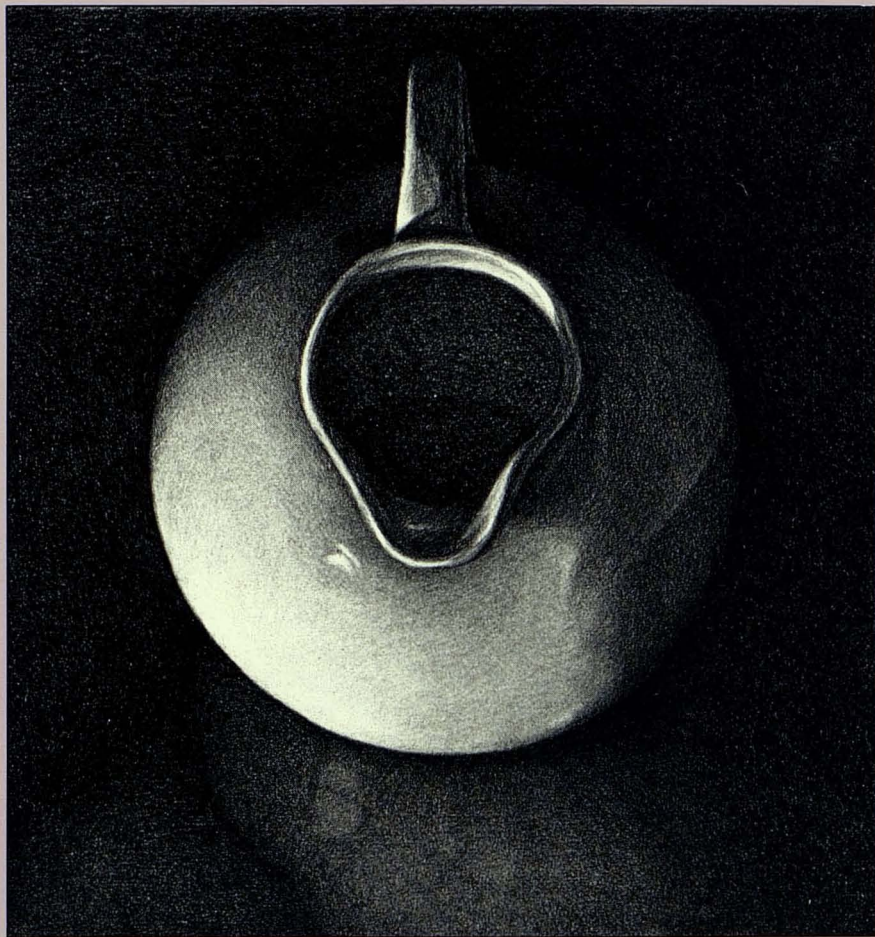


May
sinister wisdom 37



**With an emphasis on
Lesbian Theory**



Sinister Wisdom 37 Spring 1989

Editor and publisher: Elana Dykewomon

Editorial readers and advisors: Barbara Ruth, DeeAnne Davis, Betty Dudley, Caryatis Cardea, Cath Thompson, Dolphin Zelda Waletzky, Gloria Anzaldúa, Jasmine Marah, Joan Drury, Lisa Carlin, Naja Sorella, Susan Jill Kahn, Valerie Stoehr, Winn Gilmore

Contributing editors: Gloria Anzaldúa, Irena Klepfisz, Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz

Typists and proofreaders: Cath Thompson, Cindy Cooper, Susan Goldberg, SJ Kahn, Valerie Stoehr

Office help, correspondence, ads and accounting: Joan Drury, Nina Wouk, Barbara Dinnerstein, Toni Langfield

Thanks to Bobby Rothschild and Rebecca Kutlin of Tamed Technology

Distribution and mailing: Barb Voss, Caryatis Cardea, Cath Thompson, Debbie Fier, Dolphin Zelda Waletzky, Elizabeth Fides, Jasmine Marah, Kim Swineheart, Leslie Baker, Leslie Levy, Lisa Carlin, Susan Jill Kahn, Toni Langfield, Valerie Stoehr

Reader for the Womyn's Braille Press: Judy Freespirit

Cover design: Louise Rafkin

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Former editors and publishers: Harriet Ellenberger (aka Desmoines)
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Michelle Cliff and Adrienne Rich (1981-83)
Michael Uccella (1983-84)
Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz (1983-87)

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A Journal for the Lesbian Imagination in the Arts and Politics

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Welcome to *Sinister Wisdom* #37. This is an "open theme" issue with an emphasis on theory and politics. We're running four papers from the National Women's Studies Conference panel on Lesbian Theory, and two papers by/about lesbians in prison. Most of the other prose and poetry deal with issues of social organization and how politics impact our personal lives.

The special Italian-American issue, which was to be #38, has been postponed due to a change in editors (Rose Romano resigned as guest editor in December). The issue has been moved to #41, and the new guest editors are Janet Capone and Denise Leto. The new deadline for submission will be February 15, 1990. All womyn of Italian descent are welcome to submit to this issue. Lesbians who sent in material for this issue before December should contact *Sinister Wisdom*. We will hold all submissions to the Italian-American issue sent after December until next year's deadline unless you request your manuscripts back.

#38, our next issue, will also be an "open theme" issue with an emphasis on personal writing — stories about relationships, childhood, love. Of course the boundaries between the personal and political are not always sharp. We hope you'll argue/discuss with us about some of the issues and overlaps.



I've been working on *Sinister Wisdom* now for two years. After the last issue, #36 On Surviving Psychiatric Assault & Creating Emotional Well Being in our Communities came out, I looked at the four issues on my bookshelf and felt a sense of wonder. This magazine actually got made, the work I and all the lesbians who've been part of *Sinister Wisdom* have done has a physical manifestation — the magazine goes out in the world and touches other womyn. Sometimes it makes them angry, often womyn write to say the work has given their thoughts voice or direction.

Sometimes womyn get mad at me — for rejecting their work, for making editorial suggestions which show my insensitivity or unawareness on issues ranging from incest to racial identity. I try to listen and respond, I remember often what Melanie said to me when she passed *Sinister Wisdom* on: "I learned I could make

mistakes and live." Many dykes share this creative, mistake-making, praise-worthy venture and our editorial group process gets stronger all the time.

I feel enormously privileged (though not always lucky) to have this job — I get a tremendous amount of positive feedback, I get to work with a varied, talented and challenging group, I am in intimate conversations with lesbians internationally, and even the very hard discussions teach me, keep me actively engaged with lesbian passion. The passion to do it right, to make our work and our lives purposeful, ethical, healing and loving.

I experience myself, and *Sinister Wisdom*, deeply engaged in lesbian community. But what I hear from other lesbians is that this sense of being part of/participant in/benefitted by community is not a very strong common experience. We may feel it in moments — for instance, those of us who were fortunate to go the Third International Feminist Bookfair in Montreal last summer gathered with lesbians from all over the world to talk about strategy and theory and went away with a tremendous high. But coming into those meetings (and after being home for awhile), many of those dykes said, "I feel alone in what I think and am doing in ... Europe, South America, Canada, the U.S. ... I don't know exactly where or what my community is."

I hear statements all the time that start with: "lesbians hurt each other too..." leading up to: there is no lesbian community, we're too different, we aren't there in the crunch, no matter how good our intentions may be, we can't provide for each other's needs.

These are very complex questions of identity that many lesbians are addressing in their work (some in this issue). Yet, simply, I believe that each of us is lesbian community herself. That it starts inside us. I know that community must have some external shape, some points of reference. But I think when any one of us says "the lesbian community has let me down" we are drawing a picture of our expectation — and that expectation is the sign of our membership, of our partnership in being. The fact is, lesbians don't come from another planet, however much we wish we did. We live here, in the 20th century, most of us terribly damaged by more than one form of oppression. Simply as members of the class of women, we have few resources, little access to ownership of the means of production, are rarely in control of the ends to

which our labor is put. Many of us have spent long hours working; trying to understand what it means to be a lesbian, a woman concerned with living and acting in concert with a desire to see life flourish. We have built whatever we could. And we expect something back for that. Don't we? We deserve it, certainly. The bitterness of not getting it from the womyn in whom we place our hearts, our best effort, our trust, is often hard to bear.

Each of us has the right, as a lesbian, to start from her own need. Our needs can be turned around from complaint to direction. For example, we have the right to say: I have housing needs that aren't being met. Instead of, "my lesbian landlady ripped me off, so take your so-called community and shove it," we could try something different. We could say: I need safe, affordable, secure housing with lesbian neighbors and privacy, where I can work to maximize the use of my resources. I need other lesbians in order to make this into a reality. That I or my friends haven't been able to do this so far doesn't mean we can't. We can always find new ways to imagine it, work on it, create what we need.

We can, can't we?



Speaking of creating what we need: Here's the fifth California issue of *Sinister Wisdom* in your hands. It takes work and money to make this. Our financial situation is always precarious — we have just enough to pay for printing costs when each issue goes to press. We have volunteer typists, proofreads, mailing crews, technical advisors, letter writers. App. 45% of our income comes from subscriptions, 45% from bookstore sales, 10% from back issues, advertising and donations. This comes to an annual total of \$22,000-\$26,000. I get paid \$300 a month (and work four nights a week typesetting to pay my rent). The truth is, we're still doing it on a shoestring and we just squeak by. Help.

What we really need is to double (triple, quadruple) our subscription list. It's critical to our survival that you renew; that you let us know changes of address; that you encourage your friends to subscribe. And of course, we're always glad to get donations.

We need your financial support because we want to keep being here with you, providing a place where we can find new ways to experience ourselves as lesbian community.

Notes on the Themes

#38. Open. We have wonderful fiction and poetry lined up for this issue. Don't miss it!

#39. An issue on Physical Disability. We want to include all womyn whose lives are seriously disrupted by long-term conditions. This includes, but is not limited to, impairments to a womon's mobility, communication, vision, hearing, as well as to the immunological, cardiovascular and nervous systems. Many womyn are isolated in their disabilities. We encourage works from womyn who have conditions not usually recognized, such as cancer and other life-threatening illnesses, learning disabilities and other hidden disabilities. (Deadline: June 15, 1989)

#40. On Friendship. "Just" friends? "Best" friends? "Old" friends? "Life-long" friends? How *do* we befriend each other? What do we expect from our friendships? What do we put into them? How do we understand the complex differences (and similarities) between friend and lover? What about betrayals? Is friendship part of political movement? Are political movements possible without friendship? What's the difference between a "clique" and a "network?" What kind of friendships do we make across race, class, cultural, ability, size, age differences? How do we sustain and nurture our friendships through time? We could ask these questions for pages — we hope you have some answers. (Deadline: October 15, 1989)

#41. The Italian-American Issue. Guest editors: Janet Capone and Denise Leto. (Deadline: February 15, 1990)

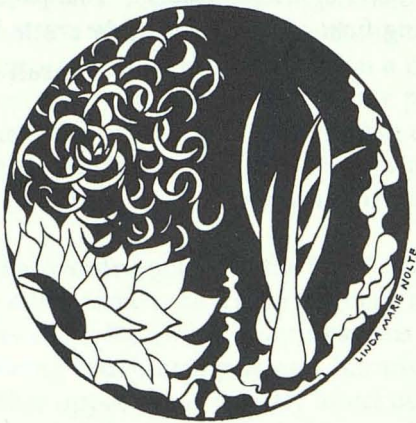
Correction

In issue #36, the photographs on p. 31 and 32 were taken by Kiku Hawkes, originally published in the book *Still Sane* by Persimmon Blackbridge and Sheila Gilhooly. We apologize for omitting Kiku Hawkes' credit, and for the mis-spelling of Sheila Gilhooly's name in the Review of *Still Sane* (p. 125) and on the Contents page.

On Singing Women's Praises

Yes, it's true —
I only know one song.

But that one song takes all the notes
And lasts forever.



Untitled by Linda Marie Nolte

The following papers (slightly revised) are four of six presented on the Lesbian Theory panel organized by Sarah Hoagland for the National Women's Studies Annual Conference, held in Minneapolis in June of 1988, which included Sarah and Jeffner Allen as well as these authors. Over 250 womyn filled the room. Their enthusiasm for a wider forum on lesbian theory encouraged us to present these papers in *Sinister Wisdom*.

"I assembled this panel because I think it very important that (some) lesbians focus on lesbian theorizing. To date most u.s. lesbians have focused on sexism, homophobia, and compulsory heterosexuality in analyzing lesbian existence. As a result, for the most part, u.s. lesbians have not focused on the creation of lesbian meaning. This loss is one of the devastating effects of heterosexuality. This panel explores lesbian theory: by working from a lesbian center, we create lesbian meaning."

—Sarah Lucia Hoagland

The Spread of Consumerism: Good Buy Community

Many years ago I lived in a Feminist Collective based upon, among other things, a shared value of resistance to Consumerism. Roughly, our analysis was that we live in a culture that promotes conspicuous consumption of goods, services, environment, and so forth. The attitude that everything can be bought or used is an example of a value (which I will call consumerism) which defines our relationship to the world. Consumer values do not allow for stable or long-lived relationships with either people or the environment. In our early analysis we hoped to replace those values with more humanistic ones. Since that time I have come to realize that "humanism" holds no promise for Lesbians, and have subsequently put it aside as I have other dead-ended ideologies.

In the past several years my focus has changed to building Lesbian connections, hence strong Lesbian Community. Even though I have devoted myself to creating connections with other Dykes, I find that the ability to describe those connections still escapes me. I sense that they are based upon a core of desire to connect on a Lesbian plane. I believe that our passion for each other is what fuels our connections. I know that our connections are not yet institutionalized. I believe that in making Lesbian connections we have the ability to create and transform ourselves and our world.

I also know that we struggle with the boys' values insinuating themselves into our interactions. There has been much education done by Lesbians about the effects of oppressions on our communities. Besides being cruel, arrogant and harmful, racism, anti-semitism and other oppressions directly affect our Lesbian communities by narrowing the scope of what is or who is acceptable. These oppressions are men's tools for enforcing sameness and anti-diversity.

Coming from a small, rural, white town in Pennsylvania, I thought that diversity was how many breeds of cows you owned. Coming out as a Lesbian, and now as a Separatist, I have had to work hard to sensitize myself to and rout out the boys' tools of division. This has helped me to perceive the world differently and form deeper, more substantial bonds with other Dykes. Struggling to be aware of how oppressions work, and what part I play in them, has made me stretch in a way that I hadn't felt since I first came out as a Lesbian.

Yet, through this process I have become increasingly aware of how I approach events and community. I know that my interactions often take on the tourist-y flavor of a consumer. Consumerism is a way of "be-ing" in the world, and it undermines our connections and sense of community. Consumer values are intertwined throughout industrial culture, and therefore probably have a pretty firm hold in many of our belief systems.

In writing this paper I am not so much concerned with what we buy, but with what male values are used to form our perception of ourselves as consumers of our communities rather than co-creators of our communities. It is my intent to blend my old analysis of consumer values with my current Dyke Separatist perspective in order to sensitize myself and other Dykes to the effects of consumer values on our Lesbian communities and Women-only space.

We live in a culture that is built, among other things, upon a system based upon consuming. In order to convince us that we have to buy, own, use, (consume), it is necessary to create a context in which conspicuous consumption looks normal. One way to develop that context is to create "needs" and then to objectify living things, processes and interactions into "products" to fill these "man-made needs." These are the gears that run a consumer society.

The society's members function in relationships of producers-consumers or buyer-seller to one another. The world, previously seen as an organic interconnected system, is now able to be "seen" as parts.¹ Those parts are able to be objectified in order to be bought and sold, used and discarded, acquired and hoarded or used as a means of trade to obtain other objects. As in other systems of reality, if one views the world in this way, it then spills

over to include how we view people, animals, the environment and our relationship to them.

What does it mean when we adopt a value that allows such mass-scale objectification? First of all, objects have no inherent meaning. We imbue objects with meaning. For instance, an automobile has different meanings related to which culture, class and economic group you belong. The owning of an automobile, besides providing transportation and the opportunity for repair bills, often serves to foster identity. We buy a particular car because it is symbolic of how we see ourselves, or how we want to be. For example, I once found a Dyke party when I wasn't quite sure of the location by driving up and down streets until I found the street with the "usual" Dyke vehicles common in my community: small foreign-made cars with a smattering of pick-up trucks.

Buying an object in order to foster identity becomes a never-ending cycle. The new pick-up truck itself does not the adventuresome Dyke make, so we are once again encouraged to enter the market place to start the cycle over. In other words, we buy an object to establish status and identity. Because objects have no intrinsic value, the status and identity do not become firmly established, so we have to continue to "consume" other objects to shore up our identity, and so the consumer cycle goes on ad infinitum.

This process works to help create a consumer atmosphere because it is an escalation-based model. It sets up the value that having new, improved, bigger, better and more is not only acceptable, it is expected of us. (For many sales jobs, employers require that you not only have good transportation, but that your car must "look" new, thus fostering the notion that employees must become believers and participants in the American dream.) This model creates the habit of escalation.

Pornography is an example of an escalation-based model that has increased dramatically over the last 20 years. This escalation occurs in terms of what is openly available in book stores. Pornography begins with showing naked females, moves to the objectification of body parts, then to the abusing and mutilating of women, and finally to the torture and murder of women and children for men's satisfaction. The escalation-based model increases the violence and cruelty inflicted.

What does it mean for Dykes when we carry this "habit of escalation" into our communities? The "habit of escalation" creates a context in which we willingly participate in or at least accept increasingly destructive behaviors without questioning them. I once asked a sadomasochistic Dyke if she kept reworking her fantasies in order to become aroused. She replied that, in fact, it was necessary for her to keep increasing the violence in her fantasies and practices in order to increase sensations (pain) for her and her partner. This objectifying of people and experiences soon leads to being jaded. Being jaded creates a sense of numbness and the more we objectify the more numbness spreads throughout our interactions. We soon need more and more stimulation in order to respond at all.

Numbness leads to a focus on newness so that we might find that extra stimulation. To focus on newness is to focus on packaging, not on content. Newness suggests that which exists for the first time. Since newness becomes more and more difficult to create, then things must be packaged to provide the illusion of newness. Marketers and advertisers do not want us comparing products in terms of how they are similar, but rather in terms of how their product is newer and different than the others. Newness is fetishized in this country. New cars, new detergents, new pop-psychologies and new religions are often far more similar to the old ones than we want to believe. Again, the value lies in the newness of the products.

The ramifications for Dyke culture are that in order to regain our attention, the boys will slap a "new, improved" label on or repackage their therapy, religion, politics and so forth. As Anna Lee points out in her paper "New Age Spirituality Is the Invention of the Heteropatriarchy,"² what many Lesbians are now espousing as their means to a new improved personal sense of empowerment is the same religion the boys were marketing to us before. We looked at the differences that they assured us were there, and ignored the now more obvious similarities between new age spirituality and heteropatriarchal religions.

Because the search for newness is based upon how things differ rather than how things are similar or connected to one another, the search for newness stems from and fosters alienation and disconnectedness. The search for newness is the search for those

things that allegedly stand out from, are apart from that which is. The ability to perceive how things, events, people and power are connected and relate to each other is at the very core of our political skills. When we participate in the focus on newness, we lose the ability to develop and use political skills because we are focused on the differences that are used as proof of newness. We are no longer able to focus on our connections with each other. Without recognizing our connections to each other, Lesbians are not able to disconnect from heteropatriarchy.

For Dyke communities the search for newness and the resulting alienation has meant that the commitment to analyze our lives, our behaviors and problems in political terms is no longer promoted or supported. In the seventies we had a commitment to analyzing our lives from a political perspective, and we joined Consciousness Raising groups to that end. By the eighties, many Dykes had retreated to therapies and various twelve-step groups, none of which are noted for any political analyses, but are heavily invested in viewing the world from a psychological base. Psychology complements consumerism nicely, in that it views humans as units that can be adjusted to the norm. All we have to do to get healthy is to work our program better, try a different therapy, or subject ourselves to an endless list of cures because we are never quite healthy enough. This also is an example of an escalation-based model.

The undermining of our political skills further endangers us in that the boys are able to divert our focus to their concerns and tasks, at the same time convincing us that they are *our* concerns and interests. Much theory and discussion has centered around motherhood. Many Lesbians understood motherhood to be fundamentally oppressive to women and Lesbians, and understood that the boys benefited from us producing children to turn over to the heteropatriarchy. While there have been Lesbians who have been honest in wanting children so that they more closely resemble heterosexuals, it is only recently that Lesbians have advocated motherhood as a strategy for changing the world. In "The Tired Old Question of Male Children," Anna Lee suggests our mothers didn't set out to raise their sons to be rapists, woman-haters, and prone to violence.³ But Lesbians who choose motherhood focus once again on how this form of parent-

ing is going to be different and not on how it is similar. Perhaps some communities are just now beginning to realize that the children raised by Lesbians are not significantly different than the children raised by heterosexual parents. The fact remains that children of Lesbians are claimed at the same level by the heteropatriarchy as the children of heterosexual parents.

Another example of focus on the new is the encroachment by men on Women-only space. A purported Lesbian musician at a major women's music event in California, while introducing the boys in her band, was reported to have said "how nice it was to be able to have boys back on stage with us again." Men have "been on the stage" with us for 5,000 years. Nothing much about their behavior has changed in the last 15 years, but now they market themselves to us as "new, improved feminist" men. Because they are "new" boys, some are willing to perceive them as different from the "old" boys. Many of us have not noticed boys doing anything differently, while at the same time noticing that they are intent on invading Women-only space. Ten years ago boys would not have been permitted on stage without a lot of discussion of the political implications of male invasion of Women-only space. Ten years ago the personal was political. In 1988 we have reduced the political to the personal.⁴ It is very difficult to explore political choices with Lesbians who champion certain behaviors as personal preferences which therefore cannot be questioned.

