way to forget the rats and roaches by which even the cleanest tenement-dwellers are blessed, or the mortgages by which even the hardest-working homeowners are blessed, and to present a classy facade. Artists dressing and talking "down" insult the hardhat much as rich kids in rags do; they insult people whose notion of art is something to work for—the pink glass swan.

Yet women, as evidenced by the Furies' publication, and as pointed out elsewhere (most notably by Bebel), have a unique chance to communicate with women across the boundaries of economic class because as a "vertical class" we share the majority of our most fundamental experiences—emotionally, even when economically we are divided. Thus an economic analysis does not adequately explore the psychological and esthetic ramifications of the need for change within a sexually oppressed group. Nor does it take into consideration that women's needs are different from men's—or so it seems at this still unequal point in history. The vertical class cuts across the horizontal economic classes in a column of injustices. While heightened class consciousness can only clarify the way we see the world, and all clarification is for the better, I can't bring myself to trust hard lines and categories where fledgling feminism is concerned.

Even in the art world, the issue of feminism has barely been raised in mixed political groups. In 1970, women took our rage and our energies to our own organizations, or directly to the public by means of picketing and protests. While a few men supported these, and most politically conscious male artists now claim to be feminists to some degree, the political *and* apolitical art world goes on as though feminism didn't exist—the presence of a few vociferous feminist artists and critics notwithstanding. And in the art world, as in the real world, political commitment frequently means total disregard for feminist priorities. Even the increasingly Marxist group ironically calling itself Art-Language is unwilling to stop the exclusive use of the male pronoun in its theoretical publications.[6]

Experiences like this one and dissatisfaction with Marxism's lack of interest in "the woman question" make me wary of merging Marxism and feminism. The notion of the non-economic or "vertical" class is anathema to Marxists and confusion is rampant around the chicken-egg question of whether women can be equal before the establishment of a classless society or whether a classless society can be established before women are liberated. As Sheila Rowbotham says of her own Marxism and feminism:

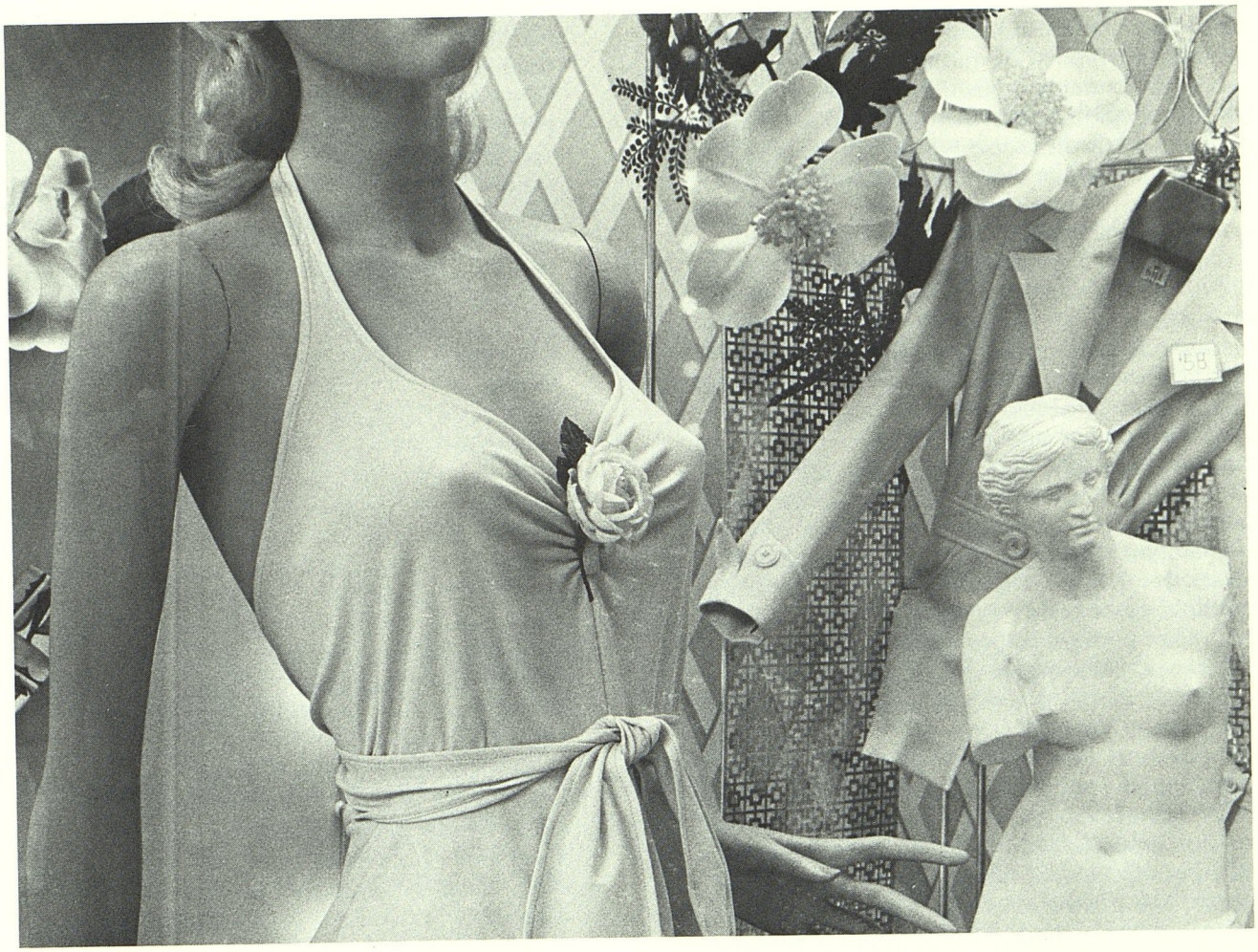
> They are at once incompatible and in real need of one another. As a feminist and a Marxist I carry their contradictions within me and it is tempting to opt for one or the other in an effort to produce a tidy resolution of the commotion generated by the antagonism between them. But to do that would mean evading the social reality which gives rise to the antagonism.[7]

As women, therefore, we need to establish far more strongly our own sense of community, so that all our arts will be enjoyed by all women in all economic circumstances. This will happen only when women artists make conscious efforts to cross class barriers, to consider their audience, to see, respect, work with the women who create outside the art world—whether in suburban crafts guilds or in offices and factories or in community workshops. The current feminist passion for women's traditional arts, which influences a great many women artists, should make this road much easier, unless it too becomes another commercialized rip-off. Despite the very real class obstacles, I feel strongly that women are in a privileged position to satisfy the goal of an art which would communicate the needs of all classes and sexes to each other, and get rid of the we/they dichotomy to as great an extent as is possible in a capitalist framework. Our sex, our oppression and our female experience—our female culture, just being explored—offer access to all of us by these common threads.

1. *Class and Feminism*, ed. Charlotte Bunch and Nancy Myron (Baltimore, 1974). This book contains some excrutiating insights for the middle-class feminist; it raised my consciousness and inspired this essay (along with other recent experiences and conversations).

2. Actually nothing new; the history of modern art demonstrates a constant longing for the primitive, the simple, the clear, the "poor," the noble naif, etc.
3. Michele Russell, "Woman and Third World," *New American Movement* (June, 1973).
4. *Opinions of Working People Concerning the Arts*, ed. Don Celender (New York, 1975).
5. Bernard Kirchenbaum, in correspondence. Celender, *op. cit.*, offers proof of this need and of the huge (and amazing) interest in art expressed by the working class, though it should be said that much of what is called art would not be agreed upon by the taste dictators.
6. This despite their publication of and apparent endorsement of Carolee Schneemann's "The Pronoun Tyranny" in *The Fox*, 3 (1976).
7. Sheila Rowbotham, *Women: Resistance and Revolution*, (London, 1972).

Lucy R. Lippard is a feminist art critic, writes fiction too, and has been active politically. She is co-founder of several women artists' groups and has published 10 books on contemporary art, the two most recent ones being *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (E.P. Dutton) and *Eva Hesse* (N.Y.U. Press).



Su Friedrich. *Chicago Mannequin*. 1975.

Juggling Contradictions: Feminism, the Individual and What's Left

Joan Braderman

In this essay, I would like to suggest where feminism can lead us and what myths must finally be left behind to get there. The nature of these myths—the myths of equality, individualism and democratic liberalism—which underwrite our humanist heritage, account for the weakest elements of feminist ideology. The recognition that feminism *is* an ideology, like Marx's recognition that humanism is an ideology (i.e., not a discourse whose "truth" was inseparable from the world it described) is a necessary step in re-examining what feminism is and what it can do.

I will use as a conceit the form of "the contradiction"—that underlying, dynamic mechanism of history—in a way that is sometimes more metaphorical than concrete. I take the liberty of using this model rhetorically at times to begin to establish a series of interrelationships between ideologies and their culture. I use it to suggest the many ways the several spheres of interest to *Heresies* readers—art, feminism and their political context—are subject to a set of analogous and mutually reinforcing ideological myths. Most feminists and artists alike are still held captive by the power of these seductive belief systems, although they threaten the coherence of our arguments, threaten our interests and threaten the very survival of the ideal of freedom.