Personal preference, which is an underpinning of psychological perspective, discourages us from examining the connections with each other and the organic world. If we attend to ways in which events, people and things connect, it would be very difficult for the boys to package our lives and sell them back to us. It is the breaking of the world into parts and even the objectifying of the world itself which feeds the vicious cycle of buy and sell. The boys cannot sell that which they cannot objectify. It is the forging and recognizing of our connections which shield and protect us from the boys' objectification of us.

When we perceive everything as an object, even people become consumable. It is no surprise that people have indeed been bought and sold, used and discarded, acquired and hoarded, and used as objects of barter. This is evidenced in the slave trade and

prostitution, among other things. While we would all like to believe that only strange people could objectify humans to that extent, it is not difficult to notice the “normalcy” of the male belief that children, wives and employees can be owned. Once people are objectified into objects, we move easily to the consuming of interactions and experiences.

The consuming of experiences is best described as being present at an event or experience and yet being a voyeur to that interaction. We disconnect from the experience — we allow it to flow over us and not affect us much, if at all. Heteropatriarchy promotes voyeurism as the path of least resistance. When we are bombarded from all sides by the boys’ often meaningless stimuli, it becomes very difficult to maintain our focus. What makes it even harder to remain focused is that the intensity of the stimuli often does not coincide with the importance of the content. For example, on a given day in Cleveland all of the rapes, woman-bashings, batterings and killing of women are relegated to the inside pages of the newspaper, yet the headlines scream out that the Cleveland Browns may make it to the Superbowl. It becomes almost impossible to correlate intensity of stimuli with importance of the content, and even more difficult to trust one’s perceptions and judgments. So most of the time I am a voyeur to boys’ culture, I step back and let it roll off my back. I am curiously removed.

Unfortunately, it is one thing to be a “tourist” in Boysland, and another thing to be a tourist to our own culture. As communities struggle with trying to keep ourselves alive and accessible to all Dykes, we have developed the “more if you can, less if you can’t” policy for many events. This is predicated upon the assumption that the community and its events are important to all of us, and that we are all responsible in “making things happen.” Yet I have observed well-to-do Dykes come in and pay the low end of the scale because they left their money in the car, or Dykes who pay less because they want to save money for a boy’s event the next night. This is treating our community events as consumable objects.

In fact, the institutionalizing of our culture, primarily our musical culture, has turned our celebrations into mass consumer events. At the recent Olivia Anniversary Gala, everything was for

sale: the reception (but only if you had \$25); articles of clothing from the "stars" as a fundraiser; and package deals in certain cities, with the best seats going to the Dykes who could dish out the most money. (Ironically, there were Dykes in Cleveland who wouldn't have been able to afford the concert, except for the fact that they produced it.) Besides being a blatant example of abysmal lack of and commitment to class consciousness, this is an example of buying and selling of Dyke community. Happily, Dyke love and energy survive under even adverse circumstances, but the fact remains that the consumerism existing in some events dictates a producer-consumer relationship.

Because boys' culture has existed for so long, it is firmly entrenched in the objectification of living things resulting in stagnation which is also a death focus. Boys' culture is in no way diminished by our consumption of that culture; in fact, our consumption of their culture contributes to its continuation. The point of Lesbian community is to separate from the status quo and base our connections on a different set of values. When we participate in a Lesbian event, we are not just purchasing entertainment, we are fostering our connections with each other. Our Lesbian cultural heritage has been that music, art and theory have been used as the means by which we created, expressed and explored our connections with each other. It is because this heritage of celebrating our connections has meant so much to me as a Dyke that I have become angry and disappointed that our events have taken on a consumer flair and return us to the mainstream. Because our connections are continually being created, we cannot assume the role of consumers of our culture unless our intent is to diminish and consume our connections as a product. If our commitment is to building Lesbian community, then we must participate in the ongoing creation of that community, not the objectification and consumption of Lesbian community. The turning of our connections and communities into marketable products is going to have a devastating effect on us. As consumers our relationship to products is on two levels: on one hand we identify with the product, and on the other hand we distance ourselves from it. The identification with the product I have already discussed. The distancing from the product allows us not to be affected by it, not to be responsible for it and often a

a voyeur of it. As consumers, our only responsibility is to our own satisfaction.

In the seventies I lived in a community that valued Women-only space, Radical Dyke Activity, manual laborers, development of theory, other working class jobs and anti-patriarchal work. I question the inverse correlation between the rise of cultural Lesbianism and the return to the malestream and resulting decline in respect for the Radical Lesbian activities. Once we institutionalize our culture, the rules of the marketplace take over. We have many examples, from making our Lesbian-created rape crisis centers and battered women's shelters more palatable to funders by firing the Dykes, to the selling of *Lesbian Nuns* to *Forum* by Naiad Press, to the Dyke musicians who play at Michigan for Women-only audiences until they make it big and will no longer play before Women-only audiences. Hence our relationships to each other have shifted from co-creating to the producing and consuming of our Lesbian community. When we create Lesbian community, we are enacting values that enhance and prioritize our Dyke connections. When we enact consumer values, our Lesbian connections are not the priority. Our consumer-producer connections are the priority.

When we established a producer-consumer relationship to each other, boys stepped in as the producers of our culture and marketed it back to us. The boys will be involved as long as they can turn a tidy profit and even if some boy producer in a large Eastern city decided to "return" some of the money to Lesbian community, it is as an insurance that he be allowed to continue to market our community. When boys quit making money from us, they will stop being concert producers and purveyors of women's books and records. They are not co-creators of our culture. They are the people who come in to make profit from our having institutionalized to the point that money was able to be made. They are the people who sell our experiences and connections. Once we give them the right to market our lives to us, they also have the right to determine what our lives will be. Boys twist who we are and market it back to us in their own image.

Consumerism has been an effective tool for undermining our communities. We have consumed our own communities, thereby diminishing them. Boys have appropriated our communities,

thereby distorting them. Boys begin to sell it back to us, thereby molding it in their own image. And sadly, many Dykes are no longer participating as co-creators of our culture, thereby conceding it to the forces of consumerism.

Consumerism is a system that fails to acknowledge what is important to us. I have interacted with my community as a consumer at times and admit that I thought I felt alive in the process. Or maybe I just felt motion and mistook it for life. But motion is not proof of life. After all, the boys are good at making machines move. That back and forth motion of consumerism is not motion on a profound level. Rather it is predictable, has a certain weariness, and holds no promise for change or creation. It is motion between two points of the patriarchy and fails to propel us away from the gravitational pull of boys' values.

Earlier in this paper, I spoke of my inability to describe our connections. I still wonder why that is when those connections are so often intense. Amidst the glare of the market place it appears those connections are also very subtle.

Yet it is at the level of our connections that we begin to build our communities. A fundamental difference between Lesbian culture and heteropatriarchal culture is that unlike the boys, what moves and sustains us are our desires and passion. Our passion for our friends, our lovers, our politics, our lives and our creations defines our connections. Passion and desire cannot live in the market place any more than we can joyously thrive in the heteropatriarchal world. Consumerism is about the objectifying of all living things and passion has its own life. Passion cannot be packaged and marketed to us; instead it is created by and among us. I believe our passion has integrity and rather than allow itself to be distorted by consumerist interactions, it will quietly leave.

When consumerism forces passion to leave our interactions, we no longer have a basis for Lesbian connections. It is this interweaving of passion and desire throughout our values, our lives and our connections that will be the foundation of our Dyke communities.

This is a revised version of the paper presented at the Lesbian Theory panel, June 1988, at the National Women's Studies Association confer-

ence. I want to thank Sarah Hoagland for asking me to participate in the Lesbian Theory panel of NWSA. The panel was the impetus for me finally setting my thoughts down on paper. I want to thank Julia Penelope for the creation of the word heteropatriarchy and Anna Lee for the word malestream. I want to thank Anna Lee, Bette Tallen, Ellen Catlin and Laura Sanders for their help in clarifying my ideas and rewriting the paper. I am also indebted to long hours of conversations with many of the Separatists who attended the Midwest Lesbian Separatist Conference, June 1988.

1. Starhawk. *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics*. Beacon Press, 1982. Starhawk discusses how the norms of the world shifted in the sixteenth century from an organic system to that of isolated nonliving parts.
2. Lee, Anna. "New Age Spirituality Is the Invention of the Heteropatriarchy," *Sinister Wisdom* #37, Spring 1989. Paper read at the panel on Lesbian Theory at the 1988 National Women's Studies Association Conference.
3. Lee, Anna. "The Tired Old Question of Male Children," *Lesbian Ethics*, Vol. 1, #2, pgs. 106-108. While Anna Lee is specifically referring to black women in her paper, I believe that the point still stands that the fact that neither black nor white women raise their sons to grow up to be abusers isn't enough to stop the boys from enacting those behaviors.
4. A point made by Bette Tallen in a conversation concerning the lack of political analysis in our communities.

New Age Spirituality is the Invention of Heteropatriarchy

When lesbians began to focus on ourselves and each other, we created a lesbian social meaning. From that lesbian social meaning, we developed a lesbian spirituality which honored equality, diversity and our lesbian selves. We elevated the female principle as defined by lesbians. We sought not power-over but power within in order to strengthen our interactions with each other. Lesbians challenged heteropatriarchy. Heteropatriarchal beliefs were suspect. Our social context excluded the male principle and males.

I plan to critique new age spirituality from a lesbian perspective through the following points:

1. New age spirituality justifies the status quo by naming it good and proper.
2. It honors hierarchy by encouraging those who exercise power in society to continue to do so through the search for enlightenment.
3. New age spirituality promotes males as important.
4. New age spirituality denies its connection to spiritualism.
5. Males want to recapture our attention.
6. By rejecting resistance and challenge to heteropatriarchy, a term developed by Julia Penelope, new age spirituality undermines lesbian connectiveness.

One of the basic tenets of new age spirituality is what exists is freely chosen. Hence the status quo is affirmed. What makes us human is interacting with each other. Our interactions, therefore, have social meaning. It requires power to arrange the world as one would want. Power coupled with wishes provide the social context within which we operate. As MacKinnon argues in *Feminism Unmodified*, "The beliefs of the powerful become proof, in part because the world actually arranges itself to affirm what the powerful want to see . . ." ¹

Apparently, it is in the interest of new age proponents to ignore power-over and focus on wishing, thereby rendering the social context invisible. It is in their interest to ignore the power-over

needed to arrange the world because then they can argue those who do not create the world in their image are less enlightened. The failure to create the world one desires is due to personal shortcoming, not powerlessness.

Free will to be truly free necessitates the absence of constraints as Sarah Hoagland points out in her recent book, *Lesbian Ethics: Toward a New Valuation*.² By denying unequal power in our interactions, new age spirituality adherents can claim the illusion of equality of our choices. Once they have established that illusion of equality, the concept of oppressors becomes meaningless.

Free will or choice becomes the basis for perceiving the absence of oppression which is the second point I want to discuss. If there are no oppressors, there can be no oppression. By claiming the absence of oppression, new age spirituality proponents honor hierarchy. New age spirituality adherents do acknowledge horrible circumstances. In a conversation, one of the new age advocates told me that the master-slave relationship was a horrible one but did not indicate oppression. It did not indicate oppression, she went on to say, because the master and the slave freely chose to enter the world for their own reasons. While she could not ascertain the reasons, it was an opportunity for each of them to learn some lesson and for the rest of us to become more enlightened.

In focusing on free will, new age spirituality denies oppression occurs. The negation of the reality of oppression encourages both the powerful and the powerless to view each other's situation as chosen. The denial of social meaning of our interactions makes it possible for no blame to be attached to the powerful. The powerful did not impose powerlessness. The powerless chose their situation, if only by choosing the circumstances under which they were born. If the powerless do not choose to change their situation, then new age spirituality would have us believe it is because the powerless have some lesson to learn.

Once horrible circumstances are freely chosen, then the responsibility of the powerful is to accept that choice. The status quo represents unequal power dynamics and must remain so until those who are less equal, hence less enlightened, freely choose to arrange the world differently. The powerful are able to define the world on their terms. They perceive the powerless as the axis on which the status quo revolves, thus absolving themselves of any

responsibility for the control they exercise in their interactions with the powerless. This reversal in logic is accomplished by new age spirituality honoring hierarchy.

While hierarchy is not specifically acknowledged by new age spirituality proponents, the implicit goal engenders hierarchy. The goal of every new age spirituality seeker is enlightenment. The powerful have defined those in horrible situations as lacking the rarefied enlightenment that the powerful possess. While the powerful cannot challenge the status quo for that challenge would interfere with the less enlightened one's free will or choice, they can and must teach the lessons they have learned. Unlike free will, the teachings are not free. The cost of the teachings will be explored later.

I want to return for the moment to the concept of individually chosen paths which on the surface would seem to coincide with free will. In fact, individually chosen paths do coincide with new age spirituality's concept of free will. The concept of enlightenment presents a continuum on which seekers exhibit more or lesser degrees of enlightenment.

This continuum is used to measure all paths to discover the degree of enlightenment exhibited. The concept of enlightenment forces those who are less enlightened to seek those who are more enlightened for guidance. While each of us has the capacity for enlightenment, only a few display highly evolved enlightenment. Those few are to be honored, respected and paid. The vagueness of evolved enlightenment is not coincidental. It is as deliberate as other patriarchal religions are and as therapy is intentionally vague. Each focuses on the inner being isolated from social meaning. New age spirituality and therapy do not value self-defined success. Success is measured by external authority.

It is not surprising that many new age spirituality adherents have previously embraced therapy as a way of life. New age spirituality is a logical step for those who seek the quick fix and instant revelation. The quick fix and instant revelation are both discussed in my paper, "Therapy: the Evil Within."³

New age spirituality departs from the path of therapy by removing any hint of human agency inasmuch as new age's arbitrator is a spirit guide. In a story about two lesbian lovers growing old in the nineteenth century, Sarah Aldridge in her book titled *Madame*

Aurora describes Madame Aurora as a medium who exercises human agency in her interactions with her clients.⁴ The channeler, unlike the therapist or the medium, presents herself as simply a vehicle for the spirit guide(s). Her representation of her role is similar to a priest claiming to be only the mouthpiece of god. Why is human agency or judgement defined as wrong and certainly less evolved than spirits?

Part of the answer lied in the fact that humans have been imperfect. New age spirituality, similar to christianity, proposes a higher power to lead us to perfection. Both christian and new age spirituality tenets accept famine in Ethiopia, men's rape of women in the home and the street, u.s. invasion of Grenada and so forth as examples of human imperfection. The tenets of new age spirituality and christianity allow such imperfection by promising that the spirit world does represent perfection. New age spirituality, christianity and other patriarchal religions provide the justification for acceptance of what is. By counseling disregard for the existing hierarchy, new age spirituality supports heteropatriarchy.

The third point about new age spirituality concerns its promotion of male and female principles. These principles are arbitrarily assigned characteristics. New age spirituality accepts that males have sex specific characteristics and females have different sex specific characteristics. These characteristics are innate to each sex.

New age spirituality proponents seek to incorporate each set of characteristics to become whole beings. This concept is also referred to as androgyny. Each set is incomplete without the other, which is the justification for heterosexuality. While male and female characteristics are perceived by new spirituality seekers as having equal value, although incomplete, male and female characteristics are not equally valued in society. The characteristics of males, such as rationality, strength, decisiveness, domination and so forth, as MacKinnon and others have pointed out, are the characteristics valued as important by society. The characteristics of females, such as emotionality, maternalness, vacillation, subordination and so forth, are not highly valued by the powerful. New age seekers claim to want female characteristics to be equally valued. As we discovered with their claims about free will and power parity, their commitment to equally valuing female characteristics is equally false.

One reason the claim is false is the sex specific characteristics are, in fact, not sex specific and can be found in both sexes. For example, females can be both rational and emotional. This overlap of allegedly sex specific characteristics is not the exclusive province of highly evolved females. Since there is a great deal of overlap of characteristics between males and females, then the assignment of a specific set of attributes to one sex or the other sex is arbitrary.

The arbitrariness of the assignment of a specific set of characteristics to one sex or the other sex is the second reason the equality claim is false. The characteristics assigned to males are the characteristics valued by the powerful. MacKinnon notes, "In reality . . . virtually every quality that distinguishes men from women is already affirmatively compensated in this society. Men's physiology defines most sports, their needs define auto and health insurance coverage, their socially designed biographies define work place expectations and successful career patterns, their perspectives and concerns define quality in scholarship, their experiences and obsessions define merit, their objectification of life defines art, their military services define citizenship, their presence defines family, their inability to get along with each other — their wars and rulerships — defines history, their image defines god, and their genitals define sex. For each of their differences from women, what amounts to an affirmative action plan is in effect, otherwise known as the structure and values of American society."⁵ New age spirituality as we have discussed in terms of honoring hierarchy does not challenge the unequal power dynamics existing in society. As long as new age spirituality does not challenge the inequality of male and female characteristics existing in society, then their claim to value female characteristics is suspect.

The third reason the equality claim is false is developed through examining those characteristics primarily exhibited by each sex. While a set of characteristics is not primarily sex specific, males are trained to be males and females are trained to be females. Part of male training is to possess females. Part of female training is to be possessed by males. MacKinnon states, "Women are there to be violated and possessed. Men to violate and possess us . . ."⁶ If males desire to incorporate the female principle, then they would be willing to be possessed by other males. If females want to incorporate the male principle, then we would need the ability to possess

other females. The androgynous model denies the inequality in relationships. MacKinnon argues, "Men's power over women means that the way men see women defines who women can be."⁷ Denial of unequal power relationships is not the same as challenging unequal power relationships. Since new age spirituality refuses to challenge the current hierarchy of unequal power relationships, female characteristics are not equally valued by new age spirituality.

In fact, new age spirituality promotes the male principle which leads to my fourth point. Spiritualism could provide new age spirituality the opportunity to value the female principle, for spiritualism is practiced primarily by women. Spiritualism at its core is the belief that you can contact spirits who once lived in this world. Some spiritualists believe that spirits from other worlds and other realities can be contacted and these spirits do have an interest in providing guidance to humanity. Spiritualism also includes reincarnation. Spirits are almost always known by the seeker. A friend pointed out spiritualism had been around a long time.⁸ I began to think about how even the name of new age spirituality severs it from the root of spiritualism. The denial of spiritualist roots is deliberate. New age spirituality divorces itself from spiritualism by renaming many of the practices. A medium becomes a channeler. Spirits known by the seeker become impersonal guides. New age spirituality takes common multifunctional tools and offers in their place costly monofunctional ones. Practices such as crystal ball gazing, fortune telling, reading palms and tea leaves and so forth were seen as the beliefs of the witless and old women. The two groups are often synonymous with each other. In a rational age, the witless and old women are not credible. Credibility is defined by the powerful. By yuppifying the spiritualists' techniques, the practices could be made credible to those who were powerful. Male participation in new age spirituality lent further credibility to that system of beliefs. The powerful require male participation in order to grant credibility.

Another reason new age spirituality is reluctant to claim spiritualism is spiritualist practitioners utilize tools which do not necessarily lend themselves to conspicuous consumption. Part of the maintenance of the status quo is to protect unequal economic distribution. Under such a system, conspicuous consumption is

valued by the powerful.⁹ While it is true the rich frequented mediums, the services of mediums were accessible to those less well off. Even today, palm reading is advertised for \$5.00. The cost of crystals has not only escalated, but also their usages have become so specialized that more crystals are required to achieve the same results.

As we examine who the believers are, it becomes even clearer that new age spirituality panders to the powerful. New age spirituality proponents are primarily white and financially comfortable. New age spirituality appeals to those who value conspicuous consumption as I discussed earlier. Hence the proponents have already demonstrated a propensity to buy services and material goods. New age spirituality adherents are eager, even require, that evolved enlightenment be costly. Given conspicuous consumption, a service or object is not valuable if it is not expensive.

For example, a psychic workshop lasting for four hours costs \$35.00 per participant. It is led by a straight woman and more women want to attend than the space can accommodate. The participants are all women, primarily lesbian, but not one black woman is present. When I talk with several of the lesbians who attended, they report surprise they failed to notice the absence of black women. The white lesbians express shock the guru is straight. I believe two things were operating in this situation.

One is that the cost of the workshop made it very valuable to those who wanted to participate. The same guru offered a lecture for a similar length of time but the cost was free or nominal. The second dynamic operating in the above situation is the undermining of lesbian agency.

My fifth point concerns the undermining of lesbian agency through males seeking to recapture our attention. The straight woman guru is perceived as more evolved than lesbians for she has already incorporated the male principle as important and valuable. As I discussed, the male principle is intrinsic to new age spirituality. In fact, while straight women are higher in the enlightenment hierarchy, it is males who have gained rarefied enlightenment status. This explains why most spirit guides are male. Males are in the forethought, foreground and foreskin of new age spirituality. Males wanted to be included in our lesbian interactions with each other. They tried many tactics to regain our attention.

Males became transsexuals and applied for jobs at lesbian record labels, lesbian production companies and battered women shelters. Males professed to be feminists and demanded to be included in our organizations and women-only spaces. Males threatened us with disaster if we did not bond with them to fight nuclear power. Males denied our commitment to anti-racist work if we did not bond with them to challenge u.s. invasion of central america. Males appealed to maternal instinct to coerce us to provide caring, money, time, energy and blood to those males dying of AIDS. In short, males clamored that their issues were primary and lesbians should attend to them. Fundamentally, heterosexuality was promoted even by gay males.

Some of us succumbed to these scare tactics, but some of us did not. As Bette Tallen observed, "Lesbian separatists are the only stability the women's movement has known, holding on to the basic political analyses developed in the early seventies while other parts of the feminist movement wavered and often abandoned the politics with which they began."¹⁰

When the male scare tactics did not fully destroy lesbian connectiveness, males promoted theories which would destroy that connectiveness from within. They advocated focusing on the inner being divorced from social interaction or context. Our focus on the inner being would be guided by males who had achieved enlightenment and credibility. The focus on inner being could not be directed by males if a lesbian inner being were central, for a lesbian focus excludes males. The inner being had to be separated from a social context. If a social context were retained, then male power in the interaction would be questioned.