A confrontation between the facts and fictions which surround us becomes inevitable within an escalating spiral of contradictions. The first group to experience directly the essential contradictions of the society we live in is, of course, the lowest class: the unemployed, the poorest, least skilled, most exploited working people. Next, the marginal groups, in North America: people of color, immigrants, the elderly, etc. Artists are marginal too. They feel the economic squeeze in recessions, may even become politicized as a result. And across all these groups are women. As groups, then, women and artists have a low priority in the hierarchy of capital.

To give up the humanist myths, those most cherished ideals of our own class, the bourgeoisie, which were forged when it was the revolutionary class, is difficult indeed. But give them up we must, for in the face of heightening contradictions—economic, biological, ideological—we have no choice.

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By 1976, the women's movement seems to have nearly as many political lines as there are women in it. This partly healthy, partly disturbing fact reflects with painful clarity both the strengths and implicit weaknesses of the feminist critique of society. What is feminist practice? What is it to be a feminist in 1976? Is it to be an individual woman "making it" in a man's world? Is it to recognize woman's historical oppression and, released from individual frustration and guilt, to take on collective responsibility? What is the nature of such a responsibility? Is it restricted to oneself? To oneself and the women one sees every week? Is this a responsibility to oneself, to women, to men, to history? In short, is feminism, as an ideology, fundamentally dangerous to the sexism it despises? If so, how?

To many women, enmeshed in the growing contradictions of late capitalist society, feminism, by 1976, has proven as much a trap as a liberation. What seemed to so many of us as little as five years ago a potentially revolutionary force now appears to be virtually co-opted. The great capitalist commodity machine has produced a whole new catalogue of cultural commodities: the feminist writer, artist, poet; the feminist academic, professional, journalist, TV persona; the feminist token with that "*feminist* mystique." She is for sale in the cultural marketplace. She is tough, durable, tireless. She is "sexually liberated" (a great lay). She works harder than a man. She has to. She is still a *woman* in a world that calls people "mankind." That is, "equality" for women still equals inequality for women. This is a contradiction.

What kind of contradiction? It is a contradiction between the ideology of bourgeois feminism and economic and biological fact. The economic facts of life for the great majority of women remain the same: unpaid domestic labor, ill-paid labor in the work force. Biological fact (which is gender difference along with its cultural baggage) proposes a contradiction, even for those of us who *are* female tokens of one sort or another, who *are* members of the bourgeoisie.

Our psycho-sexual behavior, like our economic roles, is wholly determined by an inherited system of power relations, not only in the public sector, but at deeper levels, in the formation—within the family—of the psyche itself. Hence, as Juliet Mitchell so carefully

describes,[1] it is *the concept of equality* which is invalid within our system. The abstract ideal of equality, she demonstrates, provides the philosophical basis for our laws. Our legal system, at its best, functions *as if* each of its individual constituents *were* equal. If some people have only their labor to sell, and this labor produces more value than it returns to the laborer, an unequal exchange has taken place. The laborer, then, and the owner of the means to produce that "surplus value" are not equal. If some people are denied, by virtue of their color, access even to the skills of labor, to whom are they equal? If half of all people have babies and half do not, are they all "equal"? Logical incompatabilities arise: what is different is not the same, and gender (among other things) means difference.

Radical feminism has tried to take on this contradiction, indeed proclaimed it *the* essential contradiction in our form of social organization. Between biology and destiny, it proposes, stands consciousness. Woman's oppression vertically crosses class lines, crosses race lines; women, armed with "consciousness," would speak to each other across a history of divisions and change the world. Women's groups would not only clarify the areas of shared experience which foster that consciousness, but would serve as support communities. With sisterhood for strength, women would hit male supremacy where it lived: at home. Yet what, after all, has changed? The quality of life for a few privileged women—a small step. Was all that fervor, sisterhood and revolutionary idealism that was meant to reinvent the terms for a mass movement so easily engorged, packaged and recycled?

For radical feminism too has been partially co-opted. Since it had already dropped out of the broader (sexist) political arena, it provided support systems for women, but toward an uncertain end. Seeing few alternatives and tantalized by a taste of power, women often used that strength to re-enter the dominant culture to become as competitive, as "good" as men. Has the women's movement had so little concrete impact on most women's lives?

Certainly the patriarchy was sufficiently threatened to let the feminist token into the limelight. (Why co-opt without advertising the co-opted product?) But she did not make it into the statistics. The economic facts so far as most women are concerned remain unchanged: unpaid domestic labor; ill-paid labor in the work force. The wage differential between men and women in fact is now greater than it was ten years ago. Even the hard-won victory of abortion (*for a price*), even the possibility of "equal rights" before the very laws which uphold a system of inequality, are a slap in the face to an ideology which aimed to alter the very "nature" of human relationships. This too is a contradiction.

What kind of contradiction? It is a contradiction between an ideology and a system; an ideology which has placed its profoundly humanist hope in individual consciousness as somehow separable from the structures in which that consciousness is created. Demystifying the contradictory elements of traditional feminism itself, then, is part of our task. In capitalist society, the process through which human labor is translated into commodity, then capital, is a process necessarily affecting not only the production of tractors and bombs but the production of *ideology*. This process puts intellectual labor, like esthetic labor, like factory labor, like reproductive labor, in the service of a system which generates a surplus of wealth for the few and subsistence for the many. This contradiction—between the forces of production (labor) and the property relations of production (ownership) is *the* contradiction which Marxists claim moves history, because it produces class struggle: the power of masses of people to labor becomes the power to revolt.

This contradiction *has* moved history. But, feminists ask, has it altered the basic relation between woman and man, woman and child-rearing, woman and psycho-sexual slavery? For the hypocrisy of bourgeois ideology in relation to bourgeois practice is paradigmatic within the structure of the family. Marriage, ostensibly a contractual agreement between consenting equals, is in fact a property relation between an owner and an exploited, isolated and powerless worker.

It is the belief in the illusion that such social contracts can be fulfilled that has hung feminists on the horns of contradiction. Feminism was born in the 17th century along with the concept of equality of individuals. It was, as Sheila Rowbotham has documented,[2] heated in the cauldron of bourgeois revolution and simmered in the idealism of 19th-century Utopianism à la Fourier, who claimed that "the change in historical epoch can always be determined by the progress of women toward freedom."[3]

Bourgeois feminism has begun, then, in its history of leaps and starts, to identify and attack its sexist enemy, and taken a few long strides away from female feudalism for the benefit of *some* bourgeois women. But the heart of the problem remains. Feminists from Tennessee Claflin to Isadora Duncan have scored high in locating it. "At the ballot box is *not* where the shoe pinches. . . It is at home where the husband is the supreme ruler that the little difficulty arises; he will not surrender this absolute power unless he is compelled," wrote Claflin in 1871.[4] Duncan, in her 1927 autobiography said, "Any intelligent woman who reads the marriage contract and then goes into it, deserves all the consequences."[5] Here is the confounding point. Monogamy asserts a situation in which one individual "owns" another. It is not ownership

per se that is in question now, but again, the mystification of what the individual is and can control. In participating in the compromised "equality" of marriage, each individual agrees to propagate the species in the context of the values of patriarchy. Values are learned, sexuality is formed, ideology is maintained—within the family.

When feminists claim that "the personal is political" they refer, in a sense, to this problem. Their hypothesis is that one can generalize from the individual, internal dynamics of sexist oppression, to a general rule. Freud's revelation of the structures of the unconscious confirms to an extent the validity of that enterprise. But up to now feminists have not taken it far enough. Having accepted the existence of subconscious structural analogues which mirror the differences between the sexes in the world, we can now proceed with the knowledge that, *as a group*, we are bound not only by the manifest political forms of our oppression but by these internal psychic monsters. In attempting to combat these monsters, however, feminists have often mistaken the cart for the horse. The personal is political—but with few exceptions, this invocation has simply generated a longer list of symptoms of the sexist disease. We must locate the *causes* of this disease if we are ever to cure it. We must exploit Freud's science of the mind, but only insofar as it is conjoined with the science of history; that is to say out of the context of individualism.

Sisterhood is really powerful only insofar as it is armed with a coherent theory and a mass strategy. We are in and of our culture; so is the feminist ideal. We must pursue, with maximum scientific rigor, the vanguard theories of culture which culture has produced. We must use the best available tools to locate the incoherence—the contradictions—in extant phallocentric models and generate predictive models based in the experience of both halves of the human race. Feminists who wish to throw Freud out the window because of simplistic readings of "penis envy" current in popular psychology might well take a look at Mitchell's *Feminism and Psychoanalysis* for a re-examination of the usefulness of psychoanalysis to feminist analysis. Her effort there is exemplary. We cannot just look back nostalgically to ancient matriarchies. Indeed, fantasies about matriarchy in our era are pure science fiction. But their existence does suggest that alternate models for culture *can* exist.

Recent controversy over Mitchell's book, among feminists and male psychoanalytic theorists here and abroad, suggests the "hotness" of this issue. Interestingly, this relation of sexuality to political economy is also being strongly developed outside a feminist context, most prominently on a major intellectual front—in the tradition of French structuralism. European feminists, especially in England and France, have thus been drawn to that tradition as heightened contradictions impel them to seek out means for their resolution. The main tendency in this area is necessarily phallocentric: it is still being written largely through the cipher of a male experience of the world. But if we as women don't begin to write ourselves into history, who will? For so far, compared to the scope of the theoretical, strategic and practical task ahead, the "woman question" has really only been given lip service by the most advanced intellectual sciences—not surprising since they are "man-made."

Engels, Marx and others have, of course, identified the monogamous, patriarchal family as the central prison for woman. Mechanistic Marxists therefore claim that releasing her from this singular prison into the work force (under socialism) must guarantee her freedom. Does it? Has it?

Not significantly; not yet. The major 20th-century socialist revolutions have made some progress, removing, as in China, the most barbaric manifestations of sexist domination. Immediately following the Soviet revolution, Lenin's program included not only the training of women to join the work force at all levels, but the legalization of abortion, free, accessible divorce, communal daycare, etc. Within ten years, however, Stalinist backlash hit these family issues hardest; much harder, predictably, than the building of an extra-domestic women's work force. In China, with the Cultural Revolution and before, ideological struggle against the values of patriarchy has at least begun. But in the U.S.S.R., in the context of their drive to quickly meet economic priorites which created the bastard known as "state capitalism," it was easier to fall back on the ingrained behaviors of the traditional family unit for free work by women in the home.

The American Communist Party reflects this tendency, still defending the "fighting family unit" as a revolutionary force—in America, a reactionary notion. In fact, mothers have been strong revolutionaries. The strength of the women of Viet Nam in the long battle to defeat American imperialism is a case in point. But, as in Algeria, where fighting European imperialism also meant the reassertion of the heavily patriarchal values of Arab and Islamic culture, women's fate has most often been: off the battlefield and back to the kitchen. The contradictions of the double standard apparently are so heightened during periods of revolution that, as with Bolsheviks like Alexandra Kollontai, the preaching and practice of "free love" (and all it implies) becomes acceptable—for a brief time. Despite Lenin's great sympathy and work for women, his Victorianism won out in the area of sex. Even the Soviet woman engineer comes home to work that is still hers, and still never

done.

In the U.S., too, anti-feminist backlash, somewhat reminiscent of the Stalinist attack on women's freedom, splits American feminism down its uncertain center. Though reformists suggest that there is room in a liberal America to heal the wounds of women, liberalism is particularly dangerous since it cleverly masks its own conservatism, its own investment in the status quo. Liberal ideology neatly instantiates the two-part form of the contradiction. "Its progressive side provides a rationale for defending the rights of individuals against the state. Its reactionary side emphasized that capitalism is not a system where one class exploits another but is rather a collection of individuals, any one of whom can succeed if he or she so decides."[6]

I hope it is becoming clear how ideologically messy liberalism really is from a post-humanist perspective in which the individual can no longer be seen as the subject of history. Liberalism is seen by leftists as a joke because it bears so tenuously the wan hopes of a bankrupt humanism and is, ultimately, untenable. Even hard-core conservatism is more internally coherent. Conservatives and Marxists alike might describe capitalism as a system in which the "stronger" individuals make out. The difference, of course, is that conservatives say so approvingly, grounding their argument in the old dog-eat-dog theory of what they call human nature. Marxists have favored the idea that the industrial capitalist system tends to pervert or alienate what is potentially, or at a given historical moment "good" in human beings. Stated so simply, both are inadequate readings but at least they rehearse the consistency of these positions.

The liberal wants to enjoy the fruits of his class privilege while salving his guilty conscience with a quasi-philosophic posture proposing that every individual (being protected by 'equality' before the law, by 'equal' opportunity measures, etc.) could theoretically be enjoying this same privilege if he or she were as hard-working and dauntless as him/herself. Thus the liberal buys off with a little charity or minimal social welfare all those who, by some extreme individual misfortune, can't quite cut it.

Here we return to the underbelly of co-optation. While a bill assuring equal rights before unequal laws is flung in our faces, and even defeated (adding insult to injury), the dominant media simultaneously declare the women's movement to be "over" or somehow "won" because of the presence of one and a half news anchor-women on TV or the financial viability of *Ms. Magazine*. Capitalist propaganda demonstrates before our eyes that by inference, if one woman can do work that one man can do, women are the achieved "equals" of men. The responsibility for change is thus cleverly switched back onto the shoulders of *individual* women; to change the world, all you really must do is change your*self*. And the mapping of contradictions comes full circle.

The liberal feminist, like the liberal social democrat, learns to sate herself on the token goodies she is tendered. Or the radical feminist (who, lacking a viable mass strategy, is a liberal in disguise) tries to build a separatist island on which she and her sisters can be "free." It's a dilemma. I was, and in some ways still am, such a radical feminist. After all, I am a member of the women's group which publishes this magazine. We try to experiment with anti-oligarchic forms, collective practice. But what is an egalitarian island in a sea of capitalist contradictions but something doomed, as it were, to sinking?

Witness a little linguistic contradiction and the issues it raises for us in *Heresies*. We are constituted as a collective. Adopting one of the stronger aspects of feminist practice, we attempt to chip away at the hierarchical authority structures of The System on a micro level by attempting to produce a theoretical magazine on a collective basis. The assumption here is that theory and practice must develop together in a dialectical relationship. But in order to function as a legal entity, we are transformed to *Heresies* Collective, Inc.: an incorporated collective. This is either redundant or ironic. The fact is, we don't even aspire to making profits but are completely dependent on the legal and business structures around us. This dependence relation, the impossibility of autonomy within a given economic structure, has meant about a two-year life-span for most American collectives before us, according to popular lore.

This dependence also means that artists, particularly those artists being forced by heightened economic contradictions to face political realities, must re-examine their place in our culture. The feminist filmmaker, for example, has had to confront this issue head on. Film, more than any other artform, requires the mastery of machine technology. For women, that technology and the authority it connotes has been historically taboo. There are exceptions in the history of film[7] but the percentage of women filmmakers is dramatically low for a 20th-century art. Feminists with the energy and support of their sisters in the movement have begun to break that taboo. But in doing so, they have been thrown against a major contradiction facing all "independent" filmmakers: the problem of capital. For to make films requires large amounts of capital, capital which is controlled by the ruling classes, middle-class liberals included.

Advocates of independent filmmaking from Maya Deren in the 1940s (implicitly) to Annette Michelson in the 1960s (explicitly in her article "Film and the Radical Aspiration"[8]) have proposed that a stance outside of the commercial market is itself a "political" gesture. It is—to the

This is a still from Julia Reichert's new film, *Union Maids,* in which she makes the necessary connections (through the editing of contemporary interviews with historical footage) of sexism with racism with classism. *Union Maids* is distributed by the New Day Film Collective.

extent that money can be garnered from liberals to make "art" as long as it is not fundamentally dangerous. But can any political art which attempts to attack the assumptions of The System *from within* patriarchal capitalism actually threaten it? This has been and will be an area of debate for many political estheticians and artists and can hardly be answered here.

But we can and must confront the question. From what is the "independent" filmmaker or artist independent? She is not independent from the need to make a living. She is not independent from the need for capital—money which gives the power to make her films and distribute her films within a tight commercial media monopoly. When a feminist wonders why capitalists won't hand over the money to make anti-sexist films, she, like her "independent" male counterpart, must face the terms of her dependence. She has begun to beg, borrow or steal (translated as win grants, go into debt, etc.) the capital to write herself into visual history, making films about the experience of women; viz: the films of Julia Reichert, Yvonne Rainer, Barbara Kopple, Chantal Ackerman, and many others. But who actually sees these films? They are shown in women's festivals, in avant-garde and political forums in a few major cities. She is, in short, caught in that same economic trap. Cooperatives for pooling resources and sharing distribution efforts, such as New Day Films, are beginning to form; they are collectives like *Heresies*. But the absolute dependence on the inconsistent, discrimate charity of liberals is the underside of that ultimately romantic hope for "independence." The terms for independence, then, among artists and feminists, are the very terms of dependence. Yet another contradiction.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

I would like to convince all feminists that it is time to realign with the Left. Current economic realities, heightening contradictions, and the topography of world imperialism reaching its limits, are forcing many groups in America to confront their need for unity. The traditionally sectarian American Left itself is beginning to move toward coalition and alliance, toward unity across color lines, across race lines, across class lines *and* across gender lines. Within such a potential configuration women *could* speak to other women. We are beginning to recognize that *all* oppressed peoples within capitalism must come together if we are even to begin to be able to defend ourselves against the attacks and backlash of this system, much less to build a new one.

Several feminist strategies for such a realignment of women with the broader struggle for freedom are presented in this issue of *Heresies* (see "Toward Socialist-Feminism" and "Wages for Housework"). This does not mean that women will not have to continue to force the priority of their own demands in relation to the needs of others. Women will need autonomy to develop theory and strategy accountable to our own needs within a broad movement, to avoid the failures of socialist experiments in the past. Thus, we must make our fight in the context of a movement we help to define and build, a movement that can take on the class contradiction as well as the racial and sexual contradictions implicit in the structures of the larger society. For, on these structures, the fate of all women, like it or not, is inextricably dependent. To wed feminism to the myths and false hopes of liberal idealism is to contribute to the systematic liquidation of its potential power.