Both new age spirituality and therapy accomplish the male mission to re-establish males as primary. New age spirituality promises to value the female principle while devaluing females.

Which brings me to my sixth point. Once lesbian spirituality sought the knowledge lost during the witch burnings. Now new age spirituality only values male knowledge. Once lesbian meaning was central to our world view. Now new age spirituality values humanist meaning. Once lesbians challenged hierarchy. Now new age spirituality admires hierarchy and has institutionalized it as enlightenment. Once we knew oppression was imposed by males. Now new age spirituality denies oppression exists. Once

lesbians examined power dynamics to explain how the world operated. Now new age spirituality wants us to believe power is irrelevant.

New age spirituality not only resembles but promotes heteropatriarchy. By rejecting resistance and challenge to heteropatriarchy, new age spirituality negates female agency. It is not coincidental that new age spirituality undermines lesbian connectiveness. New age spirituality is truly the invention of heteropatriarchy.

I want to thank Vivienne Louise and Billie Potts who listened numerous times to this paper while I was preparing it for the National Women's Studies Association Conference in 1988. I also want to thank Tara Ayres and Lee Evans who discussed the concepts of new age spirituality with me over a period of many months. I want to thank Mev Miller, Selma Miriam, Betsey Beaven and Noel Furie for encouraging me to write this paper. Although it is not exactly what any of them had in mind. Finally I want to thank Sarah Hoagland who invited me to participate on a panel on lesbian theory. To date, this paper has taken me the least amount of time to complete. There is some value in complying with deadlines. Of course, the lesbians mentioned are not responsible for the arguments I have put forth.

1. MacKinnon, Catharine A., *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, 1987.

2. Hoagland, Sarah Lucia, *Lesbian Ethics: Toward New Value*. The Institute of Lesbian Studies, Palo Alto, California, 1988.

3. Lee, Anna, "Therapy: the Evil Within," *Trivia*, #9. Fall 1986.

4. Aldridge, Sarah, *Madame Aurora*. The Naiad Press, Tallahassee, Florida, 1983.

5. *Op. cit.*, *Feminism Unmodified*.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*

8. This was pointed out to me in a conversation with Tara Ayres.

9. Evans, Lee, *Sinister Wisdom* #37, Spring 1989.

10. Tallen, Bette, quoted by Sarah Hoagland in *Gossip* #6 in her article "Lesbian Separatism: an Empowering Reality," London, England, 1988.

Lesbian Theory and Social Organization The Knots of Process

This wave of the lesbian and women's movements started out with a stated desire, if not commitment, to abolish hierarchy and work collectively. In the last twenty years we have had wonderful, short-term successes, community-dissolving disappointments and political collectives that turned into capitalist businesses. Our brief history in collective and collaborative work has often deeply discouraged us. Of course many of us thought we'd live to see the "women's revolution to end all revolutions." We had neither models nor cohesive theory with which to conceptualize working together from our 20's to our 90's.

Yet over the course of these years, I believe lesbians have developed an idea which I call an "harmonious placement model," from which we might go back and re-examine our understandings of collective organization. While it may seem obvious to envision ourselves in a harmonious (as opposed to any form of power-over) relation to the world and universe, it is in direct conflict with the thrust of western thought since the creation of hierarchical nation-states as we know them. That we have gotten as far as we have, with some of our senses of humor intact, is remarkable.

But in order to address the problems of hierarchy and the ways we organize our lesbian lives and work, I need to go back a step and figure out what lesbian theory is. And for that I need a definition of lesbianism. What is a lesbian anyway? What makes lesbians a group that needs theories? And what is this theory-making process all about?

About two years ago, my Jewish lesbian writing group rented a house in Lake Tahoe for a week. We expected good weather and of course got freezing rain. Hanging around the house, I started to browse through the books of the family who owned it, and came upon a collection of "essential Kierkegaard." I had gone to

college thinking I wanted to study, among other things, philosophy. After a semester of watching men put their feet up on the table and talk about the nature of dogness, I decided that either there was something profound I was missing due to my own inferiority of one kind or another, or these guys were all fools. Eighteen years go by, Kierkegaard has to make at least as much sense as Plato, I figured what the hell, a rainy night by the fire, I'll check it out.

I was amazed. Here was a philosophy based on hating women. No bones about it. But not quite that simple: a philosophy concerned with the placement of man in the universe, not the sham generic man, but the real article, Man with a capital M. And Man's placement depended on defining his superiority — in Kierkegaard's case, moral, ethical, spiritual superiority — over women and nature in general.

What my evening's reading made me realize was that I was both right and wrong all those years ago: there was nothing I had missed except that those guys weren't fools — they were engaged in a very serious activity through which they claimed the right to control my life and the fate of the planet.

Because that is what the practice of philosophy, the creation of theories is all about: placing one's self in relation to the world in which one finds oneself. But placing yourself in the universe does not necessarily have to mean placing yourself in control of it.

Which brings us back to: "What is a lesbian?" Each of us will have some differences of opinion on that, I'm sure. To me, lesbianism encompasses three clear areas: sex, culture and politics (that is, of course, just about everything). To be a lesbian is to have a world view.

Not simply sex (or what "they" like to call sexual preference), because if being a lesbian just meant going to bed with other women in a world of equal choices, there would be no lesbianism.

We all know that being a lesbian means breaking the rules.

As soon as a specific group universally breaks a rule, by its very existence, that group needs a theory. Needs a way to examine the structure of the rules, the motives of the rule-makers. Needs ways, rituals, events, to express and develop its group identity. That group, lesbians, needs theory that places it in relation to the

world, and in relation to other theories of placement with which it comes in conflict.

Now if lesbians break the rules, and we need theory in order to understand what that means, to validate our own beings apart from the rules, does that mean that the sum of lesbian theory is based on reaction, a theory that starts from and ends with our responses to being oppressed?

Yes and no. The theories that men make which give them the power to make the rules place Man at the center of the universe with his god. These are all, in one form or another, theories of dominance and submission. When someone goes around the world saying I'm the boss of this place, you're the outlaw, you there — you're the slave, and you're the freak, and if you don't like the way I set it up, I'll kill you — it's hard not to be reactive. It is, in fact, the terrible trap of our attempts at creating a moral way to live here — those who place themselves in a position of dominance appear to control the interpretation of our response. Like a prisoner in a mental institution, we may say their interpretation of reality makes no sense to us — and they will call us crazy. We may say they can go on with their interpretation of reality, and we will go on with ours — and they will say we're crazy. We can say we don't care what they say, and they will say — you are still our prisoner. What women often opt for in that situation is to make their wardens believe they agree with the "reality" of dominance and submission — and eventually many women, through isolation, frustration, fear, longing, loneliness — come to actually agree on the definitions of reality with those who hold power over them.

We all struggle with this problem in our daily lives. Fortunately, we don't struggle alone — and that makes all the difference in the world. We are a group which *can* identify ourselves, which can engage in the life-long process of self-definition and the creation of theory that places us in relation to the universe. Not simply in reaction to the rules that we have broken, but to the rule-makers from whom we want to regain our own power to say what are and are not clear and purposeful ways to live.

It's important to note here that while I am asserting the possibility of lesbians identifying with each other as a primary group, I am in no way advocating any erasure of individual cultures of

origin. Our diversity is a source of wonder and growth. But the fact is we all come from families, and family structure across the world echoes the structure of the state — it depends on some form of dominance and submission, cross-culturally. If we as lesbians choose a different model for placing ourselves in relation to the universe, we are immediately in some kind of conflict with our families and cultures of origin which is very painful and complex. Every lesbian works out her own resolution — and I believe a strong lesbian analysis and the creation of lesbian social structures can help us experience community in the midst of what is often a very isolated, alienating struggle.

I would also like to note that a harmonious placement model is not unique to lesbians — many matrifocal Native American and indigenous tribal groups developed cultures which did not rank relative status for human beings and animals. Patriarchal culture has been extremely successful in destroying and subverting these other cultures — and the history of those conquests is one from which we have a lot to learn.

Among lesbians, the process of theory-making and establishment of group identity has been going on for decades. That work is what leads me to understand that we, as lesbians, have both politics and a culture. *Which also means that if we examine our culture, we should find forms of social organization that reflect the ways we understand our place in the universe.*

But it is extremely difficult. I want to say, I as a lesbian base my life, my ethical and political decisions, on lesbian theory. A theory that proceeds from the premise that social organization should be based within individual integrity, that the good of the whole comes from the well-being of every single member, and that each member, by acting for her own well-being, acts for the good of the whole. That identification with "the whole" is as strong and important as self-identification, and embraces a sense of identification with the natural world. A community which defines itself that way needs no police, no sets of rules, only the attention and loyalty of its members. Individuals within such a community may find themselves at odds with each other, but could not envision themselves at odds with the group: they are the group. A lesbian utopian anarchist-socialist society makes perfect sense to me, when I've gotten this far.

So that, for example, if I lived in a lesbian community, in which each member identified herself as a willing and committed community participant, and that community decided, for the common good, we would attempt a new form of income distribution — then I would have no reservations about giving my full support and best critical attention to that plan.

Well, that sounds good in theory but we sure seem a long way from it in our lives. Why can't it work? Because: who would be in control of the division of resources? Who would make sure it would be equitable? Who could sit through nights of meetings where every woman presented her need? Who would trust that a roomful of lesbians of different class, race and ethnicities would understand her? Who would believe that even if a contract could be made, the others would abide by the terms of the contract? What happens to the group if someone cheats? If someone withholds, if someone steals and splits? If someone simply leaves?

In a group of women working on distributing money, someone will want a leader, someone will want to be the leader, and someone will feel compelled to rebel against the leader or leadership, and either no one will cop to it or else there will be a group justification. They will say collectives don't work, they will talk about the tyranny of structurelessness, they will rationalize why so and so should be in charge. They will say: I have to look out for myself first; they will say: you are not my family, I don't owe you anything.

We are caught between the theories of dominance and submission that we grew up in and our fledgling ability to define our own position in the universe. Without analysis, without ways to keep very basic questions open between us, we tend to feel ourselves isolated and coerced. Many of us find ourselves taking it for granted that we need boards of directors, presidents, treasurers, elections and stars; that the world is divided into the famous (or rich, or powerful, or beautiful), the aspiring to be famous and those who pretend they don't care; that some of us are more "evolved" than others which confers upon us a higher place in the spiritual order; that some occupations are more deserving of respect than others. Inversely, we have come to believe the collective process is too unwieldy, too inefficient; that

co-operatives are doomed to failure; that only fools believe in non-profit work.

There are enormous questions we have to address around power, hierarchy and social structure. I believe we do ourselves a terrible disservice by disowning the collectivist impetus the lesbian and women's movements had twenty years ago. We can change our memory of our short-lived collectives from painful to instructive. What was useful, what do we still carry with us? In what ways have we tried to establish trust, on what basis, and how might we re-establish trust now? How do we divide the work? What kind of activity gets status and why? Who gets respect, how do we understand that? How can we encourage individual excellence as an expression of group creativity rather than a series of competitions?

Political repression, survival needs, romanticism and consumerism keep us from really looking at the social structures of our work and interactions. We are very substantial women who keep plugging our creativity, our intimate juice, back into hierarchies, into institutions that offer us short-term rewards for agreeing to play by the dominance/submission rules.

Those rules don't fit us. If we do really believe that we can claim the power to define our own position in the cosmos; and if we choose to define a lesbian position as one committed to individual integrity within group identification; then we need institutions that reflect that belief. We need to work in ways that follow our belief in ourselves and each other. Not easy: we are colonized, we have to make money, we need enough time to enjoy our lives, we are in reaction, we are damaged, we are often forced into war by those who believe in their right to dominate. It may be that the institutions we create will always reflect this struggle: but better they should reflect our struggle than our loss of self. Our collective, cooperative, collaborative impulses are our treasure. Let's keep figuring out how to change the world together.

Lesbian-Feminist Theory: a View from the Political Theory Trenches

I come to this work both excited and a bit sad. Excited because I feel like I am once again on the cutting edge of a new kind of feminist theory, a theory that may yet bring feminist theory back to its more radical nineteenth-century roots. The sadness comes from a realization, though, that much of what is called feminist theory today is not an inclusive enterprise, it is meant to exclude my life and my experience. Most "feminist theory" today is exclusionary of lesbians and exclusionary of Jews, among many other groups. So I begin this paper with a call that it is time to recognize that what we are doing as lesbian theory may in fact be far more inclusive than most feminist theory is today.

I also begin this work remembering what happened to me when I entered graduate school in political theory in 1971. I was taking a seminar with my advisor on modern political theory and I was going on and on about my favorite theorist at the time, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his ideas on man and his environment. My advisor (who became my advisor because she was the only woman on the faculty and I was one of only four female graduate students in my year) finally couldn't take it anymore and asked me, "Tell me, what is the fate of poor woman?" My mouth dropped open — I had never heard such a question. So I stammered on and on how man was really a generic term and that clearly Rousseau had meant to include women in his discussion. She asked me if I had ever read Rousseau's *Emile*. I said I hadn't so she sent me home with her copy that evening. So I went home and eagerly opened the book and started to read. Well, *Emile* was all about the education of the ideal citizen, Emile, who of course was male. No problem, I thought — I'm used to identifying with males. After all, Holden Caulfield had been the hero of my youth. Then I got to Book V, Rousseau's chapter on marriage. Here I met

for the first time Sophie who is there to help complete Emile's education. Imagine how I felt when I read,

In the mating of the sexes each contributes in equal measure to the common end but not in the same way. From this diversity comes the *first* difference which has to be noted in their personal relations. It is the part of the one to be active and strong, and of the other to be passive and weak. Accept this principle and it follows in the *second* place that woman is intended to please man.¹

Imagine my surprise! I then was forced to radically re-examine all that I thought I knew about any political theorist. Was I to be included in any of their visions and analysis, was I to be liberated along with all the others? Clearly the term man was meant to be exclusionary not only by Rousseau but by most theorists. John Locke, for example, never really explicitly confronts whether women are truly to be fully included in his theory of natural rights. He does grant that even married women retain their right to life, but how about liberty and property? His silence and the silence of others spoke volumes.

My second starting place for this work occurred in 1982 when Billie Potts published the best all-round women's herbal I've seen; its title was *Witches Heal: Lesbian Herbal Self-Sufficiency*. One of the reasons Billie titled it that was that all the women's herbals she had ever seen only addressed women's reproductive issues. She subtitled it as a lesbian herbal not only because of her extensive work and commitment to lesbian health but also because she meant it to be a complete herbal for a woman's entire body. I have used the book as a text in several courses on women and health. Students loved the book but were, in the main, shocked and uncomfortable with the title. One student in her journal went on for pages yelling about the title and why should she as a non-lesbian be forced to read this and then went on to say that the section on arthritis saved her knee. Further, anytime I went into a women's bookstore that stocked the book, it was inevitably on the lesbian shelf; not once did I see a copy on the health shelf. It clearly belonged on both. That was my first major indication that non-lesbians absolutely refused to identify with the word lesbian even though in this case the book applied to them. Recently I was a judge for the Chicago Women in Publishing annual awards.

One of the awards that I and another judge recommended was for the Iowa based periodical, *Common Lives, Lesbian Lives*. She and I were amazed at the lengths to which the other judges, all non-lesbians and all very high-powered women in the world of publishing, went to avoid uttering the L word — I did make them say it. As feminists we reject the generic man and refuse to identify with exclusionary language. What does it mean when non-lesbian feminists refuse to identify with the term lesbian?

Do non-lesbians include or exclude us when they use the term woman or the word feminist? We all understand that terms like lady doctor or lady lawyer imply that doctors and lawyers are male. Why, then, is it so hard to see that feminist may be just as exclusionary? Women of color have often challenged the term feminist and whether it is inclusive. They point to the phrase Black feminist and say if feminist is inclusive, then why is Black placed in front of it. Many feel that the term womanist is more inclusive and clearly, historically, they are correct. I think of the times I have heard non-lesbians use terms like lesbian families, lesbian mothers or the supreme redundancy lesbian woman. When I have pointed out to them that lesbian women as a term implies the existence of the ultimate oxymoron, lesbian men, they look at me as if I were no longer in the realm of the rational. Finally, it has dawned on me that perhaps they do not use terms like family, mother or even woman as inclusive ideas — they do mean to exclude lesbians. A dramatic example of this occurs in an interview with Linda Gordon, a prominent Socialist-feminist historian, who is quoted as saying, "The word *family* does have an ideological meaning that cannot be defined away simply by the decision of leftists to make it mean something else. The family does *not* mean two lesbians and a child."² Let me not be accused of quoting Gordon out of context; she makes it very clear that she does not embrace the pro-family politics of some feminist and left theorists. Still her omission of lesbians from the concept of family is significant. Does it mean all of her work on family and violence against women within the family cannot include a discussion of lesbian battering? If not, can any discussion of lesbian life have any place in her work? Is this women's studies? Perhaps the reason that non-lesbians look at me as if I am speaking nonsense when I address terms like lesbian woman is that they do not think

that woman is an inclusive term — how could they if they add lesbian to it?

In order to consider how inclusive or exclusionary the practice of feminist theory is, I need to think about what I know about political theory and the emergence of feminist theory. Most political theory that calls itself feminist emerged as a reaction to liberal theory. Once citizenship in the state was opened up to all men (excluding slaves in the U.S.), women began to also agitate for inclusion. I, among others, have already written at length how the connection between liberal theory and feminist theory has both fueled and limited the emergence of feminism as a political movement.³ It should be noted that early liberal feminist theory focused primarily on woman's relationship to the state, a focus that took as its automatic presumption that the state was a given, the state was and is vitally necessary for the preservation of human peace. Even institutions like the church and family needed to be preserved, albeit reformed. Even Elizabeth Cady Stanton, one of the most radical theorists of the nineteenth century, relied on the state as the major vehicle through which women needed to gain and exercise rights.

Even when one moves out of the nineteenth century most political theories calling themselves feminist either built on the same assumption (i.e., that the state was natural and vital for human interests) or focused exclusively on women's relations to men, to children and to the family. In other words, feminist theory has taken certain social institutions, primarily marriage and the family, as the focal points of its analysis. These are not only institutions that exclude lesbians, these are also institutions that are male-defined and dominated. It is clear that many of these feminist theorists' intention is to maintain relations with men. Sheila Rowbotham, another very prominent Socialist-feminist, takes this point even further when she says,

I felt that the concept of patriarchy was one that I couldn't handle as a historian . . . It seemed to me that the idea of patriarchy inevitably inclines toward separatist feminism . . . what I was really trying to say was that a feminist theory about relationships between women and men needs to think in terms of mutual needs and relations, positive reasons for relating as well as conflict. You need the two together . . . you need to see why it is not a relation of total

conflict, not a Hobbesian situation, otherwise it would deny the experiences of those who have either sexual, work or political relationships with men. I think this is an unreal aspect of separatism . . . The term "patriarchy" implies that the forms of male domination are unchanging.⁴

So women and men become the yin/yang of feminist analysis. So much for the dialectic — all synthesis and no conflict.

There are several other points of interest that can be derived from Rowbotham's statement. The first is her view that feminism is meant to facilitate women's relations with men ("you need the two together"). Her embrace of the male/female, yin/yang explicitly connects women's situation to men and in so doing, denies lesbian existence. What further interests me is her insight that the use of the term patriarchy inevitably inclines toward separatism. What she really seems to be saying is that once you accept the concept that men seek to dominate, control and define the lives of women because they are male and because historically men have exercised that right, then the only way to free oneself from that is to separate from men. Her refusal to do so only further underscores the nature of the non-lesbian feminist's dilemma. Her last assertion that patriarchy implies that forms of male domination are unchanging is truly absurd. Would she say that the term capitalism implies an unchanging form of economic domination and exploitation and therefore is not a useful term?

A survey of the major women's studies texts and major non-lesbian theoretical works reveals the same tendency to either ignore lesbians all together or treat them as a special case. Linda Gordon, in the same interview cited above, reveals that the high point for her at one of the Berkshire Women's History Conferences was a paper on the history of the Buffalo lesbian community. She says we need to do more of this but then she says, "since Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's wonderful article, much that has been written about women's culture, particularly in the more popular feminist press, is abstract, rhetorical, polemical or without critical analysis."⁵ Earlier she had already drawn a distinction between lesbian history and women's history when she stated, "there is real energy now in lesbian and gay history, as there was in women's history ten years ago and that brings both strength and weakness."⁶ Does women's history not include lesbian history?

On the one hand she collapses lesbian history into women's culture and states that since one article on lesbians (written by a non-lesbian), nothing very good's been written. Has she not read Mary Daly, Marilyn Frye, Sarah Hoagland, among many others? Has she not looked at *Sinister Wisdom*, *Lesbian Ethics*, *Common Lives*, *Lesbian Lives*, *Trivia*, the old *Insighter*? Why does she only seem to link lesbian history with the history of gay men? Is our history more similar to theirs than the experience of all women?

The point is that Monique Wittig was right all those years ago when she wrote that lesbians are not women. That to be a woman in a heterosexualist context meant that one's existence and context were defined by one's relationship to men. Most heterosexual women who consider themselves feminist are not willing to be seen outside of those relations with men e.g., "I speak to you today as a wife and mother, as well as a ———." Their absolute refusal to identify with the word lesbian shows their complicity in male domination.

Non-lesbian feminists, to the degree that they refuse to separate from men and masculine values and identify with lesbian existence, participate in the maintenance of patriarchal values. If the major focus of the feminist revolution is to facilitate women's better relationships with men ("dancing with chains" was my high school principal's description) then one really needs to question the revolutionary nature of feminism.