1. Mitchell, Juliet, "Women and Equality," in *Partisan Review* (Summer, 1975).
2. Rowbotham, Sheila, *Women, Resistance and Revolution*, Vintage Books (New York, 1974).
3. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
4. Schneir, Miriam, ed., *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings*, Vintage Books (New York, 1972), p. xviii.
5. *Ibid.*, p. xv.
6. Guettel, Charnie, *Marxism and Feminism*, Women's Educational Press (Ontario, Canada, 1974), p. 2.
7. I and others have written elsewhere about the history of women directors. See my article in *Artforum* (Sept. 1972) and Sharon Smith's *Women Who Make Movies*, Hopkinson and Blake (New York, 1975).
8. In *Film Culture Reader*, ed., P. Adams Sitney, Praeger (New York, 1970).

Joan Braderman is completing her doctorate in film and political theory at N.Y.U., writes theory and criticism and makes 16mm films. She teaches film at The School of Visual Arts in New York City, is a political activist and likes to sing.

Ann Newmarch. *Look Rich.* (Photo: eeva-inkeri.)

Mandy Martin. (Photo: eeva-inkeri.)

Progressive Art Movement. *Gaol Bosses; Not Workers.* (Photo: eeva-inkeri.)

Toni Robertson. *Sometimes We Do Offend, Girls.* (Photo: eeva-inkeri.)

Ann Newmarch and Mandy Martin are Australian artists living in Adelaide. Their posters were made while both were working with the Progressive Art Movement—a leftist group working with prisons, labor unions, etc. Newmarch is a member of P.A.M.'s Visual Group and the organization also has other groups working in other cultural areas. Toni Robertson lives in Sydney. She teaches screen-printing in workshops at Sydney University and works with the Earthworks Poster group. *Sometimes We Do Offend, Girls* is numbered 4/28 "as tampon came from day 4 of my period and 28 days is another myth"; it was sold at $4.00 to the rich, $2.00 to those earning less than $100 per week.

Moratorium: Front Lawn: 1970

Kate Jennings

watch out! you may meet a real
castrating female

or

you'll say I'm a manhating braburning
lesbian member of the castration
penisenvy brigade, which I am

I would like to speak.
I would like to give a tubthumpingtablebanging emotional rap AND be listened to, not laughed at. You don't laugh at what your comrade brothers say, you wouldn't laugh at the negroes, the black panthers. Many women are beginning to feel the necessity to speak for themselves, for their sisters.
I feel the necessity now.
It's the moratorium. I would say, oh yes, the war is bad a pig bosses war may the nlf win, I also say VICTORY TO THE VIETNAMESE WOMEN. Now, our brothers on the left in the peace movement will think that what I am about to say is not justified, this is a moratorium. It's justified anywhere. We've heard you loud and clear before, brothershits, we know we have to work towards the Revolution and then join the ladies liberation auxiliary if we have any time left over. I've worked my priorities out, I will work towards what I know about, what I feel, and I feel because I'm told ad infinitum that I'm a woman, I'm a second-class citizen, and I should shutup right now because my mind's between my legs. I say you think with your pricks. We should all get our priorities straight and organise around our own injustices, our own condition. There are a lot of people here who feel strongly about the Vietnam war. But how many of you, who can see so clearly the suffering and misery in Vietnam, how many of you can see at the end of your piggy noses the women who can't get abortions, how many of you would get off your fat piggy asses and protest against the killing and victimisation of women in your own country. Go check the figures, how many Australian men have died in Vietnam, and how many women have died from backyard abortions. Yes, that's cool, they're only women, and you'll perhaps worry if your own chickie gets pregnant. Can you think about all the unwanted children, or the discrimination against unmarried mothers. Illegal dangerous abortions are going to be performed regardless. So make them legal. And to these women who think an abortion campaign, or women's lib for that matter, is reformist, I quote "in fighting for our liberation we will not ask what is revolutionary or reformist, only what is good for women" some of us are revolutionaries, some of us are manhunting crazies, but we are all working toward one thing, the liberation of women, and most of us will recognise that this will only happen in a socialist society.
We all feel very strongly about conscription and freedom of the individual, some go to great lengths to martyr themselves on the issue of the draft. I don't feel very strongly anymore about the ego scenes of the mike jones's around me. I do feel strongly about my freedom and my sisters' freedom. Women are conscripted every day into their personalised slave kitchens, can you, with your mind filled with the moratorium, spare a thought for their freedom, identity, minds and emotions, they're women, and your stomach is full. It suits you to keep women in the kitchens, and underpaid menial jobs, and with the children. You, by your silence, apathy and laughter sanction the legislators, the pig parliamentarians, the same men who sanction the war in Vietnam. You won't make an issue of abortion, equal pay, and child minding centres, because they're women's matters, and under your veneer you are brothers to the pig politicians. And I say to all you highminded intellectual women who say you're liberated with such force and conviction, I say you make me sick. So women's lib doesn't concern you. Ask your companion what he would prefer—to talk to you or fuck you? (and if you say you'd prefer to be fucked, you've absorbed your conditioning well). And the women in the suburbs are no concern of yours? Your mother is no concern of yours? so long as you think you're liberated, all's well. You and your sisters and the silent suburban women are all part of a capitalist PATRIARCHAL society which you cannot ignore.
And don't start to trust the sympathetic men who want a socialist society. Where will the women be after the revolution? Go, ask them, the men on the left stink—they stink from their motherfucking socks to their long hair, from their jock straps to their mao and moratorium badges. The ones who pretend to espouse our aims are far worse than those who at least wear their true colors on their sleeves. And to my brothers on the drug scene. Grass is good. Oh yes, but instead of becoming happy and peaceful and oh so motherfucking loving all I can see is you sitting there, asserting, even grooving on your maleness, dominating every joint every puff. Chickies aren't very good at rapping, aren't clever or subtle enough. I mean, it's a male scene, isn't it, you fat arrogant farts.
Okay, I've stopped trying to love and understand my oppressors.
I know who my enemy is.
I will tell you what I feel, as an individual, as a woman.
I feel that there can be no love between men and women.
Maybe after the revolution people will be able to love each other regardless of skin color, ethnic origin, occupation or type of genitals. But if that happens it will only happen if we make it happen.
Starting right now.
I feel hatred.
I feel anger.
Without indulging in an equality or marxist argument I say all power to women because that's what I feel.
ALL POWER.
And I say to every woman that every time you're put down or fucked over, every time they kick you cunningly in the teeth, go stand on the street corner and tell every man that walks by, every one of them a male chauvinist by virtue of HIS birthright, tell them all to go suck their own cocks. And when they laugh, tell them that they're getting bloody defensive, and that you know what size weapon to buy to kill the bodies that you've unfortunately laid under often enough.
ALL POWER TO WOMEN.

"Kate Jennings is a feminist. She believes in what Jane Austen recommended at fifteen: 'Run mad as often as you chuse; but do not faint.'" This "biography" appears on the jacket of Jennings' book of poems (from which "Moratorium" is reprinted)—*Come to Me My Melancholy Baby*, published in 1975 by Outback Press, Fitzroy (Victoria), in her native Australia.

Suellen Snyder. *Puerto Rican Day Parade,* New York City, 1975.

Suellen Snyder began photographing in 1972, studied with Larry Fink and Lisette Model, and has published photos in *Ms. Magazine, Majority Report, Fiction* and *The Columbian*.

Su Friedrich. *Twins and Janet,* Abeokuta, Nigeria, 1976.

Su Friedrich is a former member of the Women's Graphics Collective (Chicago) who now lives in New York and devotes her camera, pen and soul to a feminist future.

Who Are We? What Do We Want? What Do We Do? *

Accion para la Liberacion de la Mujer Peruana

We are a group of women who have organized to study, work and fight for our liberation, and especially to work with and for our sisters who suffer a double oppression: in being women and in belonging to a social sector which has been historically dominated and exploited.

The struggle of women is integrally bound to the struggle of working-class women.
No! to Mother's Day.
Yes! to Peruvian Woman's Day.
Less homage, more rights.

Why are we named Action for the Liberation of Peruvian Women?

Because we want to carry out our work without euphemisms or timidity—in short, without masks or half-measures. It is correct to call actions which are destined to radically change our condition by their rightful name: liberation.

Ours is simultaneously a study-group and an action-group. We are by no means a political party. We do not aspire to be an institution with traditional hierarchic structure. We reject verticalism, dogmatism and leadership positions. Ideologically, we align ourselves within free Humanist Socialism and adopt the best of its tenets conducive to female emancipation.

Without national liberation, there can be no women's liberation. Fight!
Only reactionary men are our enemies!
Sisters, Unite with us!
Liberation is action!

Because we cannot separate our specific problems from our socio-economic context, all our work strategies are adapted to the actual conditions of our country. We do not copy foreign movements because we are aware of living in a Third-World Society where imperialism is our most powerful enemy. Therefore we express solidarity with other liberation struggles on this continent, as well as with other women and men fighting for national liberation in their respective countries.

To analyze the historic and social origins of our condition is to revolutionize our understanding of the world!

We believe our liberation is inseparable from that of other oppressed groups—workers and peasants. The liberation of our brothers will never be realized while their women—workers and peasants too—are second-class citizens, and while prostitution is seen as a "necessary and insuperable evil."

Consequently we do not believe in individual liberation. The fact that some of our sisters are being promoted to important public positions or are gaining access to professional and technical careers in increasingly greater numbers has nothing to do with liberation. We believe that only structural change will produce real "women's liberation."