Feminist theory and process are exclusionary of others in addition to lesbians. As a Jew, I have long been disturbed by what I saw as the exclusion of Jewish values and life from feminist politics and process. Evi Beck, in her introduction to *Nice Jewish Girls*, summed up many of my feelings on feminist process. I have long experienced feminist process as subtly anti-Semitic. The focus on not interrupting, not being emotional or loud are not only feminist priorities but they embody the values of WASP middle- and upper-class life. Jewish conversational style and cultural values are distinct. In my home, to interrupt someone was an indication of interest, not of dismissal. Feminist process is also based on the concept of the "good girl," the one who speaks when spoken to, is not rowdy and obnoxious, who doesn't talk too fast, is, well, nice. Within WASP culture, Jewish lesbians are not nice. Within patriarchal culture, how many lesbians are nice?

As a Jew and a lesbian, I have long rejected the premises of liberal feminism. Liberal feminism today is based on many of the same premises of seventeenth-century liberalism: that the state is vital for the preservation of human peace. The illusion that one can, by putting pressure on the state, achieve meaningful equality for all women is a frightening one for me. First, the liberal state was set up to ensure the protection of unequal distribution of property. To imagine that the state, which was set up to protect the interests of wealthy and powerful white men, will protect women, let alone a Jewish lesbian, is absurd. Second, as a Jew, I am all too well aware of what reliance on the state can bring. As Hannah Arendt so convincingly argues in her work on anti-Semitism, one of the major reasons Jews stayed in Germany, even after Hitler came to power and before the massive deportation to the camps began, is that over the centuries Jews had looked to the secular state to protect them from Christian religious authorities and from the mobs inspired by the Church. To hear liberal feminists embrace the state as the guarantee of my freedom and life is not only foolish but chilling.

Similarly, much of what is written by Socialist and Marxist-feminists also seems either exclusionary or foolish to me. For example, in one of the standard Socialist-feminist readers, Zillah Eisenstein's *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, there are only two more than perfunctory considerations about lesbians. The first is an article by Linda Gordon on reproductive freedom in which she argues that lesbians and gays will also benefit from reproductive self-determination. She writes,

In this respect again the lesbian liberation movement has made possibly the most important contribution to a future sexual liberation. It is not that feminism produced more lesbians. There have always been many lesbians, despite high levels of repression; and most lesbians experience their sexual preference as innate and involuntary. What the women's liberation movement did create was a homosexual liberation movement that politically challenged male supremacy in one of its more deeply institutionalized aspects — the tyranny of heterosexuality. The political power of lesbianism is a power that can be shared by all women who choose to recognize and use it: the power of

an alternative, a possibility that makes male sexual tyranny escapable, rejectable — possibly even doomed.⁷

Lest I be accused of trashing Linda Gordon, whose work on the whole I have admired and used, it must be noted to her credit that she is the only non-lesbian in the group of women included in the anthology that seriously considers lesbians as a political issue. It still must be seen in her analysis, though, that she links lesbians with gay men (as part of a distinct "homosexual" liberation movement). She also states, with no footnote, that most lesbians experience their sexual preference as innate and involuntary. Now, the Kinsey research does indicate that is true for most gay men, but I have yet to see any serious research that says that it is true for most lesbians. My lesbianism was a personal and a political choice, a choice to reject heterosexual privilege. I do know lesbians who have experienced their own personal preference as innate but they still recognize that they have also chosen to see it as a political choice as well, and to base their politics on it. It was their choice to base their politics in a lesbian context.

The other article in the book that deals with lesbianism at all is the Combahee River Collective statement. However, their statement is strongly opposed to any separate lesbian analysis and action when they write, "we are feminists and lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that white women who are separatists demand."⁸ That is the extent of their statement on lesbianism.

The other articles in the anthology systematically ignore lesbianism as they focus on the more "important" subjects of women's work in the family, mothering, and women's role in the work force. Even where a discussion on lesbianism might be appropriate, for example in Judith Stacey's article on women in China, where she does mention the Shanghai women marriage resisters, and does cite Agnes Smedley's statement that the women were "notorious and thought to be lesbians,"⁹ there is no examination or elaboration of that.

Nowhere in the final section of the book on Socialist-feminism in America is there any mention at all of lesbians (except for the Combahee River statement), not even when one author calls for changes in patriarchal ideology and women's consciousness.¹⁰ I guess Socialist-feminists make it pretty clear about where they

stand on lesbians; their silence, like that of John Locke on the subject of women's rights, sounds pretty loud to me.

It is perhaps the ultimate irony that Marxist-feminists appear to be the worst offenders when it comes to the issue of dealing with lesbians and lesbianism. At least liberal feminists deal substantively with the issue of civil rights for gay people and do support lesbian custody fights, etc. But some lesbians are seeing the Hobson's choice they are facing. As Erica Jong writes,

Unless men give up their denial that the society they have created is deeply diseased, most women have no choice but to be either semi-slaves colluding in their own oppression, or militant separatists à la Dworkin. How to get past male denial when most men have so much to gain by denying the existence of female pain? Privileged groups seldom give up their privilege without bloody revolution, and it is unthinkable that women will take up arms against their own sons, brothers, husbands. However violent our dreams, we are tied by ties of love and loyalty. Men have always known this and abused it.¹¹

Jong is correct when she identifies that unless men give up privilege women face two choices — to collude in their own oppression (to get men to be more human and behave themselves), or to separate from men. What a dilemma!

I am not writing this to take all lesbian-feminists and lesbian theorists off the hook. Historically, much of our own writing and language has been equally exclusionary — think of terms like Black lesbian, working-class lesbian, Jewish lesbian, etc. Our theory has also seemed at times to assume that all lesbians were white, Christian, middle class, not disabled, etc. Some of our theory has been racist and exclusionary. Yet I do think that most lesbian theorists and writers have taken the issues of exclusionary theory, privilege and accessibility seriously. One only has to follow lesbian or predominantly lesbian publications for a short time to realize how diverse the perspectives and backgrounds are. We take each other's cultures and systems of oppression seriously and attempt to understand our own privileges. I think of Alix Dobkin's line often when she sang, "we ain't got it easy but we got it."¹² This is not to say that our work is finished, but I do think it is correct to say lesbians have been at the forefront of every

fight in our movement in the struggle to make it more accessible and inclusive. The fact that we do so while so many of our non-lesbian sisters systematically exclude us from their writing is of great significance.

What would a theory that is explicitly lesbian and revolutionary look like? Clearly it cannot start from the assumptions that seem to underlie both liberal and Socialist-feminist theory. It is not a theory that takes as a given an accommodationist politic with men and male-dominated institutions. It cannot take as its end product the "reconciliation" of men and women. It cannot deny that men do oppress other men, that racism, anti-Semitism, classism are real for men as well as for women. But it must be a theory that challenges the assumption that the end product of theory is the unity of opposites. In my view, it is a profoundly separatist theory. In order to also separate from women's traditional roles in the family, we need to challenge the use of "motherhood" as our dominant political metaphor. We must start with, as a central focus, woman as a separate and autonomous being, and examine our relations with each other, not only by analyzing the nature of lesbian oppression, but also the issues of bonding, responsibility, ethics and how various systems of oppression work in our lives.

The necessity for lesbians doing this work can be seen if we examine what happened at the 1988 Sisterfire Music Festival (when two lesbian separatists asked two Black men to leave their crafts area because it was womyn-only space, an altercation ensued and at least one of the womyn was hit by one of the men). When some lesbians defended the actions of these two Black men because of the reality of racism in the U.S.A., they ended up justifying woman-hating. Lesbians (and feminists) must stop excusing men's violent and oppressive behavior because of some men's lack of privilege. We must continue to deal with differences between us, but we can no longer allow our understanding of the oppressions that some men face as an excuse or rationale for their actions.

Events like the Sisterfire incident only teach me how much more theory and understanding we need to do. We also need to continue to confront non-lesbian feminists on their failure to identify with the L word. I am not saying they must become

lesbians, but that they understand that a lesbian context and meaning can apply to their own lives, the part of their lives they define separate from men. The continued failure to identify with a lesbian meaning represents the true divisiveness in feminism.

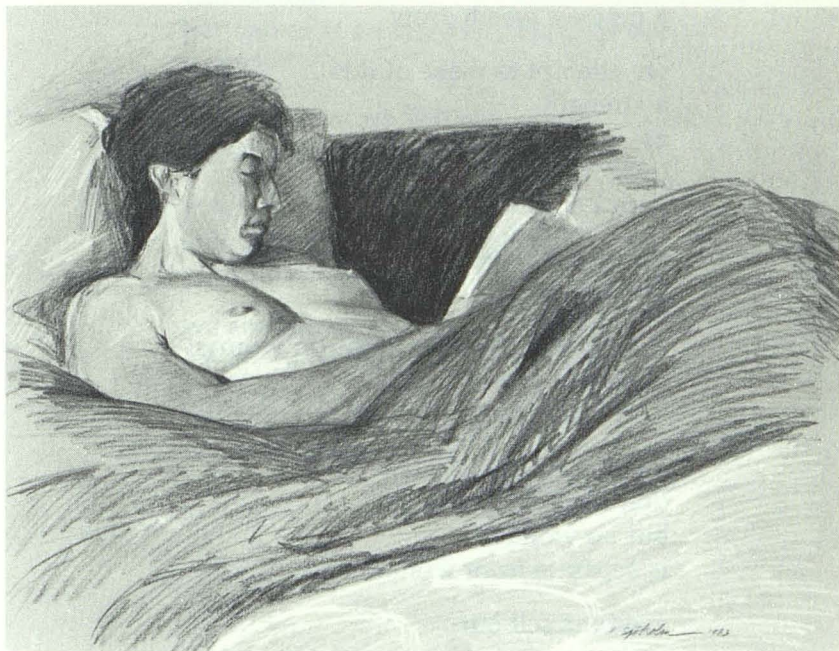
If being a feminist means "working it out" with men, count me out. As long as the practice of feminist theory continues to be exclusionary we must struggle both with non-lesbian feminists and create our own more inclusive lesbian theory. If being a lesbian and being involved with lesbian theory means working together with other women-identified-women to build a community, a movement, and ultimately a safe planet, count me in. The more non-lesbian feminists continue to deny their complicity with male supremacy because of their fear of being labeled a "man-hating" lesbian, the more we all lose.

Let us continue to create our lesbian theory and give voice and meaning to lesbian existence. In so doing let us end the divisiveness and exclusionary aspects of feminism. Let the non-lesbians among us do more of their own homework and examine their own woman-hating and lesbophobia. Ultimately it is the non-lesbians' fear of us that is the true divisiveness of the feminist revolution.

1. JeanJacques Rousseau, *The Emile of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*. Translated by William Boyd. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1962, p. 131.

2. "Interview with Linda Gordon," *Visions of History*, Abelove, Blackmar, Dimmock, Schneer (eds.). New York: Pantheon, 1976, 1977, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1983, p. 84.

3. For further discussion of this see Bette Tallen, *Liberal Equality and Feminism: the Implications of the Thought of John Stuart Mill*, unpublished dissertation, 1980. Also see Juliet Mitchell, "Women and Equality," *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (eds.). New York: Penguin Books, 1976, pp. 379-399. Also see Zillah Eisenstein, *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism*. New York and London: London, 1981.
4. "Interview with Sheila Rowbotham." Abelove, et al., *op. cit.*, p. 60.
5. "Interview with Linda Gordon." *Ibid.*, p. 92.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
7. Linda Gordon, "The Struggle for Reproductive Freedom: Three Stages of Feminism." *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, Zillah Eisenstein (ed.). New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1979. p. 123.
8. "The Combahee River Collective: a Black Feminist Statement." *Ibid.*, p. 365.
9. Judith Stacey, "When Patriarchy Kowtows: the Significance of the Chinese Family Revolution for Feminist Theory." *ibid.*, p. 302.
10. Rosalind Petchesky, "Dissolving the Hyphen: a Report on Marxist-Feminist Groups 1-5." *ibid.*, pp. 384-385.
11. Erica Jong, "Changing My Mind About Andrea Dworkin" *Ms. Magazine*, Vol. XVI, No. 12, p. 64.
12. Alix Dobkin, "Talking Lesbian." *Lavender Jane Loves Women*. Preston Hollow, N.Y., Women's Wax Works, 1975.



Deborah Reading
charcoal, 19" x 25"
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tremors

Your head is on my shoulder
while somewhere
the earth shifts

feminism creates
a rage we watch grow

we attempt to make of this
a strength
as

i was raped
i am a survivor

this is but an act
of endurance

with what stubbornness do womyn
robbed of our lives
continue to live

many men are islands
don't believe the saying
but no womon
is separate from womonkind

even the sell-out
in the comfort of her counterfeit success
does not truly hasten our demise
despite our fears to the contrary
for she lives
unconnected to womyn
in hollow denial of our bond

the contrast is unbearable
your head is cradled on my shoulder

the newspaper says a woman
young
was raped and beaten by six men

her life stretches before her
unbroken
so many mornings
and nights ice-starred with memory
of this act of imbalance

this woman robbed of her life
will be told
her hatred is an unacceptable response
to theirs

when she knows that she knows
the scales must alter

you stir
and settle again more restfully
your head secure on my shoulder

we are at rest
we are in balance

but somewhere
the earth shifts

We Be Signifying

Everywhere you look
Black women are dreading
People ask
Why do you do that to your
hair?

We be letting you know
the struggle continues
the '60s are not dead
the '20s still beat
the Ancient Mother breathes.

We be dreadin'
cuz we are home
and you supposed to
get comfortable
when you feel at home.

Buried Inside the Stone

In the beginning, the accounts were few and scattered and seemed to bear no relationship to each other. The first one I remember was on a morning in late May, about a year ago. We were listening to NPR and getting breakfast going. I was slicing a banana and Lori was opening a can of cat food. The coffee had just finished dripping, but we hadn't poured it yet. A slight breeze blew the embroidered cafe curtain back and forth across the back of our fat tortoise-shell cat stretched out on the windowsill. This is what a work morning is like in our house, more or less — or, what it used to be like.

"Just in," the radio voice said. What followed was a report of two men killed and a third critically wounded in a pre-dawn attack near an all-night diner in Queens. Disconcerting, but not all that unusual in New York City. The announcer went on to explain that the shootings took place in a neighborhood not usually plagued by violence.

"Mob-killing?" I wondered.

"Probably drugs," Lori muttered.

The radio answered us both. "Police are puzzled as to a motive. They do not believe the crime was drug-related or connected to organized crime. Further investigations are under way."

"Well, that's two less to worry about," Lori said under her breath, carefully measuring out our standard quarter cup of granola into the gray pottery breakfast bowls. "Do you want yogurt or applesauce?"

"Too much dairy is clogging up my throat lately. It's hard to keep their attention for a full period when my voice gives out. Guess I'll have the applesauce. I'll get it."

"Okay. But I'm going to have yogurt," Lori said.

"Which shelf is it on? What do you mean 'two less to worry about'?"

"Top shelf — behind the pasta sauce... Here, let me find it. I'm going to have to spend some time on this refrigerator. The cheese

looks like a science experiment... Two less men. Two less men to worry about."

"Huh? Why are you worrying about men?"

"What I mean is ... Oh never mind, look at this yogurt. It's dated May 5. Do you think it's still good?"

And the morning went on. There may have been other news stories after that, but my schedule got really hectic in June — finals, grades, graduation. The next report that now, looking back, may have been related was something we heard on the car radio on our way to Michigan in August. Even with the antenna up, reception driving through much of Upstate was garbled. But we were planning to camp near the Finger Lakes our first night out, and the ominous clouds made me switch on the radio in the hopes of hearing local weather conditions. What we heard was mostly static, except for a piece of a newscast about a car bomb exploding and killing five men. We couldn't make out where it had happened. "Middle East, I bet," Lori muttered. "Yeah," I agreed, "or Northern Ireland."

Later on that evening, when we went to the campstore for ice, I glanced at a local paper and saw a headline about a bomb explosion in Westchester. Huh. Not what we'd thought. Lori read over my shoulder. She shook her head and turned away to find the charcoal. I read just enough to learn that the police were unsure of whom the attack was aimed at. Without this information, the process of discovering the perpetrators could not begin. The five men killed in the blast did not appear to have been mixed up in anything that could have resulted in their being targeted.

"Male violence."

"What?"

"Male violence," Lori intoned as we marinated the vegetables for the veggie shishkebab. "The boys are killing the boys in Westchester now."

"You can't reduce everything to that. The world doesn't work like that. Hand me that skewer. Is this enough mushrooms?"

"You're really wild! No, put on some more. You really are wild. You're the one who used to have to ask every bookstore if they had a women's section ..."

"Yeah — you could never understand why it mattered if

women had a place of their own. And now, a short five years later — you're the one who walks out when the clerk explains there isn't one. But what has that got to do with what I said? You can't just throw everything together under one heading. The world is too complex. Nothing is that simple."

"I know the world is complex and nothing is simple. Stop talking to me as though I were in your English class. And anyway, I was quoting an Alix Dobkin song."

"Oh. I didn't mean to play teacher. I'm sorry. Do you think that the onions should get parboiled?"

"But it's true anyway... Yeah, maybe. They take longer than the zucchini and the other stuff. Did you know that one in every four girls is sexually molested by the age of 18?"

"Oh god! Is that a real statistic? That's incredible. That's awful..."

"Male violence ... "

"Male violence ... Maybe it is a good idea if they kill each other. Leave us alone."

"But the only problem is they're not killing each other fast enough. Maybe we need to give them a little help."

I couldn't see Lori's face as she leaned over the grill. "Are you serious?" I said. "What are you saying? You're not saying that women should kill men — just because they're men. I mean, they're people. They're human beings. Women don't kill anyway. That's male. Remember — *male* violence. I really don't agree with you, I don't ..."

"Hey — You're getting upset!" Lori interrupted sharply. "Why are you getting so upset? I haven't killed anyone. I'm not planning on killing anyone."

"I'm not upset. It's just that — well, we can't be like that. We can't be like them. Women are different."

"Yes, I agree with you. Women are different. But don't go putting women up on that ridiculous pedestal you used to have them on. Women are capable of doing anything they want to do."

"Oh that's not even the issue ... "

"Pass me the marinade. I think two of these are done. Do we need more water?" Lori picked up the pot holder from its place on a flat rock, next to the neatly lined up barbecue utensils. Even in the woods, Lori created order.

The papers, by the end of August when we got home, were filled with accounts of men killed for no apparent reason. Not that the papers made the connection that all the victims were male. Since "man" is still generally synonymous with "person," there was no connection to be made.

Labor Day came and school started again. But something had changed. Women, it seemed to me, began to look at each other differently. Not all women, of course. But the women I saw on a regular basis, at meetings and readings and dances. We all seemed to look at each other differently. Our eyes seemed to linger a moment longer than was necessary, the corners of our mouths almost, but not quite, turning up into smiles. Something was happening. It was in the air. It was on TV. It was all around us. Something was changing. When I was a child, autumn meant walking home from school through piles of dried, crunchy, orange-brown leaves, the air sweet with the smoke of bonfires. The crunch and smell of the dead leaves filled me with exhilaration. Leaf-burning is against the law now, but that same summer's-death sense of exhilaration filled my being now.

Lori and I began planning our annual Halloween party. We were sitting at the kitchen table, trying to design an invitation, when Lori suddenly jumped up and ran into the bedroom. She came back paging through a book.

"Let's put this inside the invitation — black paper with orange paper glued to it. And this on the orange paper." Her finger pointed to the words of Andrea Dworkin: *Many women, I think, resist feminism because it is an agony to be fully conscious of the brutal misogyny which permeates culture, society, and all personal relationships. It is as if our oppression were cast in lava eons ago and now it is granite, and each individual woman is buried inside the stone.*

I read it twice. Then I looked at Lori.

"This isn't an invitation, Lor. Lori - What's going on?"

"It is an invitation — of a sort," Lori answered, staring hard at me. Then she looked away. "I'm going to a meeting on Wednesday. It's not at the Gay and Lesbian Community Center."

"What kind of meeting? Where is it?"

"It's ... The group's called BITS. You can come if you want to ... Do you want to?"

"Wednesday?"

"Yeah."

"What kind of a meeting is it? What's BITS?"

"Look at the last four words of the quote."

I did. "Buried inside the stone. Is that it? You're going to a group called 'Buried Inside the Stone'?"

Lori nodded. Her expression was impossible to read. I don't even think she had an expression. "Are you going?" I asked her.

Lori nodded again.

"It has something to do with what's been going on — with the newspaper stories ... with the killings ... Doesn't it?"

Lori didn't answer. Slowly, she folded a piece of black construction paper in half and placed it in the page containing the quote. Then she closed the book and took it back into the bedroom.

The sky is filling up with rain clouds. They say that the weather patterns for our area have been drastically altered by the greenhouse effect, the build-up of pollutants and break-down of ozone. Perhaps that's the reason. Maybe we're all just reacting to the radical changes in the environment we inhabit ... that our psyches are being altered, affected like the fishless lakes of the Adirondacks and the leafless trees of the Smokies. I don't have a real theory yet. I know only that women's ways are different than men's. I know only that too much violence has been done to women. I am not a violent person. Lori is not a violent person. But the men must be stopped. I do not wish to become like a man. I am a woman. Women's ways are different.

Lori isn't here now. She hasn't been here for awhile. In the morning, I slice a banana and I open the can of cat food and I pour the coffee. Lori is organizing something bigger than our refrigerator and our lives. I'm not sure it's going to be okay. But that does not seem important. I have a meeting to go to in a little while. It's not at the Community Center.

* Andrea Dworkin, *Our Blood*, p. 78. Perigee Books, G.P. Putnam's Sons, NY, 1976.

Look Twice Now

I read a book
called *Men Who*
Rape behind my
bolted bedroom door

cried a little
because one girl
five foot one
pushed down in a puddle

ate mud at his command
and jumps these days
when she sees
such a pick-up truck

and fears rain-
storms like I
look twice now
when crossing train-tracks

Learning to Read

I know it is cold because Cecile returns to bed after her shower with her socks on. She burrows under the quilt, twisting her ankles around mine. I can hear Colby in his own room singing out the alphabet. When I get up to make the coffee, I light the candles on the windowsills, as if this will keep us warmer.

"The coffee's already on," Cecile says. "Close the windows."

"It's only September," I answer.

"It's cold."

"We live in Florida," I remind her.

"North Florida," she reminds me. "We're not in Miami anymore."

I miss the smell of hibiscus. It is not yet autumn, and already the mornings are more chilled than February. I think Cecile looks cute in socks, but I hate to wear them myself; socks make me feel like a child.

"You're not going to turn on the heat, are you?" she accuses.

"It will warm up"

"You're just like my mother," Cecile says. "You would rather freeze your ass off than use a little electricity."

"It isn't the electricity," I tell her, but I don't know what it is.

After spreading out a pair of Osh-Kosh overalls, a blue and white striped shirt, some white socks and Snoopy underwear for Colby, I lavish myself with a hot shower, grateful that Cecile has left me some steaming water. I imagine what I will wear to work, deciding on a purple pullover and lavender pants. Toweling my hair, I see Cecile walk into the kitchen with the purple pullover and lavender pants, as if she read my mind.

Colby is still singing the alphabet and he still has his pajamas on. The clothes, however, are on the floor.

"Get dressed," I yell.

"What does this say?" Colby asks, pointing at the letters on his pajamas. Last year, he was involved with the three wolf-looking dogs silkscreened on the pajama top. Now, he wants to learn to read.

"Chinook," I say.

"And what does this say?" Colby asks Cecile, as she brings me a cup of coffee.

"Team Sled Dogs," she reads.

"Look, a 'S', a 'S'." Colby is excited.

"Yes. 'S' starts the word 'sled.' S-L-E-D," Cecile says patiently, as I am trying to wrestle Colby out of his pajamas, worrying that they are the warmest pair that he has, and he is wearing them in September.

"What's a sled?" asks the almost-five year old who has never seen snow.

Cecile, who has seen snow twice in her life, explains dogsledding to Colby. Although Cecile spent her childhood in the subtropics, she spent most of it reading *National Geographic* magazines.

"Hurry up and get ready for primary," I change the subject. "If you are old enough to be in primary, you are old enough to get dressed yourself."

My suggestion has no effect on Colby, who is tracing the word "Chinook" with his finger. After two weeks in the primary section of the Co-op Free School, the word "primary" has lost its magic. After months of pleading and cajoling, Colby finally made his way across the fence into primary. Now, it all seems blasé. It depresses me to see one of the cruelest habits of life — that anticipation leads to disappointment — already ingrained in a four year old.

Cecile and I are also less than thrilled with primary, although in our case we did not have too many expectations. This school is the "alternative." While the scant women's community is often subsumed into the "alternative" community, when it comes to the Co-op Free School, it sometimes seems as if the word "co-operative" is not broad enough to include Cecile and me.

It also seems that "co-operative" excludes lots of other people. While the facade of the school is interracial — the walls are covered with magazine cut outs of mixed race children who must be attractive to the Anglo eye as well as politically correct — the children who actually attend the school are as uniformly light-skinned as Colby. The most physically different child has a birthmark the size of a quarter on her cheek; the most emotionally

different child is undergoing sugar deprivation for his hyperactivity.

On the way to the school, Colby finally dressed, Cecile and I talk for the hundredth time about sending Colby to public school as soon as he is old enough. For now, it seems as if it is either the Co-op Free School or the Christian Academy.

But sometimes when Cecile and I walk into the Co-op school with Colby between us, I think mornings facing the fundamentalists might be easier. It is not difficult to read the faces of the adults: *surely, it only takes one of them to hold the boy's hand, keep him from dropping his lunchbox containing Oreo cookies although they have been told we disapprove of sugar, sign him in.* With one of us, the teacher and her aides (all of them women, all of them married, most for the second time) can pretend we are not who we are; can pretend that somewhere there is a happy husband rushing off at this very moment to committee work at the food co-op or a responsible job at the university with walls, or at least to yet another episode of acceptably heterosexual infidelity. So, Cecile and I always walk in together.

This morning, when we walk in, we learn that September is "family month" at primary. I do not notice the bulletin board at first because I am noticing how nice those lavender pants hug Cecile's thighs. Cecile elbows me, pointing.

WHAT IS A FAMILY? the block letters on the bulletin board ask. Underneath, is the block letter answer: FATHER MOTHER SISTERS AND BROTHERS YOU. To the side are three magazine cut outs: a white man and woman with a blond boy child and a blond girl child and a baby; a black woman and man with a brown eyed black skinned boy child and a brown eyed black skinned girl child and a dark brown skinned baby; and an Asian woman in a kimono with an Asian man in a business suit and an Asian looking baby. The lines drawn around each of the pictures look so thickly uncrossable that it makes me wonder how all those interracial children on the walls got there.

I mean to comment on this to Cecile, but when I look at her I can see that there is a storm gaining strength under her eyebrows. Cecile has the same sort of torrential temper that my mother has. While Cecile spent her childhood looking at magazines, I spent mine reading the skies of my mother's eyes. So, as soon as I spot

that certain cloud around the iris, I try to redirect the storm. This morning, with Cecile, I pull her out of the room, banging my knee on one of those two-foot high tables.

I barely get the car door closed before the downpour.

"I have had it," Cecile screams. "Men. Men. Men. These stupid jerks and their fucking fathers."

"Cecile," I say.

"I'm tired of it. We pay all this money to send Colby to an alternative school and they shove that shit down his throat. Every family does not have a father."

"I know that, Cecile."

"Well, apparently those fools don't."

"I'll speak to someone." I am hoping that Cecile does not take me seriously. I am hoping Cecile knows that I am saying this to mollify her. I would be content to let it slide, perhaps light a pink candle. And then change schools.

"Good. Go talk to the director," Cecile says, taking me seriously.

Like any other two people who have known each other longer than five seconds, Cecile and I assign ourselves and each other roles. It would be easier, I sometimes think, if Cecile and I had more rigid roles; like breadwinner/homemaker or even butch/femme. Our life, however, has never been capable of being split into even such complicated dualities. Instead, I — the woman who won't close the windows no matter how cold it is because the calendar on the wall reads September — am being cast as the logical one of the co-mothers.

I open the door to the car. I try to remember the director's name, but I can only think of radio jingles for sugar free candy. I clear my throat to make room for my "I-know-you-really-did-not-mean-to-be-an-insensitive-shit-but-your-homophobia-is-showing" tone of voice. Surely, I think, it cannot be that difficult to talk to the director of an alternative kindergarten. After all, I am employed with the state of Florida in a responsible supervisory position, although I am dressed a little funkily and wish I had on those lavender pants. I decide upon the administrator-to-administrator approach.

But before I am totally in the little office, I am being nagged about the garage sale to benefit the school. The director, whose

name I still cannot recall, is reminding me that I have not yet donated any items and insisting that I must have something suitable.

"I'll look," I promise, not stopping to take a breath. "But what I really need to talk with you about is family month at primary. I'm a little troubled about the theme, especially the father thing. Not all children have fathers, you know."

Silence.

"Oh, I know that," she finally says. "It isn't meant to be offensive. And I really thank you for saying something. Parental involvement is what this school is all about. I'm so glad you spoke up. Parents sometimes think I can read their minds, but I can't."

I do not mention that there was never a need to read my mind, all she had to do was read any one of the seemingly hundreds of forms Cecile and I had to fill out to enroll Colby, forms with questions about pets, favorite colors, and maybe even the pets' favorite colors.

"Well," I finally say.

"Like I said," she says, "I'm really glad you shared your thoughts."

It is at times like this that I see the fury of Cecile and my mother as the logical response. I would like to rip the artfully knotted bandana from around the creamy neck of the director.

Instead, I am true to my role. My character resembles Antarctica more than a tropical hurricane.

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I can take it up at the next Teachers' Planning Day."

"And when is that?"

"October ninth," she says.

"How convenient." I stalk out to Cecile.

I tell her about my conversation with the director. To Cecile's credit, she lets me finish before her curses fog up the windows. To my relief, she focuses on the director of the school.

After Cecile drops me off in front of the office building, I spend my time trying to sort out my politics, my responsibilities to Colby and the Monday morning reports. I would like to put my personal life on hold, but the phone lines keep ringing. Now my private line rings with its Cecile ring.

She can't meet me for lunch today. She's got the car. She's

picked up Colby. She's home trying to figure out how to work the heat. She's going to make a list of our options. She'll pick me up at five.

"Four," I tell her. "I'll leave early."

She tells me that she loves me; that she'll be there at four; that she loves me; that we'll have soup or something warm for supper.

After a dinner of cheese soup and toasted cheese sandwiches, Cecile produces her list. It includes suing the school, bombing the school, home schooling Colby, starting a lesbian school and moving to Cuba.

"My Spanish is shit," I respond only to the last option.

"So's mine. But wouldn't it be neat to have Colby learn to read in Spanish. *Mira perro*," she says, as if she has been practicing.

"The lesbian school is an interesting idea," I answer.

"Great, until you think of who else would be involved," she says, axing her own idea. "Can you imagine a school with Prissy the Nazi's kids?"

"Don't use the word Nazi so lightly."

"I'm not. What would you call her? Born in Paraguay after World War II, her father a German scientist."

"People aren't responsible for their fathers," I argue.

"Maybe not. But she sends her eleven year old son off to a military school in South Carolina because he was acting 'like a sissy.' She campaigns for Republicans. She may sleep with women, but she ain't a lesbian in my book."

"There are other people," I say, hoping Cecile does not ask me to name names.

"Whatever." Cecile smiles. "I think we should teach him to read at home."

"We already are."

Colby can pick out words like "and," "the," "moon" and "ocean" from his favorite books. He has memorized the stories like poems, of course, but we are teaching him to see letters as words, to say words as sounds, to hear sounds as meanings. He is anxious to learn, as if he can smell freedom.

When I was learning to read, it was that same smell of freedom that intensified my hunger. Sitting in my mother's lap, I learned the skills which would make it possible for me to have a life different from hers. It was in a book where I first learned about

women who loved each other. I like to imagine that I was reading those books in the same spaces of time in which Cecile sprawled in a windowseat reading *National Geographic* articles about women with dogsled teams.

For Cecile and me, learning to read allowed our world to be different from our mothers'. But now that Cecile and I are mothers, I find myself not wanting to allow Colby's world to be different from ours.

I want to protect Colby from the F-word: father. I want to censor all those books with their perfect Daddy and Mommy dyads. I want to forbid all the fairytales and legends and myths full of insipid women who are either bad or beautiful and boys who are either handsomely virtuous or stupidly ugly. Since he was born, Cecile has been reading to Colby and changing the words. Now we are teaching him to read. Soon, he is going to figure out that MOM cannot be spelled both M-O-M and D-A-D.

Our phone rings.

"Who is it?" Cecile asks.

"The school," I say, without moving. My ability to know who is on the phone without answering it used to spook Cecile. After all these years, she now merely thinks it is convenient.

"Should I answer it?" she asks.

"Go ahead."

The poor mother (it is never a darling daddy) unlucky enough to be on our branch of the phone tree soliciting items for the Cop Free School garage sale finishes her spiel to Cecile.

"If we aren't good enough to be represented in family month, then I doubt our white elephants are good enough for the garage sale." Cecile slams down the phone.

"I hate the whole idea of families," I tell Cecile.

"We've had that discussion a thousand times," Cecile estimates.

In less than an hour, the phone rings again.

"It's the school," I say.

"Even I know that," Cecile says, picking up the receiver.

"We *did* tell you how upset we are." Cecile is telling the director.

"No, I don't expect you to read our minds. We told you this morning." Cecile is raising her voice.

"Another bulletin board sounds like a pretty token gesture." Cecile is pretending to be even-tempered.

"Well, we'll talk it over." Cecile hangs up.

"Talk what over?" I ask Cecile.

"Oh. That jerk thinks she can fix everything with a bulletin board filled with photographs from the kids' families. We should send a picture with him on Wednesday. The teacher will do a collage."

While Colby is in the bathtub, Cecile and I talk about victory and compromise, about consensus and politics, about when we were kids, about being different from other mothers because we are dykes and being different from other dykes because we are mothers and about being different from other dyke mothers because we are who we are and who we are means we are different even from each other.

After Cecile's anger has subsided and Colby is clean, she wants to compromise by sending an outrageous photograph of the three of us. I want to pull Colby out of school for "family month."

After Colby gets into his Chinook purple pajamas, despite my argument that it is turning warmer, Cecile reads him a book. He claps whenever he spots "and" or "the" or "ocean" or "moon." Cecile is trying to teach him "tree." He becomes confused between "the" and "tree." He whines and cried.

"No one said learning to read was easy," Cecile almost-scolds him. "Now, do you want to learn to read or don't you?" she asks.

I am half-hoping he says no, but Colby says he will try harder. Cecile tells him to count whether there is one "e" or two. Colby smiles, learning another secret.

When Cecile is finally finished with the book and Colby has sung himself to sleep with the alphabet, Cecile and I relax in our bedroom. I watch as she takes off those lavender pants, a golden splotch of soup stained into the thigh. I light a candle on the windowsill. A damp night breeze blows through the open windows.

We sit cross-legged on our pink quilt. We look at each other, two women with a child asleep in the next room. This is the universe we have made — we have ourselves and we have each other and we have long conversations, sometimes with words that sprint from our lips to the other's ears and sometimes with

words which travel between us without moving through either time or space.

When we get out the tarot cards we each ask the same questions; and the same immediate question: what should we do about the Co-op Free School? We spread the cards and pick them and talk about them. We get the Towers and Five of Discs and Son of Cups and the Star.

We decide we need some more practical advice. In the same moment, we are striding towards the phone, each of us wondering whether it is too late to call our mothers.



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Minnie Bruce Pratt

My Life You Are Talking About

The ugliness, the stupid repetition
when I mention my children, or these poems,
or myself as mother. My anger when someone
tries to make my life into a copy of
an idea in her head, flat, paper thin.

How can I make any of this into a poem?
What do I mean by *this*? For instance:

Me standing by the xerox machine, clack, slide, whish.
Another teacher, I've known her for five years,
asks what I've been writing lately,

and I say: *These poems about my children,*

holding up the pages. Her face blanks. I'd never seen that
happen before, the expression, a blank face: vacant, emptied.

She says: *I didn't know you had children.*

So I say: *That's why I'm writing the poems. Not many people
know I have children. They were taken away from me.*

She says: *You're kidding.*

I say: *No, I'm not kidding. I lost my children because I am
a lesbian.*

She says: *But how could that happen to someone with a Ph.D.?*

I lean against a desk. I want to slap her with anger.

Instead I answer: *I'm a pervert, a deviant, low as someone sexual
on the street, as a prostitute, a whore. I'm un-
natural, queer. I'm a lesbian. I'm not fit to have
children.*

I didn't explain: A woman who's loose with men is trash;
a woman with a woman is to be punished.

Because this woman was supposed to be a feminist and understand something.

I walk away, carrying away the poems,
useless words, black tracks on flimsy paper.
So much for the carry over of metaphor,
and the cunning indirection of the poet (me)
who lures the listener (her) deeper and deeper
with bright images, through thorns, a thicket,
into a hidden openness (the place beyond the self:
see any of the preceding or following poems.)

So much for the imagination. I don't say:
You've known for years who I am. Have you
never imagined what happened to me day
in and out, out in your damned straight world?

Why give her a poem to use to follow me
as I gather up the torn bits, a path made
of my own body, a trail to find
what has been lost, what has been taken,

when, if I stand in the room, breathing,
sweating a little, with a shaky voice,
blood-and-bones who tells what happened,
I get her disbelief? Or worse:

A baby-faced lesbian, her new baby snug in her closed arms,
smiles matronizing, smug, and asks
had I ever thought of having children?

Have you ever thought of having children?

What I thought as the payphone
doctor's voice pronounced jovial
stunning pregnancy, advised philosophy
(why he had five, this one's only my
second) was where would my life be
in this concept *mother-of-two*?
There was no one around to see.

I could cry all I wanted while
I sat down and got used to the idea.

At a friend's house for dinner, we talk about: my boys, her girl,
the love affairs of others, how I like morning bed
with my lover. She complains how sex is hard to get
with a three-year-old around, glances at me as if to say:
You have it so easy. Does say:

Well, if you had children:

In his crib the first one bangs
his head on the side, little worm
wailing lost earth. He burrows,
pushes through, in, out my vagina,
while in another room, I cringe
at the push of his father's penis.

Other side of the door, the two boys
half-grown, gangly in their sleep.
In bed, her hand slides, cold, doubtful
from my breast, she frets what are they
thinking? While I whisper, hot, heat
in my breath, how I lost them for touch,
dangerous touch, and we would not believe
the mean knifing voice that says we lose
every love if we touch. We pull close,
belly to belly, kiss, push, push,
no thoughts in writhe against ache,
our sweaty skin like muddy ground,
when we come back to being, there, in bed,
and to the sleeping presence of children.

In a classroom, theories of feminism, we wind through ideas
about women, power, the loss of children, men and ownership,
the loss of self, the lesbian mother.
They have heard me say how it has been for me. The woman
to my left, within hand's reach, never turns her face toward me.
But speaks about me:

It's just not good for children to be in that kind of home.

I am stripped, naked, whipped.
Splintered by anger, wordless.
I want to break her, slash her.
My edged eyes avoid her face.

I say: *Why do you think this?*

I do not say: *What have you lost? What have you ever lost?*

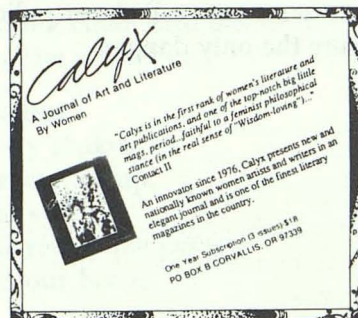
Later I say: *This is my life you are talking about.*

She says: *I didn't mean it personally.*

Over the phone, someone I've known for years asks what I'm writing now.

I say: *I'm working hard on some poems about my children.*

She says: *Oh, how sweet. How sweet.*



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Summer of 53

The tree was behind the Soldier's Home.
The knotted rope swing pulled between our legs
as our bodies swung
and our toes touched the leaves below.
This was before the boys opened us
like the names they carved on bark.
They gathered frogs from the pond
and threw them under cars
just to hear them pop.
Us girls held each other's hands
and tightened our roller skates with keys.
On the stoop our fathers played poker
and laughed at the frog crackers
as the heat exploded into twilight,
and the porch light
and shirts went on.
I saved as many frogs as I could
by making noise,
but most weren't quick enough
to hid in the summer grass.
They slipped in oil as thick as mud.
I sat down by the pond
and made mud pies
listening to my mother yell about polio
as if that were the only danger.

Ruth Wiseman

(my mother's partner)

They lift fifty pound slabs of rubber
to make shoes
hoist it onto the table
and smooth the edges
as if one of their children
were being powdered.

The factory stacks
like towers
fume behind them.
I wait after school
by the iron gate
then stand between them.

Ruthie has small hands,
hands that help her accent.
They move like grazing deer
splitting the grass with their tongues
and my mother understands words
that I have never heard.
Ruthie's hands are as soft
as a stuffed pillow
and I watch them
these hands that quieted
one crying child with death
to save the other two.

On the bus
my body shakes
with every bump.
Mother's lips
look as red as the garage
behind our house

where paint bubbles like blisters.
They talk of German winters.
I can feel the wind through window cracks
and hear the crisp sounds
of boots on the snow.

Ruthie gets off at Carmel Street.
The bus jerks forward;
I am thrown into her seat.
It is warm and torn apart
and my feet swing underneath
as if separated from my body.

I can see her red earrings
dangle in the distance
the ones that crossed Europe
and she has let me touch them
with my fingers.

Mother holds onto her lunchbox
her eyes fixed on the silver handle.
I move back beside her
because I know
even as a child
that I can only lean
towards Ruthie's empty seat.

Spaceship to the Good Planet

Five of them sit cosily watching the television, a lesbian sitcom, rare treasure, and it isn't even bad. Ella's feet are in one lap, her head in another. Nicole is making a fresh pot of tea. Soon there will be pancakes and Shirley will offer a teaspoon of her closely hoarded maple syrup. They will laugh and ask how she proposes to share one teaspoon between five. She will reply that they'll have more fun all trying to lick the spoon together.

The phone rings. Nicole, who is nearest, answers it. They do not see her face go white, the fear in her eyes, but they hear when she walks towards them, saying, "It was a woman with an American accent. She said 'The Jew-haters must die.'"

Penny and Jean groan and shrug. Such a household for trouble, only the syrup comes in spoonfuls. Shirley is on her feet, her arms round Nicole. Ella is about to check the front door, somehow she imagines death comes through the letter box. She has not quite left the room when Nicole turns to her.

"Do you think it could have been Miriam?"

The scream which leaves Ella's mouth is high enough to crack the glass of the sliding doors to the garden. High enough, but not long enough. Shirley cuts it short.

"Could it?" she insists.

"It could not," shouts Ella. "No. How can you think? How can you imagine? Miriam doesn't go around threatening women. It's as likely to be an Arab as a Jew."

"Of course. Arabs always address their death threats to 'Jew-haters,'" says Shirley coldly.