So our position, our actions, are aimed at contributing to the process of transformation taking place in our country, at helping it strengthen and advance without obstacles. We support this Revolution because it is anti-imperialist and anti-oligarchic, and because it makes possible our own liberation.

What do we call Cultural Revolution?

The process by which the old system is entirely questioned and revised: its values, behavior, habits, customs, institutions and forms of communication. A Cultural Revolution must reject all individualism, engendering a collective way of life harmonious with group ideals, while resistant to group egoism. A Cultural Revolution must combat stereotypical attitudes like "maleism" (*machismo*) and "femaleism" (*hembrismo*) —brute maleness and coy femaleness. A Cultural Revolution must change patriarchal institutions like bourgeois marriage and the nuclear family—two characteristic expressions of capitalism and the division of labor. Finally, a Cultural Revolution's ultimate goal must be to *change life*, to culminate in a free and humane socialism.

Wanting to shape your own destiny is wanting to transform injustice.
Wanting to transform injustice is being political.

What do we want to be liberated from?

From the social, economic, political, cultural and moral conditions imposed by a patriarchal capitalist society which assigns us secondary roles, condemning us to live as marginal beings passively supporting and "servicing" men.

From reformist paternalism which perpetually treats us as legal minors, because it reduces

everything to the creation or amplification of protectionary laws that are pretexts to mask our real situation of dependence on men and second-class citizenship.

From all kinds of ideological pressure, expressed in the terror most of us feel about joining feminist organizations, under the assumption that if we do so, we must be "against men." From the fear of being ridiculed or insulted as "tomboys," "whores," or "dykes."

Statistics affirm that few women are workers.
Out of the home and onto the production lines!
Working women also carry the burden of the home!
Communal eating-places, day-care centers and laundries—to create new jobs and lessen the load of unpaid workers in the home.
Being a mother and being fulfilled shouldn't be a contradiction.
We want family planning in hospitals, accessible to everyone.

Against whom must we struggle?

Against the Patriarchal-Capitalist System which determines an unjust society, fostering exploitation, abuse, discrimination, hunger, wars and massacres; a system which transforms woman into a beast of burden (if she is proletarian), or into a luxury sex-object (if she is bourgeois). Capitalism has also reviled love, reducing male-female relationships to economic factors or to mere social appearances. It is a system in which children are the responsibility of individual couples and, in actual practice, of the women alone.

Against all sexist ideology which gains by reinforcing our situation as "different" and which is expressed in the cult of "femininity"—sweetness, weakness, virginity and motherhood as woman's only aim and destiny.

And finally, against all threats to the liberation front whose ultimate goal is the *Monolithic Unity of Revolutionary Women*, and of those men who integrally support the cause of our liberation.

*Excerpts (slightly rearranged) from the booklet of this name distributed by "Accion para la Liberacion de la Mujer Peruana," April 15, 1975, Lima, Peru. This text was taken from the first half of the booklet; the second half deals with a specific program for practical revolutionary work. The following are listed as the group's coordinators and "honorary members": Cristina Portocarrero Rey, Ana María Portugal, Amor Arguedas, Dorelly Castañeda, Beatriz Ramos, Lucía Parra, Margot Loayza, Edith Alva, Carmela Bravo, Dora Ponce, Flor Herrera, Leo Arteaga, Diana Arteaga, Dora Guerrero, Bertha Vargas, Inés Pratt, Adela Montesinos, Estela Luna López.

* *

On Woman's Refusal to Celebrate Male Creativity*

Rivolta Femminile

Rivolta Femminile is an Italian group of radical feminists founded in Rome in July 1970, now associated with other feminist groups in Milan, Turin, Genoa and Florence. They have consistently resisted hierarchal structures and male-dominated institutions and their development of feminist theory has been detailed in publications such as Carla Lonzi's Sputiamo su Hegel *(1970) and* La Donna clitoridea e la donna vaginale *(1971), the collective's* Sessualita femminile e aborto *(1971) and Carla Accardi's* Superiore e inferiore *(1972). The latter records the author's dismissal from her job after discussing the Rivolta Femminile manifesto with her female high school students. All publications are available from Rivolta Femminile, Via del Babuino 16, Rome, Italy.*

We in Rivolta Femminile refuse to pay tribute to male creativity because we are aware that in the patriarchal world—that is, in a world made by men and for men—even the liberating force of creativity is the prerogative of men. Woman—in so many ways a subsidiary being—is denied every role which could effect a recognition of these inequities. For her, there is no prospect of liberation.

The creativity of men speaks to the creativity of other men while woman, as client and spectator of that dialogue, is assigned a status which excludes competition. Woman is locked into a role which, *a priori,* assures the male artist an audience. While *creating* art is seen to have a liberating function, art as an institution insists that woman be the neutral witness to the work of others. Man's energy, even in art, is spent by competing with other men. Only the contemplation of art invites woman's involvement.

This is the nature of patriarchal creativity: to depend upon aggressive competition with male rivals and on the passive appreciation of women. Man, the artist, feels abandoned by woman as soon as she abandons her archetypal spectator's role; their mutual solidarity rests solely on

the conviction that, as a spectator gratified by creativity, woman reaches the highest possible point in the evolution of her species.

But, on the contrary, woman is discovering that the patriarchal world *needs* her—that man's self-liberating efforts absolutely depend on her—and that *woman's* liberation can only be realized independent of patriarchal previsions and the dynamics by which men liberate themselves. The artist depends upon woman to glorify his work and she, until she begins her own liberation, is happy to oblige. The work of art cannot afford to lose the security inherent in her exclusively receptive role.

Once aware of her position in relation to male creativity, woman is left with two possibilities: the first—until now, the only available option—of distinguishing herself within the creative hierarchy historically defined by men (which alienates her from other women while men recognize her only indulgently); or—the feminist alternative—of autonomously recovering her own creativity, nourished by her awareness of past oppression.

To celebrate male creativity is ultimately to submit to the historic sovereignty of men, to that patriarchal strategy which deliberately subjugates us. But let woman remove herself, and the struggle for male supremacy becomes not man lording it over woman, but merely a struggle between individual men.

By refusing to celebrate male creativity, we are not judging creativity, nor are we contesting it. Rather, with our absence, we are refusing to accept it as defined; we are challenging the concept of art as something which men graciously hand down to us. By ceasing to believe in a refracted liberation, we are unleashing creative energy from patriarchal bonds.

With her absence, woman performs a dramatic act of awareness, creative because it *is* liberating.

*Text written by Rivolta Femminile, March 1971; free translation by Arlene Ladden from Carla Lonzi, *Sputiamo su Hegel: La Donna clitoridea e la donna vaginale e altri scritti*, Scritti di Rivolta Femminile, 1,2,3, Milan, 1974.

* *

Assata Shakur (Joanne Chesimard) has been associated with the Black Panther Party and other political groups, including the Black Liberation Army, which she has said "is not an organization. It is a concept. A people's movement, an idea" emerging from conditions in the Black community. She is currently a political prisoner being held in New Jersey, ostensibly on charges of bank robbery.

WHAT IS LEFT?

Assata Shakur

WHAT IS LEFT?