The room empties, the pancakes are never made. One by one Penny, Jean and Nicole go (cocoaless) to bed, slinking away from the hysteria and rage which has invaded their comfortable kitchen. Ella and Shirley scream at each other until the small hours. It is a few weeks after the massacres at Sabra and Chatila. This is only one in a series of anonymous death threats to Lebanese, Palestinian and Jewish lesbian groups.

In Shirley's collective there is a woman, Farida, whose mother was murdered in the Sabra camp. The row between Ella and Shirley has been brewing ever since Farida's mother died, ever since Ella started sleeping with Miriam. There is a sudden lull. Both Ella and Shirley draw breath.

"I don't want Miriam in the house any more," says Shirley. "It's an insult to Farida."

"Just because Miriam's Jewish? That's all? That's all you have against her?"

"She's part of that Jewish lesbian group."

"Shirley, you and I are both lesbians, and we are both in groups, the only difference with Miriam is she's in a Jewish group. That's blatant anti-semitism."

"I'm not anti-semitic. I'm anti-Zionist."

"It seems to amount to the same thing."

"My friends find it difficult to be around your friends."

"I find it difficult to be around you."

"We find it difficult to be around each other," said Shirley, "You know, if we were talking Russian we could make that one verb and conjugate it."

Ella raises her eyebrow. Shirley smiles tentatively. Her Russian came from her father.

"What makes this so much worse, Shirley," says Ella, "is how much I like you. I just don't understand how you can have a Jewish father and . . ."

"This has nothing whatever to do with my father," Shirley bellows.

"I suppose he's still welcome in your house, then," says Ella, "unlike my lover."

"You were dead right when you said you didn't understand," says Shirley. "They murdered Farida's mother. Can't you see . . ."

"Who 'they'? Listen to yourself. Miriam's never set foot in Lebanon. She was horrified by the massacres. Why do I even have to justify her? This is appalling."

They sit down and look at each other. It is appalling. Of all her housemates, Ella likes Shirley best because she is generous: with her time, her property, her passions, herself. Whatever Shirley protested, if she'd cooked pancakes tonight, she would have used up all her maple syrup on them. When a row was brewing, Shirley

and Ella had it, clearing the air for the others.

"Want a cup of tea?" asks Shirley.

"Love one," says Ella.

Shirley fills the kettle, picks up the tea caddy and laughs.

"Do you know what they're doing upstairs?" she asks, "right at this very moment?"

Ella shakes her head.

"Jean and Penny have crept into Nicole's room and they're huddling round her camping gas burner, heating milk for cocoa, like good girl guides pretending to be outlaws."

Ella laughs. It is true. She has so much more in common with Shirley than with the girl guide cocoa drinkers. Shirley brings the tray over to the sofa and is about to pour tea.

"Apologise first, Shirley," says Ella.

"For what?"

"For suspecting Miriam."

"Nicole said that."

"Nicole said the name of the first American woman she could think of. She's just a twit. But you thought it was possible."

"It is possible."

"Shirley, I can't stay in a house where my lover isn't welcome."

"I can't apologise, Ella. I'd feel I was betraying Farida."

Ella is too tired to scream any more. She wants the spaceship to land now, right now, and take her away to the good lesbian planet where no one is anti-semitic, or racist, or even unkind. Where Shirley's generosity would always outweigh her stubborn, stupid loyalty, and everything would conspire to bring out the best in Ella.

Instead she is going to leave the house now, stay the night on a friend's floor and, in the morning, join the ranks of the lesbian semi-homeless. Maybe in ten years she will have been on a waiting list long enough to get the tenancy of a bedsit in her name. She will, over the years of six month short lets in damp, insecure basements, come to regard her moonlight flit as a heroic sacrifice for Miriam. The politics will be lost as Ella loses her home, her old friends, and her job in the move. She will depend, almost utterly, on Miriam, and soon she will lose her lover too. And then, will she blame Miriam, absent throughout the high drama except as the first American with a Jewish name to come to Nicole's foolish and


frightened lips? This is not the best of Ella. It is not the best of Shirley, or Nicole, or Jean or Penny. And as for Miriam, she is only a name. A Jewish name.

Ella is about to stuff some clothes into a bag and storm out when the first deep groans of Shirley's saxophone come to her through the open door. The full moon bursts through the clouds, the house is bathed in blue light. Ella stops on the stairs; Shirley's playing ripples up her spine. The light pours down the stairwell from the skylight; a cello joins the sax. It is impossible, but the cello sits down in the kitchen to a duet of bitterness and pain, loyalty and loss. Ella hugs her knees and weeps. A soft breeze blows in the window, the light turns purple, an oboe wails. Ella closes her eyes.

It is no longer mournful. It is beautiful. It is like listening to the March from "Aida," the Gallop from "Orpheus" and "Stormy Weather," all separate and all at once. It is like reading a perfect paragraph of Bertha Harris, eating three mangoes and swimming your fifth mile, all separate and all at once. The spaceship has landed. They knew how to find her after all.

This is the first part of a short story entitled, "Players in the Oberlin." The oberlin is an instrument played by sentients of many different forms on many different planets. On Earth, it is a force for female liberation.

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Dick Money

This piece is a response to some of the references that have been made to prostitutes in the recent Lesbian literature; to wit:

"It was Queenie's line of work the other dykes had problems with. They all agreed they could live with anything but that."

"Then they'd shake their heads — because to them a woman who fucked men was defiled, and that's what Queenie did for a living. There were some things you just couldn't wash off, they said to each other . . ."

This is from Common Lives, Lesbian Lives #25, and is entitled "The Queen of the Tanqueray," by Martha Miller.

Or how about "Texas was a fat, blonde whore that summer, who smoked cheap cigarettes and wore brassy make-up; who stood under a light and beckoned to strangers — and you and I — well, she'd gotten in our blood."

This is from Sinister Wisdom #35, entitled "Texas '52," by Charlene S. Henderson.

My piece is a remnant of my adolescence, spent as a Lesbian prostitute in the late 1960s and early 70s. It is something of a summary of a conversation held in the early 70s and which occurred between a Lesbian Feminist and myself. Just another experience that didn't wash off.

I gave you my dick money. That meant something to you. It meant that the money came from men. Well, actually from a woman who sleeps with men. For money. I'm someone who can be bought, you say. You also say that I am not a Lesbian (the term Dyke is not yet in vogue). If you sleep with men, you aren't a Lesbian. Lesbians don't sleep with men. But I do. And so does the woman that I sleep with. What are we then, the two of us, when we sleep together? Does the fact that I sleep with men outweigh the fact that I sleep with her? If so, tell me, what does *that* mean?

You know you have a serious problem with visibility when the group you belong to, a group with an admitted problem with visibility, insists that you don't exist. I'm moving towards being defined out of existence. If I can't be a woman because I'm a Lesbian, and I can't be a Lesbian because I am a prostitute (and therefore sleep with men), then finally what am I? A prostitute, I

guess. No one ever argues with me and tells me I'm not a prostitute. Everyone is willing to concede that I am a sexual object.

What does a woman who can be bought buy with her money? Let's start at the beginning, or very nearly the beginning, when I am an adolescent. What do I buy after I've been bought? First, a place to sleep, as safe as possible. The Ohio East Hotel; a small room, you walk in and almost fall onto the bed. There is no window. There are many roaches, a night stand, and a lamp with a very low watt bulb. I would have liked a chair to place against the door when I slept. Sometimes my lover and I would go for days without sleeping with men because we had somehow managed to pay for the room through the end of the week. This was before we learned to deaden our responses, before we learned not to care anymore (or at least not as much) about what they did to us/we did to/for them. It was when we still referred to it as sleeping with them (men), before we started saying fucking them, sucking their dicks, calling them dicks, pink dicks. It was also before we got to the point where we just couldn't suck another pink dick, couldn't be touched by another one of them without screaming and physically attacking them (which we both finally did, much to their surprise and confusion). It was before the point where we thought it would be easier to die. At first we only didn't care if we lived anymore, or how we lived. Eventually we wanted to die, me going to sleep saying to myself, "I hope I don't wake up, if I could just not wake up, if it could only finally be over;" you going a step further beyond this, and trying for it, over and over and over again through the years. You finally made it, I recently heard; I understand, I know you were tired, your thinking wasn't faulty; no one deserves to live, to have to live, if that is what living feels like. You do it as long as you can, but you finally reach a point of diminishing returns.

During this period of time, before I became desperate enough to start selling to men again, I used to sell my blood (plasma, actually). Doing so paid \$9, but only so often, because your body needs time to make new blood components. This was a variation on being used as a breeder; only this time I was used to produce blood components which would be sold to hospitals, instead of being used to produce babies. I don't remember how often I could

sell my blood, but I think I was able to make \$27 about every six weeks. Clearly not enough to live on. Go on public aid, you say. Yeah, but I was afraid of any of those people with authority, because they could have us locked up, in a number of different places. I probably had warrants out for my arrest; maybe even for assault with a deadly weapon, because when that man attacked me I hit him with a hammer that I pulled out of my purse; did he file charges? I don't know. How badly did I hurt him? I don't know, I didn't stick around to figure that one out. Then again we could be locked up in one of the state mental hospitals. My lover was several years older than me and had had this experience on a number of different occasions; it becomes a self-perpetuating phenomenon. We weren't crazy, but that doesn't keep them from diagnosing you as such. Or they could contact my legal guardian, also not a pleasant thought. So I didn't want to risk any contact with anyone in authority; it just didn't sound like a good bet. That left prostitution at this point. Later on it would leave theft and drug dealing as well as prostitution, but I hadn't gotten that far yet. Right now we're talking about dick money, the money I made off of sucking or fucking dicks; which, remember, I did only when I couldn't sell my blood. This means that the dick money cost me more personally than the blood money, because I'd rather part with my blood than suck cock. If I sold my blood to get money to donate to your Lesbian Feminist cause would that be ok, or would that gross you out too? Would that be tainted money also, an ethical question, a moral conflict to consider in accepting the money from me?

I gave you my dick money, the money I live off of. Do you have any idea what that means? Have you any ability to conceptualize what I had to go through to get that money? And even when I became older, and could do it (prostitute myself) with little apparent trauma occurring as a result of it, what about what I had to go through to get to the point where I could distance myself from what was going on so completely?

When I gave you my dick money, I gave you something that was very precious to me because it cost me so very much. Giving you my blood would have been easier, would have meant a lot less. But I did give you my dick money. And why did I give it to you? What does it mean that I was willing to give it to you? Why

would I do that? How must I feel about you?

You look down your nose at me, consider me of inferior status to yourself; you see me as less ethical, less moral, less Lesbian. You abuse me too. You hurt me too.

I talk to the other hookers, tell them don't give your money to some man, some stupid pimp, you give him money and he abuses you, he doesn't value you, doesn't care about you, you're stupid to do that. And they look at me and laugh. "How do your women treat you?" they ask. "Our men don't treat us no worse than your women treat you. Wake up and smell the coffee. Abuse is abuse. Beat up is beat up. Don't matter much really whether it was a man or a woman who beat you up. You look and feel the same after they're done with you. Only difference is, you whore for women, I whore for men. That must be because you're a Lesbian; you must really love your women. Next time you're in lockup, call NOW to come get you; at least my pimp, he comes and gets me."

Maybe they were right. *And maybe I'm the Lesbian* (me who sucks cock) and you're not.



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Swimming Lessons

I am fat.
I stay afloat in water .

I am not a life raft,
Blown up and thrown here
To save skinny girls like you
Who cannot swim.
Don't cling to me in my celebration;
Don't climb on my back because you are too tired to tread water;
Don't load me down with your lifetime pack of problems.

I am not a mothership.
I do not wait conveniently off shore
To take you on board after a short row.
Don't make yourself comfortable in my space,
Then tell me you have no friends.

I am not your island,
Not your stable ground.
Don't walk on me because you can't find your sea legs.
Don't dump your waste,
Then sit here and tell me
You wish you were in a better space.

I am happy with myself.
I cannot make you happy with you.
Yes, there is more of me.
Enough to stay afloat in water.

Jan Hardy

submitting poems to a straight magazine

All of a sudden, each love scene
becomes a movie
Now Showing: Two Women
Doing It
and even my English subtitles
are a foreign language

Breasts
fill the screen
loom like planets
my lover and I
a monster matinee
Goddess of a Thousand Breasts
meets Mammoth Mammaries

Our mouths
are huge
our tongues
rivers of muscle

Our cunts
could swallow
academia

And a single pronoun
she
castrates
objectivity.

Pomegranate Seeds

i. Demeter

She said she'd be back
in an hour, just wanted
to gather hyacinths
to bring to the Oracle

I tried to find her
in the darkening
dusk light, my heart
jumping from the sudden
movements of small
animals, the rustling
of leaves

I imagined she'd be
behind every tree
I saw, black
against the purple sky

I called her name
it hung in the air
caught in the web
of branches like a bird
in a trap

At midnight
I lit two candles
and climbed the long hill
to the Oracle, the crescent
moon a silver blade
against my throat

What I learned there
will haunt me
until I die:

He grabbed her
from behind, dragged her
down into the dank
hell of his home
and raped her

The Oracle told me
to find an armful
of hyacinths
fallen to the ground

and I will find my way
back to her

ii. Persephone

I cried for my mother
hours and hours
of tears
salt stinging
my lips

he watched me

he opened his fist
his palm held a cluster
of pomegranate seeds,
garnets lighting
the cave

he said the sweetness
would take away
the pain

and told me
to eat

I sucked each seed
drew my tears
back into myself

spit the hard kernels
onto the damp floor

I didn't know
that taking anything
from him

meant giving up
everything

iii. *Demeter*

I told her *never*
take sweet things
from strangers *never*
listen to the sweet
nothings
that seep from men's
lying mouths

But you know
the ways
of the world

One man's brute force
destroys
years of a woman's work
a heavy boot
crushing
a spider web

Each day I circle
the fields
searching
for the dried
remnants of her
hyacinths

And as I walk circles
within circles

the air grows cooler
the days grow shorter

At night she comes
to me in dreams
her lips stained
with pomegranate juice
her thighs stained
with blood

I stopped bleeding
after he took her

No life, no fruit
will come from me
until she's back

in my arms

CILLEACH ÓHEARA



Calyakh Veyra, the Hag of Beur
by Max Hammond Dashú

Delicate As ...

*The woman comes back
delicate as any clue.*

Delicate as a gun runner
gowned and veiled, eyes averted,
in Iran, in Algeria, the veil
makes her invisible, the gun
not even a bulge
in her full clothing.

Delicate as any carpenter
swinging a hammer
silver in the northern
California sun
or in North Carolina,
where the woods were green
as the heart of corn,
as the memory of Eve
before Agent Orange
rained here, stripping
leaves, life, hot and merciless
as it was in Vietnam, ending
the women's land collective there.

And the woman always comes back
delicate as fire
the first tiny blue flames
licking the papers, then bursting
into red, joyous and greedy, eating
the hate passbooks;
the women
feeding the flames, dancing
in South Africa, "You have struck the women,
you have struck a rock," they say.

And the woman always comes back
like the moon
on a stormy night
peeking through.
The goddess,
in as many forms,
as there are people who see her.

In Iran, the revolution
foundered
in a narrow pool
of reaction, of religion, women must now
wear the veil
everywhere.

In Algeria
the veil is more and more common.
Here, women go veiled
in fear
of rape, dyke-bashing, death.

Yet the woman
always comes back.
Behind her veiled eyes
she remembers
the thrill and courage of smuggling
and the feeling of metal
delicate
in her hands.

Arpilleras

Arpilleras are a traditional Chilean needlework form. They have been politicized by groups of women, friends and families of the "disappeared," who use them to depict and denounce the Pinochet dictatorship. The arpilleras are smuggled out of Chile and sold to help fund the resistance.

Some of the images in this poem come from the article "Needle and Thread Warriors" by Marjorie Agosin (Woman of Power, Winter/Spring 1986).

The women's hands are rough
against burlap
as they gather to work
pushing needles through fabric,
hands that work with urgency
stitching what is difficult
to say aloud

these hands have dug
in gardens, fed families
from pots that now stand empty
these are hands that have waited
too long already,
waving white handkerchiefs
outside prison walls
not knowing who is within
hands that smooth the face
of a child awakening from nightmares,
that moisten themselves in tears

hands that do not dig graves
there are no graves for the disappeared

the women gather
just as women do everywhere
and begin to speak the truth
demand
to be spoken to in truth

demand the simple facts
of loved ones and the ways they were taken
the details they remember or invent
become pictures in cloth, true stories
of the disappeared

sacando sus trapitos al sol:
bringing the bits and pieces
out into the sun

with bits and pieces
with scraps of cloth
burlap and lengths of thread
the truth here
is simply the image
burned into the heart
stitched into cloth
slowly and with sorrow

scenes of silent protest
translations of memory
are patched into wall hangings
arpilleras
which are sold
and smuggled from Chile
a fragile lifeline, to places
where their names can be spoken:

Irma, Mireya, Mercedes, Ana,
Anita, Elaida, Eloisa

needles flash in the sun
such tiny weapons
such moments of knowing
as their eyes meet over cloth
bound together by the moments
in their lives when everything changed
and they alone left to tell
bound by the images they stitch

by the truths:
empty pots, empty chairs
empty streets
at night, as a van drives off
into darkness
with shadows inside
the silence of voices
smothered by cloth
gives way to the silence
of no one there
now cloth begins to break
that silence
speaks of people plucked from corners,
from cafés, from theaters,
from beds, from arms

and the waiting
and the waiting

the women's hands fly
their needles like birds
they stitch houses with empty windows
women outside the houses
watching, speaking, joining together
and the mountains
and the clear blue sky

bring the bits and pieces
out into the sun

Not Black America

I went shopping downtown today
and not once was I
accosted
called
"mama"
"sweet thing"
"bitch"
or talked to like a dog
by my black brothers

I realized then
that I must not have been in
Chicago
Detroit
D.C.
San Francisco
or in any Black American ghetto
where angry black men assert their 'manhood'
vent their rage and frustration
on any black woman who happens to pass them by

I am not in Black America
I am in the Pacific, an ocean away

A black woman
has to cross an ocean
to escape the abuse
that spews from the mouths
of angry black men

stomp, bruiser, fang, sparks ... and footnote

Womyn in the Joint Wimmin in the Joint

This article is about prisons and it was written in hopes that it will spark consideration and discussion of these ideas. We are not so interested in recruiting lesbians/women to think exactly as we do, as we are in promoting thought and talk that moves us all forward. Also, we believe that lesbians/women in prison are under attack and need our awareness and support.

This article deals with adult women in prison. We are aware that hundreds of thousands of children are imprisoned and somehow survive the horrible conditions. This is a subject for another article.

In patriarchy, physical violence or the threat of physical violence is a primary tactic of cunt-role. The just-us system is run by the elite BMW's (Bourgie Male Whitefolks). It exists to retain their control and to ensure the preservation of the existing power structure. Womyn who question this system by fighting back are considered out of control (out of male control anyway); and wimmin who kill are definitely beyond control (crazy bitches). Battered womyn who kill their batterers are not "political prisoners" by the standard/traditional leftist definitions, but they are given harsh and heavy sentences, over three times the penalty given male batterers who kill the women they abuse. In a system that's based on the rights of men to treat women and children any way they want, killing men is seen as a highly charged political act. As one judge justified a long sentence..."we can not condone this behavior. We can't have women declaring open season on husbands..."

Womyn and lesbian political prisoners and prisoners of war are not criminals by the standard/traditional definition either. They have made a VERY conscious decision from a serious political awareness of the world and its enemies. And these bold bitches are amazingly successful at striking effective blows. Just like wimmin who kill their abusers, womyn political prisoners

are given extremely long sentences and serve them under harsh conditions..." We can't have political women declaring open season on the system..."

Maybe this is simplistic, but maybe it is also true that there are many overlaps and similarities, if we pay attention to witch wommin are seen as the enemy of the powers that be. After all, degree of punishment is relevant in determining who is considered more dangerous by the punishers. They know we are "at war."

Lock-Em-Up Whenever Possible

The united states imprisons more people per capita, and keeps people locked up for longer lengths of time, than any other industrialized country. (The soviet union and south africa are second and third.) The prison population has more than doubled in the past ten years, and womin are the fastest growing group within that increase. Is it coincidental that more womyn than ever before are being institutionalized at the same time as the women's liberation movement is gaining a very broad base strength and approval among women???

"PRISONS" change according to need. For example, 50 years ago it was easier to imprison wimmin in the home. Another successful "prison" for womyn, specifically Black womyn, was slavery (total control of wommin's sexuality as well as her physical labor). Another traditional lock-up for women of all races and classes has been mental institutions. Whenever women don't agree with the system, and more specifically with their subjugation as women/lesbians, they are called crazy/lesbians ... And the more butch, the more criminal/crazy they are diagnosed. All bad girls in amerika are thought of as crazy. The newer lock-up for womin who refuse in one way or another to be under male control is prison itself, traditionally used almost exclusively for poor men and men of color.

Most "crimes" committed by wommin are non-violent. Most of these acts are related to economic survival such as forgery, stolen property, fraud, not to mention the victimless crimes of drugs and prostitution, which account for 90% of the women in prison. The new federal codes demand that more and more first offenders be thrown in prison. In the past, women were likely to

get probation for a first offense and be scared Straight (as a heterosexual) away from further criminal activity. Now with the lock-em-up wherever possible mentality there is less and less choice because once a woman is in prison she is stigmatized for life. She is a slut, a horrible person, a lesbian, a disgusting creature, a whore, and definitely an unfit mother. Between 70 and 80 per cent of women in prison come from impoverished backgrounds; 50% are between the ages of 22 and 30 (except in the federal system where the average age for women is slightly higher); 24% are married; and 60-70% are mothers.

Less Than Minimum Wage: Who Says Prisons Ain't Class-y

The current trend in amerika is to imprison more and more people. And increasingly, prisoners are being used as cheap labor. Building and managing prisons is big business. Prisons are moving away from just warehousing people and are becoming highly militarized forced labor camps.

The unemployables have always included women, but even more so these days. Wommin are the cutting edge of the changing economic scene in amerika. As single mothers, as lesbians, as economic need dictates wommin refuse to accept the traditional roles specified for them under decaying u.s. culture. The roles for Black womyn that were created under slavery have been transferred over to the prison system (in 1985, 46% of all wimmin prisoners were Black). The base theory for u.s. prisons has always been "out of sight, out of mind."

As the working class becomes poorer and more unemployed, BMW's see a chance to get work for less and less wages. In prison industries workers are paid anywhere from 10 cents to 1 dollar an hour for jobs that workers on the outside would get at least minimum wage for. Women, particularly women of color, have always been the most unskilled and unemployable. This works to keep women dependent on welfare, workfare, all so-called social agencies and on the individual men in their lives. Women prisoners are working in prison industry sweat shops just as colonized women work in sweat shops in Singapore, Puerto Rico, Johannesburg, New York or San Francisco.

Another side of this is the "prison-ification" of amerika. Security systems, drug testing, ID cards, and other control measures

that were first used in prisons are being brought into non-prison workplaces and communities. They prove every day that if they can get away with doing something to people in prison, they will do it to people on the streets.

Sexual Harassment as Social Cunt-Role

The increasing numbers of women in prison, and their growing economic role, have required the development of new means of social control. One is "control units" like the Lexington Control Unit, where women, mostly political prisoners, were subjected to 24-hour a day psychological, physical and sexual torture, with the clear intention of "breaking" them physically or mentally. The threat of being sent to a unit like this is used against any prisoner who dares to resist.

Another technique is the institutionalization of sexual harassment. Traditional sex roles in this society make womyn constantly vulnerable to specific sexual attacks in ways that men can never be.

"Sexual threats and sexism as a weapon are rampant in the prisons as a whole. It is an underpinning of the institutional policies of the BOP (Bureau of Prisons). It is encouraged and applauded by the administration..." (Susan Rosenberg). Even when men rape men in prison it is blamed on women (or cuz there are no women). Even the brave and brazen out-there faggot is seen only as a substitute woman by his fellow prisoners. Since being female and vulnerable is seen as shameful in the general view of this society (and this is of course reflected in the left), it is no surprise that women/lesbians are never a political focus for too long. Men are so uncomfortable, guilty, and threatened by the level of sexual abuse that wommin can be forced to endure on a daily basis that they will use all sorts of excuses not to deal with any specific women's oppression.

The colonizer will always consider the slave his sexual property, especially in a prison environment. This was made very clear during the struggle around the Dessie Woods case. And one thing for sure — in all control units in this land it is only wommin who have to ask male guards for kotex (one at a time). And it is only wommin who are held down by robot guards and raped vaginally as well as anally. This sexual victimization of women is

a model that is then applied to other sexually vulnerable people like gay men or children.

Feminist Co-Opt-Eration

The just-us system is a system of victimization and abuse, but this is obscured by propaganda from newspapers, t.v., government officials, lawyers, etc. telling us that people are sentenced because of the "crimes" they commit..."remember they are terrorists..." (quote from letter from BOP about Lexington Control Unit, 1987). This propaganda helps create an illusion of protection for oppressed people and enforces that tired old myth that the system can work in our favor. This encourages the people who feel/are powerless to call upon the police for protection. In reality, however, sentencing has little to do with one's race, sex, class, sexual identity, religion, etc.

Wimmin who try to protect themselves or their children from rape or other assault are often manipulated into cooperating with the just-us system. They are told that the prison system is the only alternative. The fact is, it isn't an alternative. No man is ever sent to prison for rape, since the vulnerability of women and children is a basic fact of patriarchy. They are sent to prison for being too dark, or too poor maybe, but not for abuse against women.

As women, we feel powerless and desperate against abuse, and so we can be convinced to support the very system that abuses us. But we never have the control or power in this system. A woman who is raped is not the one who brings the charges, who makes any major decisions regarding the case, or who decides the sentence.

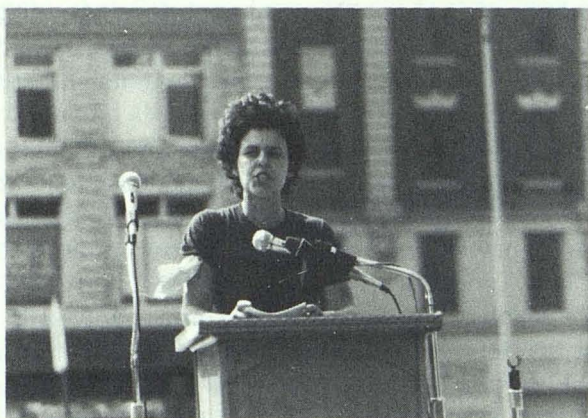
How come we are clear that an individual man beating his wife is horrible, but we are not so clear that turning over working class/men of color/women/lesbians to judges/police/psychologists is doing their dirty work for them? When we call the police on a batterer, we are turning over a little batterer to a big batterer, and helping the bigger batterer cover up his cruelty. This helps him pretend he is protecting womanhood instead of enforcing a system that's destructive to women. The women's community, like other oppressed communities, can and does find ways to make our own justice, whether it's safe houses or armed self defense teams, or anything in between.

Lezberadas ...

There are over 200 political prisoners and prisoners of war in this country (using conventional left definitions) and more than 25% are women. Three are out lesbians. Judy Clark has been in prison for more than eight years, in some form of segregation/isolation for most of that time. Laura Whitehorn and Linda Evans have been in prison since 1987 on sentences up to 40 years, and are currently on trial in Washington, D.C. (See other article in this issue for more information about these sisters.)

Gay people are outside the mainstream employment market unless they manage to pass in some way through education and/or acceptable costume (drag). Lesbians are even further outside. Poor dykes, dykes of color, and working class dykes have even less opportunity to gain skills when they do not stay put in the closet. They usually get nothing but shit jobs with little or no job security or advancement. When we get to prison, we usually end up doing more time, and doing harder time.

Lesbians in prison and lesbian political prisoners are an important part of our community, and their defense is a part of building our future. "Being a lesbian is a really important gut level part of why I'm a revolutionary and I want to be part of the struggle to end our oppression, not contribute to it by being back in the closet..." (Linda Evans).



Judy Clark, before incarceration

Marilyn Kalman and Rachel Lederman

Talking with Three Lesbian Political Prisoners

Standing on the sidelines, watching the annual "Peace, Jobs and Justice" march in San Francisco, if you know how to spot dykes, you will see a Lesbian presence in every contingent. Lesbians march with the labor unions, the anti-intervention and solidarity movements, anti-racism organizations, peace groups, political committees. Lesbians have played a major role in many of the progressive movements in this country. Yet, too frequently, we haven't intentionally made ourselves visible as lesbians, and have failed to demand that a strong call for lesbian liberation be included in the platforms of the mixed movements in which we work.

By the same token, some lesbians who work exclusively in the women's community are alienated from the left or do not see much connection between the women's/lesbian movement and other movements for social justice. The alienation of many progressive lesbians who do not actively support left causes and the invisibility of lesbians who do are often both a product of homophobia or lesbophobia. As lesbians, we recognize that there is a connection between lesbian liberation and the national liberation struggles of other peoples colonized by dominant powers. We see the importance of working with left movements and struggling against homophobia within them.

There are three out lesbians (that we know of) who are currently incarcerated in U.S. prisons, facing long sentences as a result of their anti-imperialist and anti-racist activities, as well as their association with the women's liberation movement. They are Judy Clark, Linda Evans and Laura Whitehorn.

As activists and lawyers, we had become involved in visiting Laura and Linda when they were incarcerated at Pleasanton prison in California. We wanted to give them an opportunity to tell their stories to the lesbian community.

Judy was convicted in 1983 on numerous charges stemming

from the Brinks expropriation attempt of 1981, and is serving a 75 years to life sentence. She is currently being held in a Federal facility in Tucson, Arizona, awaiting transfer to a New York State prison. Linda is doing 45 years, 40 of which are for a conviction of using false identification to purchase legal weapons. (The length of sentence unprecedented for the crime charged.) Linda faces an additional 45 years and is awaiting trial in Washington, D.C., with five other co-defendants, on charges that she has "conspired to resist U.S. government policies and practices through the use of violent and illegal means." Laura is awaiting trial with Linda on those same charges in Washington. She is also facing separate charges for weapons possession and assaulting an officer. Laura has been held without bail for almost 3 years.

For each of these women, their commitment to fighting for social justice for all people has resulted in a major life sacrifice. Like many of us who are in our late 30s/early 40s, these women came into their "political being" by supporting other people's struggles.

JUDY CLARK: "When you grow up in the '50s in Brooklyn, a Jew, a daughter of communists, a girl who reads and thinks and dreams and sometimes must speak out, you grow up acutely aware of being Other. And that Otherness — it either is a nightmare from which you do anything to escape. Or you take it as your own, you adopt it as your child; you are that child, that Other and you love it. You love yourself as Other and that makes you love all the other Others you find. You feel their Other pain, as you feel your own rage and frustration and alienation. Their fight is your fight. And you feel uplifted, empowered when Others rise and struggle. To join that struggle, to support that struggle is not a sacrifice. It is a privilege; it is a liberation, an inspiration, an act of self-empowerment and affirmation. My world opened up with my discovery and involvement with Black people in struggle. My horizons broadened with the inspiration of the Vietnamese and Cuban revolutions. Here I found Life and culture, here I found hope and faith. Here I found a vision worth climbing toward. This was the path I chose. This path brought me to the earliest women's liberation groups."

LINDA EVANS: "I was born May 11, 1947, and grew up in Iowa and the Midwest in a staunchly Republican family. My family lived in a nearly all-white, small farming community. I graduated high school as valedictorian in 1965 and attended Michigan State University in East Lansing. I dropped out of college in 1967 as a result of my awakening consciousness of racism and a rejection of the privileges of the academic "ivory tower." I remember very vividly a field trip to inner-city Detroit, walking around the glass-strewn streets, and the shocking waves of awareness of how masses of Black people were being forced to live — and the contrast to my own middle-class, privileged upbringing. In June of 1969 I moved to Detroit as part of an SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) Summer Program to support the Black liberation movement and intensifying work against US aggression in Viet Nam. In June of '69 I went to Viet Nam as a representative of SDS. This trip changed my life forever. Perhaps more influential than anything else was the example of Vietnamese women and the importance of the role they played in mobilizing the entire population. Women overcame tremendous difficulties — years of traditional socialization to stay in the home, their own fears and men's reluctance to accept their new roles, a chronic lack of education and skills — to become full participants and leaders in the liberation struggle."

LAURA WHITEHORN: "I am 43, a Jew, born and raised in New York. I began my work as an activist in the civil rights and anti-war movements in Cambridge during the sixties. I started out writing letters to congresspeople and signing and circulating petitions. I remember sitting up late at night, writing letter after letter to Bobby Kennedy, pleading with him to do something to stop the war. In 1968 I moved to Chicago and my view of the world began to radically change. For one thing, racism was more raw and obvious than it had been in Cambridge. For another, the Chicago police were so clearly a racist force with power — acting as an occupying force in the Black and Puerto Rican communities. I saw this with my own eyes daily — cops stopping

young Black men on the street, searching and questioning them for no reason. The anti-war demos at the Democratic Convention also opened my eyes. There we were, in the streets, being gassed and beaten by the police — what had happened to the democracy I'd believed in the day before? After that I began working in support of the Black Panther Party and the Young Lords Party. What I had come to understand was that the issues I was concerned about were issues of power, not just kinks in a basically sound framework. Control, power — the right of people to determine their own lives."

Many of us came to recognize our oppression as women and lesbians and the need for a women's liberation movement *in part* as a result of encounters with sexism in the left.

LINDA EVANS: "My political consciousness was actually first awakened by the grim realities of racism in the US and the horrors of the Viet Nam War. I became a political activist primarily out of a sense of outrage at the suffering and inequities that exist inside the US and around the world. But as soon as I started to assert myself in the anti-war/student movement, I began to encounter resistance from the men around me, and I began to understand my own oppression as a woman in our society."

The reaction to sexism in the left was clearly not the only basis for the development of the women's liberation movement.

LAURA WHITEHORN: "Through the late '60s my consciousness as a woman was growing, but it was still pretty vague, and definitely still individual. I resented the limitations put on me as a woman, but I didn't see this as a collective problem of women, nor did I see the possibility for a collective struggle to change it. But now that was something else I learned from the Black struggle: oppression is a collective social problem, not an individual one. Some women trace the roots of the women's liberation movement of the '60s to women becoming fed up with the male-dominated left. To me, it's always seemed an outgrowth of

the most powerful struggles for social change we saw at the time. In other words, to change things, to get rid of the things that held us down, we had to organize ourselves as women and struggle against whomever and whatever was holding us down."

While Judy, Linda and Laura each came to recognize their own oppression as women, became integrally involved with the women's liberation movement and eventually came out as lesbians, they continued in their commitment to fight against racism and to support the national liberation struggles of other oppressed peoples.

JUDY CLARK: "In the early '70s, as women who had fought in the Civil Rights, anti-war and anti-imperialist movements found their way to the women's movement and feminism, some cried, 'Enough! I've spent all my energy supporting other people's struggles. Now we must fight for ourselves.' But that denied our historical legacy. We *found* ourselves, discovered and defined ourselves in relationship and solidarity with Third World Struggles. I have never been able to disown my legacies. I came out in fits and starts, through the last years of the '60s and early '70s. I came out at a time when gay liberation was exploding and droves of young women and men, including many activists came out. I came out in the years that 5,000 Black revolutionaries and activists were jailed and hundreds were shot down, while others went underground to organize armed resistance to the government's effort to stamp out the most fertile seeds of revolution in this country. I came out in the years that the overwhelming majority of those with whom I'd marched, rioted and fought suddenly or gradually settled down to quieter, less embattled lives. But coming out only sharpened my sensitivity to the crushing of liberation movements, to the reality that the war in Vietnam was not over and the drug war against Black and Latin youth had just begun, to my own rage and refusal to make a separate peace."

LINDA EVANS: "The late '60s and early '70s were a time of great energy, activity and growth in the women's liberation

movement. Women were forging unique connections with each other, engaging in a lot of political struggle and analysis, and learning strength and commitment from the examples of women around the world — in particular, the women of Vietnam and women leaders in the Civil Rights and Black Liberation movements. In many ways it was the power of the women's liberation movement that helped me discover the deep love and respect I have for my sisters and for what women have accomplished in the world. Certainly it was the support of other women that helped me acknowledge to myself and to the world that I am a lesbian, to be willing to talk about it and be proud of it. For me being a lesbian is both deeply personal and profoundly political — there is no real separation. Fundamentally, it's my own oppression as a woman and as a lesbian that has led me to commit my life to struggling for revolution."

The connections between lesbian liberation and efforts for national liberation (e.g., the struggles of the people of South Africa, Central America, Puerto Rico, Palestine and Black and Native American people inside the U.S.) are not always obvious to white lesbians. In our work it's been important for us to look at these connections as well as understand the differences. This is not an attempt to create something from nothing, to pull teeth to justify a political perspective. The development of our analysis begins with our life experience, learning from the experience of others and studying. These are complex issues and our analysis is far from complete. We hope that this dialogue with other lesbians will help clarify issues, contradictions and directions.

In preparing to write this article we had discussions with north american lesbians who are anti-imperialists in different parts of the country. One commonly-held position was that no people can experience true liberation until all peoples are liberated.

JUDY CLARK: "Because I yearned for unity, a just peace, for a true communion among equals, the political visions that resonated and moved me are liberationist visions. I have always felt, have always known that no person, no woman, no one people can be free, can be whole or at peace, unless all peoples are free. That no liberation can take root on the

bent backs of other oppressed people. That solidarity is not a gift we bestow, but a necessity for our spiritual, social and physical survival."

Through our discussions the ideas we wanted to present here became clearer, although not crystal clear. Many of the issues are not new but deserve more attention. The interests of north american lesbians in many ways differ greatly from those of people who are fighting for their national liberation. There is a lot we *don't* have in common with other progressive communities and these differences often lead to conflict. On the other hand we have common enemies, like white male supremacists, like the U.S. government and the rich and powerful behind it.

One of the problems in the U.S. that obstructs resistance is that there aren't a hell of a lot of people who think things should change. People hold onto what they have in the face of racism, sexism, anti-semitism, homophobia and many forms of exploitation. There is so much wealth in this country and it's spread out just enough to keep people placated with their creature comforts.

The lines are clearer for third world and indigenous peoples of other nations. U.S. corporations are visibly robbing them of labor and resources every day, while the U.S. military robs them of self-determination. Therefore, large numbers of people in these nations are more willing to fight for revolutionary change. The people of Nicaragua and El Salvador, for example, have a much better chance of achieving major social change in the near future than we do in the U.S.

As lesbians who are interested in achieving social justice, it is important that we be a part of this process. In addition to adding our numbers to the fight against U.S. dominance, progressive lesbians have a lot to contribute to the shaping of new societies. This contribution helps to ensure our own future by making sure the issues of homophobia and sexism are always addressed. Our presence also includes the work our community has done in such areas as spirituality, collectivity, environmentalism, and body and health issues, to name a few.

LAURA WHITEHORN: "Because I'm a lesbian, fighting to change the system as it now exists is a very necessary thing to me: I'm fighting for the right to live as I wish, without

being a target of hatred and discrimination. It also means that building alliances and unity with other struggles against the u.s. government is very important to me. I believe that the struggle for women's liberation will never be won except as part of a struggle against the people, forces and structures responsible for keeping women, along with other oppressed people, down."

LINDA EVANS: "What is the relationship of my identity as a lesbian and all of these political ideologies, besides in my own personal/political self-definition? Objectively, national liberation struggles are leading the fight against imperialism and establishing societies that vastly improve the quality of life for the vast majority of their people: Nicaragua, Zimbabwe, Angola, Cuba, Mozambique, Vietnam are only a few examples. For us to act in solidarity with these struggles, from inside the center of the empire, will bring imperialism's defeat sooner.

"In order to build strong alliances with other liberation movements, we will have to struggle that an end to gay and lesbian oppression must be part of building a revolutionary society, that women's liberation must be a fundamental principle, and that sexual preference/orientation should never again be a reason for discrimination in any aspect of our lives. But for working alliances against imperialism to be built, we will also have to struggle hard against racism and white supremacy in our own community, and against the national chauvinism and arrogance that so often leads people to assume that they have the right to intervene into another movement's internal decisions about direction or strategy. These alliances are crucial to our collective survival and, ultimately, to winning the opportunity to create a better society where peace, justice and equality can prevail."

Yet, these alliances are not always easy. As women, we have been taught to put ourselves last and as lesbians, we all suffer from internalized homophobia. These factors combine with the external homophobia we experience in mixed movements to prevent us from putting forth as strong a voice for lesbian liberation as we might within the left. Judy Clark speaks of the

necessity for our revolutionary vision to start within our lesbian selves.

JUDY CLARK: "Today, I say, 'I am a lesbian, I am an anti-imperialist.' Both are true and each affects the other. But for years, one qualified the other. I was a lesbian *but* I was an anti-imperialist. I was a revolutionary, but also a lesbian — but I wouldn't let that get in the way. I fought for women's liberation, but I hated the elitist exclusivity in much of the feminist movement and culture. I was at war with myself.

"We couldn't embrace our experience and identity as lesbians as a positive reality in and of itself, worth fighting for. Always we were seeking the elusive political formula that could justify our lesbian identities on anti-imperialist terms. Over and over, we were drawn, out of the best of our instincts and identification, to women fighting for themselves, their children, their lives. Over and over, we'd back away because we couldn't transform these struggles into part of a neat, pro-national liberation, anti-racist package. We stood outside ourselves, our communities, shouting, shadowboxing against the spectra of our worst nightmares.

"We de-eroticized our lesbian lives. What was legitimate was what could be contained by political analysis and could be enlightened by revolutionary principles. But the sexual energy, the personal self-affirming, celebratory energy, the rage and love and desire that come from within — all that became fugitive.

"We denied ourselves and feeling lost, without any identity, we sought to find ourselves, re-create ourselves as Third World people. But the seeds of our rebellion, our militancy and courage and commitment lay not in their lives and heritage and identities, but in our own. Out of our own selves came the capacity for solidarity, the transformative vision of liberation that is quite different from striving for equal rights on a ship that's on fire."

Judy Clark has been in prison for approximately seven years, most of that time spent in isolation. Linda is currently held in segregation from other prisoners. Both she and Laura are subject to severe conditions which inhibit their ability to prepare their

defense to the charges they now face. When you compare the sentences and conditions of other prisoners it is clear that these women are being persecuted for their political beliefs.

At the same time the government literally isolates these lesbians and other political prisoners and Prisoners of War by cutting them off in segregation units, it would like to isolate them from *us* by labeling them terrorists and extremists. Unfortunately many of us have assisted the government in condemning our own sisters who have been charged with engaging in armed struggle and/or destroying government property. Even though some of us may not agree with armed struggle as a strategy for social change, we cannot let the government decide strategy for us. We are doing just that if we jump on the bandwagon and disassociate ourselves from women whom the government labels as terrorists. We should instead commit ourselves to the dialogue that is necessary to resolve and accept our differences while remaining conscious of our commonalities.

Not only does the label terrorist help the government justify the cruel and unusual punishment directed at Political Prisoners, but it helps justify government attacks on our own community. For example, the FBI and other police forces have attempted to justify their extensive surveillance and infiltration of progressive organizations (including gay and lesbian groups) during the past few years by claiming to be looking for terrorists. If we agree with the "terrorist" label, we help open the door to the suppression of all efforts for social change.