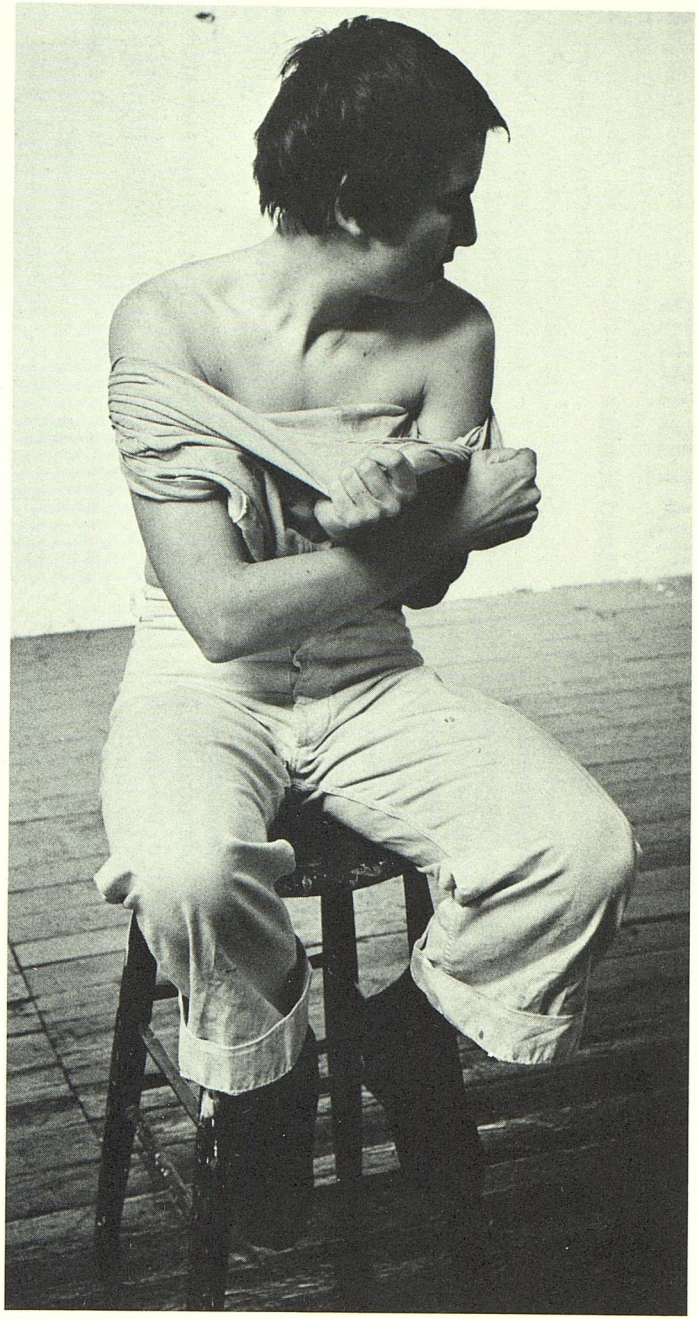
AFTER THE BARS AND THE GATES AND THE
DEGRADATION
WHAT IS LEFT?
AFTER THE LOCK INS AND THE LOCK OUTS AND THE
LOCK UPS
WHAT IS LEFT?
I MEAN, AFTER THE CHAINS THAT GET ENTANGLED
IN THE GREY OF ONE'S MATTER
AFTER THE BARS THAT GET STUCK IN THE HEARTS
OF MEN AND WOMEN
WHAT IS LEFT?
AFTER THE TEARS AND DISAPPOINTMENTS
AFTER THE LONELY ISOLATION
AFTER THE CUT WRIST AND THE HEAVY NOOSE
WHAT IS LEFT?
I MEAN, LIKE, AFTER THE COMMISSARY KISSES
AND THE GET-YOUR-SHIT-OFF-BLUES
AFTER THE HUSTLER HAS BEEN HUSTLED
WHAT IS LEFT?
AFTER THE SAD FUTILE MANEUVERS
AFTER THE SHRILL AND BARREN LAUGHTER
AFTER THE CONTRABAND EMOTIONS
WHAT IS LEFT?
AFTER THE MURDERBURGERS AND THE GOON SQUADS
AND THE TEAR GAS
AFTER THE BULLS AND THE BULLPENS AND THE
BULLSHIT
WHAT IS LEFT?
I MEAN LIKE, AFTER YOU KNOW THAT GOD CAN'T BE
TRUSTED
AFTER YOU KNOW THAT THE SHRINK IS A PUSHER
THAT THE WORD IS A WHIP, AND THE BADGE IS
A BULLET
WHAT IS LEFT?
AFTER YOU KNOW THAT THE DEAD ARE STILL
WALKING
AFTER YOU REALIZE THAT SILENCE IS TALKING
THAT OUTSIDE AND INSIDE ARE JUST AN ILLUSION
WHAT IS LEFT?
I MEAN, LIKE, WHERE IS THE SUN?
WHERE ARE HER ARMS AND WHERE ARE HER KISSES?
THERE ARE LIP PRINTS ON MY PILLOW
I AM SEARCHING
WHAT IS LEFT?
I MEAN, LIKE, NOTHING IS STANDSTILL AND
NOTHING IS ABSTRACT
THE WING OF A BUTTERFLY CAN'T TAKE FLIGHT
THE FOOT ON MY NECK IS A PART OF A BODY
THE SONG THAT I SING IS A PART OF AN ECHO
WHAT IS LEFT?
I MEAN, LIKE, LOVE IS SPECIFIC
IS MY MIND A MACHINE GUN?
IS MY HEART A HACKSAW?
CAN I MAKE FREEDOM REAL? YEAH,
WHAT IS LEFT?
I AM AT THE TOP AND BOTTOM OF A LOWER-ARCHY
I AM IN LOVE WITH LOSERS AND LAUGHTER
I AM IN LOVE WITH FREEDOM AND CHILDREN
LOVE IS MY SWORD AND TRUTH IS MY COMPASS
WHAT IS LEFT?

Around Coming around-a performance

I WAS SIXTEEN
WAS I A CHILD?
I WAS SIXTEEN
I CAN'T REMEMBER
I CAN'T REMEMBER
WAS I A CHILD?
I WAS SIXTEEN
MY FATHER AND I
WERE DRIVING HOME
AFTER VISITING A COLLEGE
AFTER DRIVING ALL DAY
WE STOPPED AT A MOTEL
THE WALLS WERE GREEN
THAT TERRIBLE LIGHT GREEN
USED IN MOTELS
THE DESK CLERK SMIRKED
AND I WAS EMBARRASSED
I DIDN'T KNOW WHY
I WAS SIXTEEN
WAS I A CHILD?
I CAN'T REMEMBER
THE DESK CLERK ASKED
DO YOU WANT SINGLE
OR DOUBLE BEDS SIR?
AND I SAID
TWO BEDS TWO BEDS
TWO SINGLE BEDS
WAS I A CHILD?
THE CLERK SMIRKED
MY FATHER SAID
IT DOESN'T MATTER
AND I SAID INSIDE
BUT IT DOES MATTER
IT DOES MATTER
I WAS SIXTEEN

I WAS A CHILD
AND WE WENT
TO THE ROOM
WITH THE TWO SINGLE BEDS
I WENT INTO THE BATHROOM
TO PUT ON MY NIGHTGOWN
A SHORT NIGHTGOWN
WITH GREEN AND BLUE FLOWERS
I CAN'T REMEMBER
AND I GOT INTO BED
THE BED BY THE BATHROOM
AND SAT ON MY BED BEFORE
WAS I A CHILD?
AND HE WAS IN THE BATHROOM
A LONG TIME
HE CAME OUT
AND SAT
I CAN'T REMEMBER
ON MY BED
AND PUT HIS HAND
ON MY KNEE
AND I LAY THERE
AND DID NOT MOVE
HE TOUCHED MY BREAST
I CAN'T REMEMBER
STROKING MY BREASTS
ON TOP OF MY NIGHTGOWN
AND HE CAME DOWN
ON TOP OF ME
I WAS SIXTEEN
WAS I A CHILD?
I CAN'T REMEMBER
I CAN'T REMEMBER
HE LAY THERE
I DID NOT MOVE

THE BLANKET BETWEEN US
I WAS SIXTEEN
HE STROKED MY BREASTS
BREATHING IN MY FACE
AND ASKED ME
I CAN'T REMEMBER
IF I LIKED IT
AND I
AND I
AND I CAN'T REMEMBER
INSIDE I SAID NO
INSIDE I SAID NO
I CAN'T REMEMBER
AND HE STAYED THERE
ON TOP OF ME
MOVING AROUND
TOUCHING MY BREASTS
TOUCHING MY NECK
AND HE ASKED ME
IF I LIKED IT
AND I SAID NO
AND HE GOT UP
AND HE GOT OFF
AND THE WHOLE NIGHT
I STAYED AWAKE
WAITING
I CAN'T REMEMBER
AND THE NEXT MORNING
WE GOT UP
WE HAD BREAKFAST
AND WE DROVE
THE REST OF THE WAY
HOME



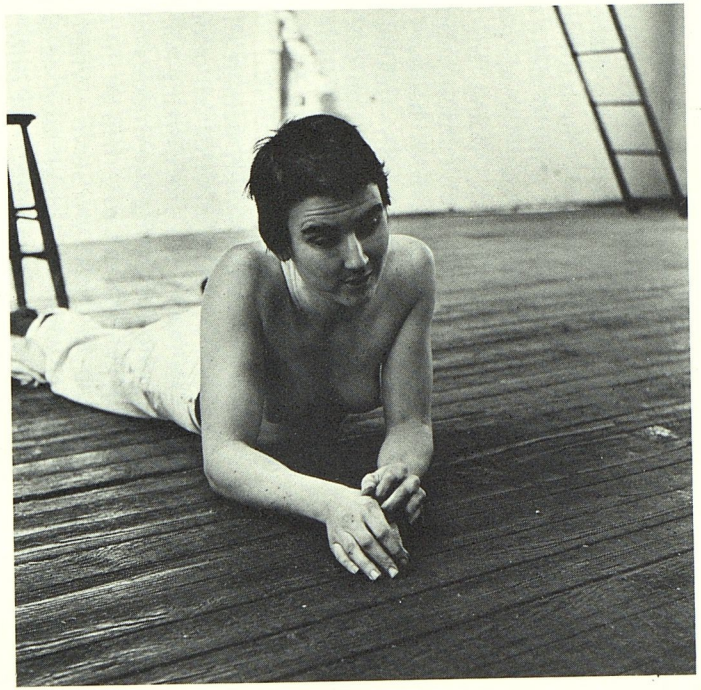
(Photo: Libby Turnock)

mine

take small knife out of pocket
open blade pause
hold knife in right hand
turn left forearm palm up
cut lightly/carefully 3 times
holding left arm still
put knife away closing
blade against right thigh
turn cut wrist over
catch blood in right hand
when hand almost full
pour blood from right hand
into left hand
apply pressure/release
pressure/release
with right fingers
upon left wrist
stopping flow of blood
eyes focus always on action
take two right fingers
and dip in blood
look up as if in the mind's
mirror and slowly paint lines
down right cheek
repeat and paint left cheek
repeat and draw a line
across forehead
repeat and place both fingers
on chin
drop hands and stare
at own reflection

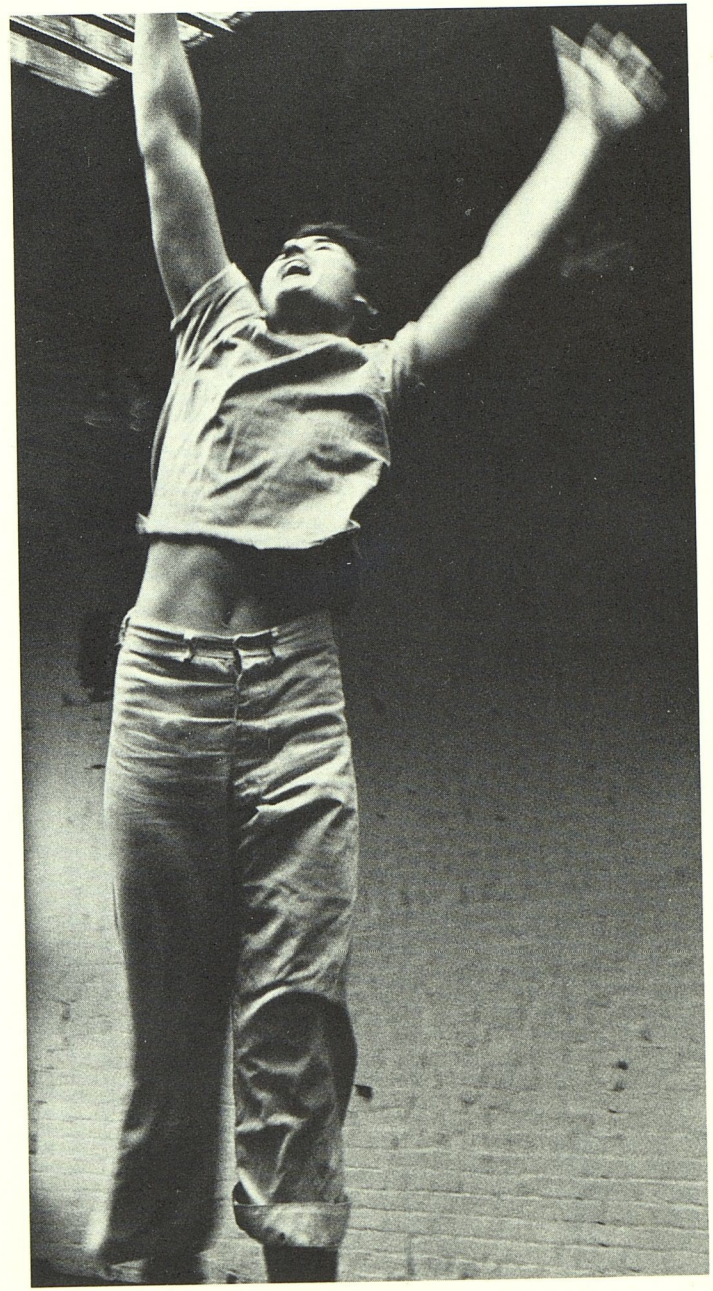
by Marty Pottenger

Marty Pottenger lives in New York City, is a carpenter, and performs improvisationally "with whoever's in the room, whatever's on hand, and what's inside all of us."



one for me. one for you. one for me. (dealing imaginary cards) one for you. one for me. one for you. one for me. let's see what you got? MONEY . . . ULCERS . . . and a PENIS. how 'bout that— i got LESBIAN . . . LOVE . . . and uh . . . A TERRIBLE FEAR i tell you what, i'll trade you some of my fear for some of your—no? so ok. we stick with what we got.

(photo: Libby Turnock)



(photo: Joan Snyder)

Wages For Housework: The Strategy for Women's Liberation

Pat Sweeney

Many "feminist" writers have contributed to the ideology of housework. Radical-feminists, while recognizing the identification of housework with our female nature, have proposed sharing this work with a man and leaving the home for outside work. Socialist-feminists, describing housework as precapitalist, have proclaimed that our goal should be toward "industrialization," which would liberate our time for more work—but in a factory, if not a collective kitchen. Liberal feminists have defined our problem as "lack of consciousness," describing women as dupes of Madison Avenue ad-men. Finally, there are those feminists who, much to capitalists' rejoicing, have glorified our forced labor in the home as the embodiment of the best human potentials: our capacity to nurture and care, our very capacity to love. One thing they all agree on is that women should not be paid for this work, because this presumably would institutionalize us in the home, and extend the control of the state to "the one area of freedom we have in our lives."

Contrary to these criticisms, the Wages for Housework Committee's perspective is based on the fact that housework is *already controlled and institutionalized* (Mother's Day is nothing less than the celebration of this institutionalization!) *precisely because this work is unwaged.* Society is organized to force us into this job, and the fact that we don't receive a wage for the work continuously undermines our power to refuse it.

That housework is unwaged means first of all that it appears not as *work*, but as part of our female nature. Thus, when we refuse part of this work—as, for example, lesbian women do in refusing to provide sexual services to men—we are branded as perverts, as if we were breaking some law of nature. We are divided into "good" and "bad" women depending on whether or not we do the housework and whether or not we do it for free. In this society to be a good woman—or just to be a woman—is to be a good servant at everyone's disposal 24 hours a day; it means accepting that this work should not be paid because it supposedly fulfills our nature, and thus contains its own reward.

Housework is not just washing dishes, scrubbing floors, or raising babies. What we do at home is *produce and reproduce workers*: every day we create and restore the capacity of others (and ourselves) to work, and to be exploited. It is ironic that as houseworkers we are not included in the nation's labor force, for without this work the workforce would not exist. The lack of a wage obscures the indispensability of our work to the functioning of this society. Housework makes every other work possible. No car could be produced, no coal could be dug, no office could be run, if there were not women at home servicing and reproducing those who make the cars, those who dig the coal, those who run the offices. *This is the sexual division of labor*: workers make cars, and women make the workers who make the cars. And to make a worker is a much more time- and energy-consuming job than to make a car! Not only do we "reproduce" them physically—cooking their dinners, doing the shopping (shopping is *work*, not consumption as some "feminists" would have us believe). We also service workers emotionally—taking the brunt of their tiredness and frustration day after day. And we service workers sexually—the Saturday-night screw keeps them going for yet another week at the assembly line or desk.

It appears that we freely donate all this work to our husbands and children out of our love for them. In reality we are working for the same bosses, who are getting two workers for the price of one. Our lives are governed by the same work schedule as those we serve. When we cook dinner or when we "make love" is determined by the factory time-clock. Not only the quantity, but also the quality of workers we reproduce is controlled. If they don't need many workers, we are sterilized; if they need more workers we are denied access to contraceptives and are forced to resort to backstreet butchers (the right to life is never claimed for women). Likewise, if we are on welfare or we tend to produce "troublemakers," we are again sterilized.

In every case, our sexuality is continuously under control to make sure that we use it productively. Lesbianism and teenage sex are illegal, and rape in the family (or the battered wife) is not a crime since readily available sexual service is part of our job. It is the lack of

money of our own that creates the battered wife or the closet lesbian and forces so many of us to remain in unwanted family situations. With money in our hands, we would have the power to walk out whenever we wanted. Men would certainly think twice before raising their hands to us if they knew that we could leave any minute, without the prospect of starving.

Our wageless condition in the home is the material basis of our dependence on men. This weakness in the community, as wageless housework ers, is ultimately the weakness of the entire class. Capitalism takes away from us in the community (through inflation—price hikes, rent increases, fare increases, etc.) what we have gained through our power in the factory. Women pay a double price for this defeat. Higher prices mean an intensification of our work, since we are expected to absorb the cost of inflation with extra work.

The struggle for wages for housework is a struggle for social power—for women first, but ultimately for the entire working class. In fact, by demanding wages for the work we already do, instead of demanding more work, we are posing the question of *the immediate reappropriation of the wealth we have produced.* Exploitation is the enforcement of unpaid labor, the only source of capitalist profits. Thus, to attack our wagelessness is to attack capitalism at its roots, for capital is precisely the accumulated labor that has been robbed from workers generation after generation.

In contrast, the strategy that has been offered to us by "feminists" and the left—the strategy to obtain more work—would only mean further enslavement to the present system. It is capital that poses work as the only natural destiny in our lives, not the working class, whose struggles are always directed toward gaining more money and less work. To pose the "right to work" as our road to liberation ignores that we are already working, and that housework does not wither away when we go out for a paid job. Our work at home simply intensifies: we do it at night when everybody is already asleep, or in the morning before everyone awakes, or on weekends. Our wages remain low—and they quickly disappear in paying for day-care centers, lunches, carfare, etc. Furthermore, with two jobs we have even less time to organize with other women. Unions have long accused women of being backward. But when did unions consider that we are not free to attend meetings after our second job is over because we must hurry to report back to our first one—picking up the kids at the day-care center or babysitter's, getting to the supermarket before it closes, fixing dinner for the men who expect it to be ready when *they* come home from work?

Another illusion is that to go "out to work" is to break our isolation and gain the possibility of a social life. Very often the isolation of a typing pool or a secretarial office matches our isolation in the home. We certainly aspire to a social life better than the one provided by an assembly line. But going out of the home is not much of a relief if we don't have any money in our hands, or if we go out just for more work.

We also reject the idea that sharing our exploitation in the home with a man can be a strategy for liberation. "Sharing the housework" is not an invention of the Women's Movement. Women have continuously tried to get men to share this work. Despite some victories, we have discovered that this battle also has many limitations. First, the man is not home most of the time. If he brings in the money, and we are economically dependent on him, we don't have the power to force him to do housework. In fact it is often more work for us to get the man to share the work than do it ourselves. Most importantly, this strategy confines us to an individual struggle which does not give us the power (or the protection) of a mass struggle. *And it assumes that every woman has (or wants) a man with whom to share the work.*

As for a possible rationalization of housework, we must immediately say that we are not interested in making our work more efficient or more productive for capital. We are interested in reducing our work, and ultimately refusing it altogether. But as long as we work in the home for nothing, no one really cares how long or how hard we work. For capital only introduces advanced technology to cut its costs of production after wage gains by the working class. Only if we make our work cost (i.e., only if we make it uneconomical) will capital "discover" the technology to reduce it. At present, we often have to go out for a second shift of work to afford the dishwasher that should cut down our housework!

Who will pay for this work?

We demand wages for housework from the government for two major reasons. First, every sector of the economy benefits from our work—we don't work for one boss, we work for all the bosses. Consequently we demand the money from the state. Second, the government already is *our* boss. In every country the government is responsible for guaranteeing an adequate labor force to industry. This means that the government directly regulates and controls our work through the family, world population control, immigration laws, and finally by entering the community whenever we refuse to perform our work.

The question "who will pay?" is usually posed so as to subvert the cause. It is assumed that the government is broke, and that our demand will only divide the working class by forcing the government to tax other workers to pay us a wage. In reality, by getting more power for ourselves, we will be giving more power not only to men (power not over us but with respect to their bosses) but to every sector (the young, the elderly, and the wageless in general). We will

begin to break the power relations which so far have kept us divided. Through a united working class we can force the government to tax the corporations, not other workers.

A posture of defeat also ignores the struggles women have made against housework and what we have been able to win in relation to this work. It is no accident that after the massive struggles welfare mothers waged in the 1960s for more money from the government—the first money we have won for housework—the number of female-headed families has dramatically increased (doubling every decade) along with the number of divorces, particularly among women with children, and the number of young women who have been able to set up independent households. This is not to glorify welfare. Welfare does not even begin to pay for all our work—we need much more and we need it for all of us. But it is to recognize how even a little money has begun to break down some of the most powerful mechanisms of discipline which traditionally have kept us in line.

Pat Sweeney is an active member of the Wages For Housework Committee (288-B 8th Street, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215) and one of the founders of the Nassau County Womens Liberation Center.

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This bibliography is in no way comprehensive, nor does it include the many books and publications already well known to feminists. Instead, we have tried to present lesser-known articles and pamphlets along with works that we feel are essential to an understanding of the relationship of feminism, art and politics.

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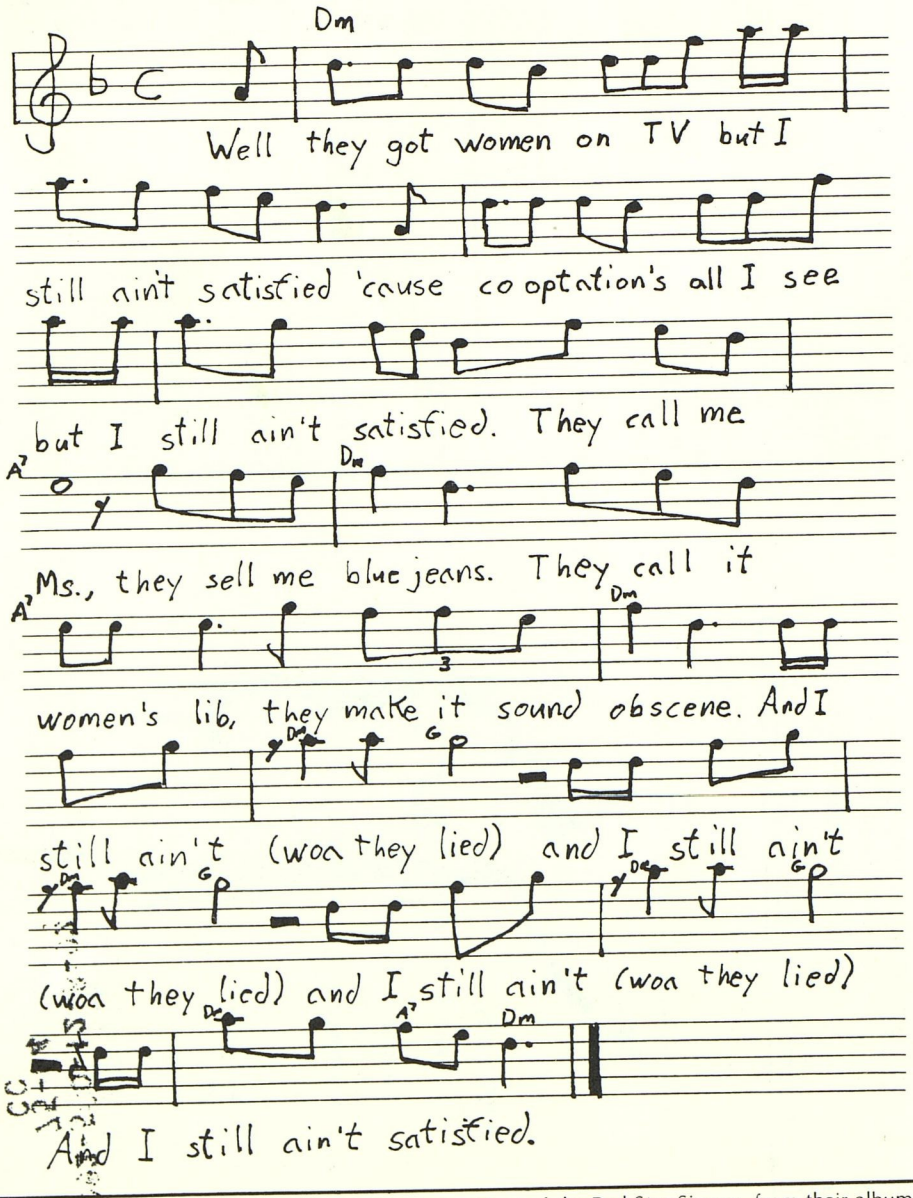

And I still ain't
Woa they lied
And I still ain't
Woa they lied
And I still ain't
Woa they lied
And I still ain't satisfied

Well they got women prison guards
but I still ain't satisfied
With so many still behind bars
I still ain't satisfied
I don't plead guilt, I don't want no bum deal
I ain't askin' for crumbs, I want the whole meal.

They liberalized abortion
but I still ain't satisfied
'Cause it still costs a fortune,
and I still ain't satisfied.
I'm singin' about control of my own womb,
And no reform is gonna change my tune.

They give out pennies here and there
but I still ain't satisfied
To set up centers for child care
and I still ain't satisfied.
And while we work at slave wages
They brainwash our kids at tender ages.

I got some pride, and I won't be lied to.
I did decide that half way won't do.

Still Ain't Satisfied: Words and music by Bonnie Lockhart of the Red Star Singers, from their album called "The Force of Life", distributed by Paredon Records. Bonnie Lockhart is now with the Berkeley Women's Collective.

WE ARE SOLICITING MATERIAL FOR THE NEXT THREE ISSUES OF HERESIES

Patterns of Communication and Space Among Women: architectural, social and sexual networks; interactions (past and present) between women—letters, diaries, conversations, groups; the politics of fashion and the body; use and experience of space, narrative, and art; women as a politically demonstrative force; questioning the public/private dichotomy; science fiction, humor, photography, film. . . .
Deadline: mid-February.

Lesbian Art and Artists: the political implications of lesbian art forms; the image of lesbians in art; collectivity—getting rid of the male ego; the relationship between eroticism and the intellect; the lesbian as monster; androgyny; passionate friendships; research, documentation and analysis of past lesbian artists and their work; dialogue between contemporary lesbian visual and literary artists; class analysis of lesbian models; lesbian art, form and content; photography; creative writing. . . .
Deadline: mid-April.

Women's Traditional Arts and Artmaking: decoration, pattern, ritual, repetition, opulence, self-ornamentation; arts of non-Western women; breaking down barriers between the fine and the decorative arts; the effect of industrialization on women's work and work processes; the exclusion of women's traditional arts from the mainstream of art history. . . .
Deadline: mid-October.

Guidelines for Prospective Contributors:
The HERESIES collective wishes to solicit material for future issues. Themes and deadlines for these issues will be announced well in advance. Manuscripts (1,000-5,000 words) should be typewritten, double spaced on 8½ x 11" paper, and submitted in duplicate. We welcome for consideration either outlines or descriptions of articles, or finished manuscripts with bibliographic footnotes (if necessary) at the end of the paper in numerical order. Writers should feel free to inquire about the possibilities of an article. If you are submitting visual material, please send a photograph, xerox, or description (please do not send the original). All manuscripts and visual material must be accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope. HERESIES will pay a fee of $5-$50, as our budget allows, for published material, and it is our hope to offer higher fees in the future. There will be no commissioned articles and we cannot guarantee acceptance of submitted material. We will not include reviews or monographs on contemporary women.

HERESIES 1 FEMINISM, ART AND POLITICS JANUARY 1977