Many of us, no doubt, share similar lesbian herstories with Judy, Laura and Linda. Most of us probably share some perspectives with them as well. When we agree with the government's effort to "criminalize" their activities, it is like cutting off our own arms. They are truly a part of our community and, along with other political prisoners and prisoners of war, need and deserve our support.

JUDY CLARK: "Always, throughout my seven years in prison, I came back to certain fundamentals, over and over, such that I know them as my bedrock, my home, my being. In that bedrock is my identity as a revolutionary, and my identification with other oppressed peoples around the

world and in this country, with people in struggle for self-determination and empowerment. In that bedrock is my identity as a lesbian, my sense of community with other lesbians, my passions and love for women and sometimes (when I'm lucky) a woman, and a universe of emotions as a mother."

Laura and Linda are expected to go to trial with four co-defendants, Marilyn Buck, Susan Rosenberg, Allan Berkman and Tim Blunk, at the time this goes to press. They have been charged with resisting the policies and practices of the United States government through violent and illegal means. The specific acts in question involve the bombing of the u.s. capital and a number of military installations in the D.C. area. The bombings caused no personal injuries.

The six, who call themselves the "resistance conspiracy defendants," have been held in the D.C. jail awaiting trial since May 1988. During that time they have been subject to many human rights violations. They never get to see the light of day, they have been shackled and chained and denied access to legal counsel. Generally, the government is doing whatever it can to inhibit their ability to prepare a defense. Laura Whitehorn is the only one who is not currently serving time on a conviction. She should be out on bail but the court refuses to even give her a hearing on the matter.

The indictment itself amounts to a human rights violation, as the charges are clearly politically motivated. The government is expending exorbitant sums to try these "resistors," four of whom are already serving sentences in excess of 40 years.

The Justice Dept./FBI wants to send out a clear message that people like Laura and Linda are terrorists by putting on a "show trial." They will be tried in a special courtroom behind a plexiglass wall, intended to prejudice the jury.

Show your support. Write Judy, Laura and Linda. If you want to comment on this article, dialogue, argue or just to say hello, your letters will be very welcome.

• Judy Clark, 83G313, Bedford Hills Prison, 247 Harris Road, Bedford Hills, NY 10507

• Laura Whitehorn, 220-858, DC Detention Facility, 1901 "D" Street, SE, Washington, DC 20003

• Linda Evans, 233-411, DC Detention Facility, 1901 "D" Street, SE, Washington, DC 20003

For more information contact: Bayside Legal Advocates, Kalman/Lederman, 67-D Hoff Street, San Francisco, CA 94110.

Not Vanishing, poetry and prose by Chrystos. (1988, Press Gang, 603 Powell St., Vancouver, B.C. V6A 1H2 Canada)

This is a powerful book, written by a powerful woman. The subject matter embraces and explores Chrystos' various identities (Native American, lesbian, incest survivor, ex-psychiatric prisoner, spiritual seeker, maid, childless) and the intersection of these identities.

"Dr. A told me being Indian didn't matter/ said I had
Character Psychosis . . . My Visions she assured me were
part of my sickness/ a tunnel my eyes couldn't light"

(Doctor's Favorite Color)

"it's such a fine/ fine line/ between my instincts & their
sanity laws"

(Crazy Grandpa Whispers)

Much of Chrystos' work is to strip away myths about who Native Americans are, and to reveal the truth of her life/our lives.

"My tendons stretched brittle with anger/ do not look
like white roots of peace"

(I Walk In the History of My People)

In one of my favorite Chrystos poems, "Today Was a Bad Day Like TB," she delivers a stinging indictment of cultural imperialism:

"Today was a day I wanted to beat up the smirking man
wearing/ a pack with a Haida design from Moe's book-
store/ Listen Moe's How many Indians do you have
working there?/ How much money are you sending the
Haida people to use their sacred raven design?"

Chrystos speaks pain and truth about the consequences of incest.

"Praying for relief I've buried you therapied you/ talked
you into blue streaks & scars cut my arms my breasts/
expelled a thousand seeds Wet clay to your fist I/

couldn't drink enough shoot up enough spread my legs
enough/ hundreds of strangers & worse"

(Bitter Teeth)

"Eli," a long poem about a boy child beaten to death, has haunted me since I first read it months ago. In this work Chrystos explores the cycles of violence and the role we each play in their perpetuation. How seductive, how familiar, violence becomes.

"Beaten too often/ one has ruts where it is so easy to be
beaten again/ It is all I can do/ to love those who don't
beat me/ because they are such strangers."

She acknowledges what it means that she is not a mother, tells us she sent a boy child and his mother (her lover) away because she could not love him.

Chrystos also gives us line drawings and poems depicting her spiritual journeys.

"I wait for the wings on my wall to speak to me/ guide my
hungers teach me winds I can't reach"

(Wings of a Wild Goose)

Some of these journeys are in the lands of lesbian love.

"her mouth takes me her/ tongue tells long dancing
stories of flight stars darkness burst/ fingers flicker in my
bones"

(Double Phoenix)

Many lesbian authors write in celebration of our bodies and the natural world. Chrystos' distinctive voice is especially apparent in "Fresh Out," a prose piece in which she calls on the elements to get her through the day.

"Listen sun you girl that gets up every morning
before the rest of us & hauls ass across the whole damn sky
every day all day until your feet hurt too

"Listen Sun give me a little courage for this joint"

Most of the poems are dedicated to individuals important in Chrystos' life. In addition, the book ends with extensive acknowledgements because, as Chrystos tells us, "Nothing is pos-

sible without relationship." My only real complaint is that the poems are not dated.

This book will push you to go further in your understanding of WHAT IT ALL MEANS. Buy it. Read it. Give it as a gift. Go further.

— Barbara Ruth

A Lesbian Photo Album —The Lives of Seven Lesbian Feminists, by Cathy Cade. (Waterwomen Books, 3022 Ashbrook Court, Oakland, CA 94601, 1987, \$14.95. California residents add \$1.04 sales tax per copy, shipping prepaid.)

As a lesbian, living in a homophobic society, I hunger for reflections of myself, while I simultaneously fear being recognized and known as I am. The life stories of seven lesbians are courageously revealed through the photographs in Cathy Cade's *A Lesbian Photo Album*. These women's stories illustrate the diversity and commonality of lesbian lives. These women are Asian, white, Black, Latina and Jewish. They are disabled and able bodied. Sometimes they go through periods of tremendous emotional strain. Some are mothers, some are thin, others fat. They are each of us and at the same moment uniquely themselves. It took tremendous courage for each woman to reveal her story. To quote Audre Lorde, "We fear the visibility without which we cannot truly live . . . And that visibility which makes us most vulnerable is also the source of our greatest strength." Homophobia, the fear of lesbians and gays, not only isolates us from each other, but keeps us from knowing ourselves.

I met Cathy Cade, the photographer, author, and publisher of *A Lesbian Photo Album*, in the early 1970's. We were on women's land at a workshop on women and creativity, in a consciousness-raising group. We were telling our stories, in photographs and through words. The personal was political. Our stories counted. Our ideals were strong. We were creating lesbian culture and lesbian nation. The politically repressive 1980's ushered in a greater lesbian invisibility as well as less time and energy to create

lesbian culture. Finally, while on vacation on women's land, I had the time to savour *A Lesbian Photo Album*. I was hungry for this inspiration, to be once again reminded of the beauty and strength of our lesbian lives. Each woman became a new friend. In my experience the warmth and caring of friendship with people different from myself brings me freedom from my racism, classism, able-bodyism, and other oppressive conditioning. Through knowing each of these women's stories, I let go of more stereotypes and allowed for the complexity of their lives. This book inspired me to pull out my photographs, to honor where I come from and the strength it took to get to where I am now.

A Lesbian Photo Album is about seven women thirty-five to forty-five years old. The "transitional generation, most of us were adult before we even heard the word feminism." The historical introduction by lesbian feminist Lois Rita Helmbold chronicles our common lesbian history. "This book examines the ways in which our pasts color our present and asks what we are doing to transform ourselves and our society. It is another small piece of the pot, unearthed and dusted off, placed with the already collected fragments that will someday form a comprehensive lesbian history."

A Lesbian Photo Album challenges stereotypical images of lesbianism. This book expands our awareness of who we are and opens up new options. Some of my favorite photos are: a nude of Ann, pensive and pregnant; Willyce, taking a long hard look at herself in the mirror during the time when she was anxiety ridden with agoraphobia; Jeri's lesbian Aunt Elsie, sitting arm in arm and obviously enjoying her woman lover, circa 1940; Cathy cradling her son Carly and laughing uproariously; Judy holding a statue of the Great Goddess with a fat sensual body remarkably similar to Judy's.

Treat yourself to an affirmation of who you are and our evolving lesbian culture. The 150 photos are high quality reproductions and these women's stories are fascinating reading. Buy *A Lesbian Photo Album* at your women's bookstore or order directly from Waterwomen Books. You'll be in for a pleasant surprise!

— Nelly Kaufer

Books Received

Reclaiming Medusa, short stories by contemporary Puerto Rican Women, edited and translated by Diana Vélez, 1988, \$8.95, Spinsters/Aunt Lute, PO Box 410687, SF, CA 94141.

Why Can't Sharon Kowalski Come Home? Sharon's lover's chronicle of the case to regain access to and a life with Karen, after a car accident left her seriously disabled. Includes information and forms to create a Durable Power of Attorney, by Karen Thompson and Julie Andrzejewski, 1988, \$10.95, Spinsters/Aunt Lute.

All the Muscle you Need, an Eliza Pirex Mystery about the disappearance of an old friend, set in the San Francisco Bay area by Diana McRae, 1988, \$8.95, Spinsters/Aunt Lute.

The Lesbian S/M Safety Manual is more or less what it seems, edited by Pat Califia, 1988, \$7.95, Lace Publications, PO Box 10037, Denver, CO 80210.

The First Stroke, short stories of dyke passion and power in the S/M vein by Cappy Kotz, 1988, \$7.95, Lace Publications.

Daughters of Khaton, one female and five males land on an all-women's planet, by Merrill Mushroom, 1988, \$7.95, Lace Publications.

Mundane's World, a mythic woman-centered first novel from Judy Grahn, 1988, \$10.95, Crossing Press, PO Box 1048, Freedom, CA 95019.

The Prosperine Papers, a middle-aged midwestern dyke struggles with her grandmother for access to a lesbian's unpublished papers, by Jan Clausen, 1988, \$8.95, Crossing Press.

Alive & Well, A Lesbian Health Guide, by Cuca Hepburn, Ph.D., with Bonnie Gutierrez, RN, CPNA, 1988, \$10.95, Crossing Press.

Red Flower — Rethinking Menstruation, including acne, PMS, menopause, myths, dreams and more, by Dena Taylor, 1988, \$8.95, Crossing Press.

Through Other Eyes — Animal Stories by Women, a collection from a wide variety of authors, edited by Irene Zahava, 1988, \$8.95, Crossing Press.

Feminist in the Dark — Reviewing the Movies, reviews of recent flicks of interest to women, by Kathi Maio, 1988, \$7.95, Crossing Press.

Footprints, a gay mystery in the WomanSleuth series, about the baby market, by Kelly Bradford, 1988, \$6.95, Crossing Press.

Clio Browne, Private Investigator, a mystery in the WomanSleuth series, by Dolores Komo, 1988, \$6.95, Crossing Press.

Naming Ourselves, Naming Our Children: Resolving the Last Name Dilemma, by Sharon Lebell, 1988, \$6.95, Crossing Press.

A Mistress Moderately Fair, a playwright and an actress with secrets in a 17th-century romance, by Katherine Sturtevant, 1988, \$8.95, Alyson Publications, 40 Plympton St., Boston, MA 02118.

Crush, a high-school lesbian romance, by Janet Fitcher, 1988, \$6.95, Alyson.

Dead Heat, a new dyke adventure with the cast from *Dancer Dawkins* and the *California Kid*, by Willyce Kim, 1988, \$6.95, Alyson.

Macho Slut, lesbian SM stories and philosophy by Pat Califia, 1988, \$8.95, Alyson.

Testimonies: A Collection of Lesbian Coming Out Stories by 22 dykes from a wide spectrum of backgrounds, ed. Sarah Holmes, 1988, \$7.95, Alyson.

Take Back the Night, a 13 month calendar of nights. Likely you have the calendars you need by now, but this is a very sweet lesbian spirited wall hanging you might still want to get, ed. by Mary Blaettler and Terese Armstrong, Full Womoon Prod., PO Box 1205, Santa Cruz, CA 95061.

Ladies' Night introduces Meg Lacey, feminist private eye, bringing child pornographers to justice, by Elisabeth Bowers, 1988, \$8.95, The Seal Press, 3131 Western Ave., Suite 410, Seattle, WA 98121-1028.

The Last Draw, a thriller about a series of murders of men in Stockholm, by Elisabeth Peterzan, trans. from Swedish by Laura Desertrain, 1988, \$8.95, The Seal Press.

Hard-Hatted Women, stories of struggle and success in the trades, edited by Molly Martin, 1988, \$10.95, The Seal Press.

Heavy Gilt — when the homophobic brother disappears, it's a lesbian dinner party whodunnit, by Dolores Klaich, 1988, \$8.95, Naiad Press, PO Box 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302.

Double Daughter, the third in the Nyla Wade mystery series, by Vicki P. McConnell, 1988, \$8.95, The Naiad Press.

Seventeen Syllables and other stories about the lives of Japanese women in and out of World War II internment camps by Hisaye Yamamoto, 1988, \$9.95, Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, PO Box 908, Latham, NY 12110.

Desert Run, poems and stories, a second book from Mitsuye Yamada, 1988, \$7.95, Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press.

As the Road Curves, cool dyke journalist climbs into her van and goes on a quest, by Elizabeth Dean, 1988, \$8.95, New Victoria Publishers, Inc., Box 27, Norwich, VT 05055.

Found Goddesses — *Asphalta to Viscera*, a tour through the communal rituals of dykedom and a categorization of the spirits we invoke, as

revealed to Morgan Grey and Julia Penelope with illustrations by Alison Bechdel, 1988, \$7.95, New Victoria Publishers.

Aids: The Women — covers women with AIDS/ARC, families & friends, professional women dealing with AIDS, educators, the lesbian community, prostitution, prevention, resources. Edited by Ines Rieder and Patricia Ruppelt, 1988, \$9.95, Cleis Press, PO Box 8933, Pittsburgh, PA 15221.

Inessential Woman — Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought, an examination of who the “we” is in (mostly straight) feminist theory, by Elizabeth V. Spelman, 1989, \$22.95 cloth, Beacon Press, 25 Beacon St., Boston, MA 02108.

A Passion for Friends — Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection, a wonderful work that helps us move our hearts and minds forward together, by Janice G. Raymond, 1986, \$10.95, Beacon Press.

Dreaming the Dark — Magic, Sex and Politics, new edition with new preface by Starhawk, 1988, \$10.95, Beacon Press.

Esta puente, mi espalda: Voces de mujeres tercermundistas en los Estados Unidos, edited and adapted by Cherríe Moraga and Ana Castillo with translations by Ana Castillo and Norma Alarcón, is the Spanish edition of *This Bridge Called My Back* edited by Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, 1988, \$10, Ism Press, PO Box 12447, SF, CA 94112.

A Legal Guide for Lesbian and Gay Couples (Fifth Edition), is what it says it is — an important resource for those of us in relationships, by attorneys Hayden Curry & Denis Clifford, 1989, \$17.95, Nolo Press, 950 Parker St., Berkeley, CA 94710.

Your Skin Is A Country, a first book of poems by Nora Mitchell, 1988, \$8.95, Alice James Books, 33 Richdale Ave., Cambridge, MA 02140.

Memoir, intense poems ranging from nuclear fear to AIDS by Honor Moore, 1988, \$11.95, Chicory Blue Press, Goshen, CT 06756.

For Lesbians Only — A Separatist Anthology contains nearly 600 pages of separatist documents from 1970-86, an amazing and essential compilation that belongs in every dyke’s home. Edited by Sarah Lucia Hoagland and Julia Penelope, 1988, £8.95 (check price at your local bookstore), Onlywomen Press, Ltd., 38 Mount Pleasant, London WC1X 0AP England.

Lesbian Ethics: Toward New Value, a ground-breaking redefinition of ethical theory and examination of lesbian community interactions by Sarah Lucia Hoagland, 1988, \$14.95, Institute of Lesbian Studies, PO Box 60242, Palo Alto, CA 94306.

Contributors' Notes

Caryatis Cardea is a 38-year-old working class dyke, Irish and French-Canadian. Still separatist after all these years.

Anne Corey is a 41-year-old poet, playwright and teacher living in Park Slope, Brooklyn with her lover and four cats. Her poems have appeared in the anthology *We're Working on It* and the chapbook *Love Bytes*. Her play "Another Thursday Afternoon" won a contest sponsored by the Women's Community Theatre of Northampton, MA.

Max Hammond Dashú is the author of the *Secret History of the Witches*, an unpublished book on European pagan traditions. She also paints cosmologies of the goddess. A catalog of art prints and cards is available to senders of of an SASE to PO Box 3511, Oakland, CA 94609.

Betty Dudley was born in Missouri and now lives and works in San Francisco, Calif. She's in the editorial group of *Sinister Wisdom*, and is a future Lotto winner.

Lee Evans: I am a white Lesbian Separatist of Welsh-German-Mexican descent living in Cleveland, Ohio. It ain't all that bad. I can't imagine why this information is interesting to anyone other than my friends, which leads me to the next question: Are there any ghostwriters who know how to spice up these little bios? It's so hard to make yourself sound interesting in five sentences. Can I put in my picture next time, Elana?

Carolyn Gage is a lesbian playwright in Portland, OR. Her play "The Second Coming of Joan of Arc" was published in SW #35. Gage is currently revising a musical based on the life of the athlete Babe Didrikson. She is also the initiator of the Women's Rape Museum Project, a project to establish the first museum/memorial with exhibits to honor our victims and survivors.

Pamela Gray is a Jewish lesbian poet, playwright, comedian, teacher and co-mother living in Oakland. Her work appears in the anthologies *New Lesbian Writing*, *Politics of the Heart* and *Naming the Waves: Contemporary Lesbian Poetry*.

Anita Green: Thanks to Lisa Manning, whose writing inspires me, whose love supports me ... who said "send in that poem."

Anne Haines: I live in Bloomington, Indiana, where I am a member of the writing and performance group Source: Women Writers. My poems have recently appeared in *Common Lives*/

Lesbian Lives, Images, and Calapooya Collage. I love music, my cats, the play of light & shadow on a woman's face...

Jan Hardy: I've published one chapbook and am editing an anthology of erotic lesbian poetry. My work has appeared in *For Lesbians Only: A Separatist Anthology*, *Sinister Wisdom* and *Hurricane Alice*. For some reason, lesbians are my most receptive audience.

Julie Justicz: I'm a lesbian feminist, born in England, living in Atlanta, Georgia, with my cat, Harriet. I'm an attorney — and I love to write — have to write. I want to live life intensely!

Marilyn Kalman is a fat, Jewish dyke. She is one of the founders of Bayside Legal Advocates, a San Francisco lesbian law firm. She also works with the Out of Control Committee, an S.F.-based group, that does support work for women political prisoners and prisoners of war.

Nelly Kaufer has been involved in lesbian publishing for the past fifteen years. She wrote, published and/or edited *A Woman's Touch* and *Country Lesbians*. She is currently writing her thesis on lesbian spirituality.

Debbie E. Langlois: Currently I am a full-time student at North-eastern Illinois University in Chicago. Most recently I completed a project through the Women's Studies Department doing court advocacy for women and nighttime street outreach work on Chicago's westside (an old neighborhood of mine). Special thanks go to Bette Tallen and Shelley Bannister for encouraging me in this area.

Rachel Lederman is a commie Jew dyke who lives in San Francisco where she practices law, knits sweaters, paints pictures and is active in the feminist anti-imperialist movement.

Anna Lee: I am a black lesbian separatist. I have recently returned to the midwest.

Anna Livia is 33, white, Anglo-Irish, and tired of racism and anti-semitism being greeted with glee as the tactical error of a rival behavior. Furthermore, one cannot disown their Christianity merely by despising it.

Linda Marie Nolte: I am a 29-year-old short, fat lesbian with Northern European Fairy ancestry who loves living in Minneapolis. My drawings provide an emotional anchor, a safe channel for expressing my subconscious self.

Minnie Bruce Pratt is the author of two books of poetry, *The Sound of One Fork* and *We Say We Love Each Other*. She has recently finished a new book of poems, *Crime Against Nature*, about being a lesbian and the mother of her two sons.

Linda Quinlan, New Orleans, LA, presently works for an oil company that is threatening to close down and writes articles for a gay and lesbian newspaper that has just started. Her poetry has been published in *Conditions*, *Sing Heavenly Muse* and others.

Viki Radden: I'm not a lesbian. I work as a junior high school teacher and stereotype-buster in a small town in western Japan, miles from English bookstores, Mexican food and live music.

Mary Carol Randall lives in Oakland with a dog and two cats. She is involved in a women's writing group and also in a lesbian affinity group, *Revolting Lesbians*.

Ruthann Robson lives outside of Tallahassee, Florida. A collection of her short fiction is forthcoming from Firebrand Books, later this year. "Learning to Read" is part of an ongoing series, entitled *CECILE*.

Barbara Ruth is a Native American lesbian writer who is currently midwiving a new publication: *Out/Inside* — a women's news journal focusing on lesbian prisoners. Watch *Sinister Wisdom* for more info.

stomp, bruiser, fang, sparks ... and footnote: We 5 dykes live in San Francisco and are from working class and middle class backgrounds. All of us are white. One is self-employed as a crafts-woman, one is an alternative healer and the rest of us get and lose jobs as we can. Two of us are unemployed at this moment, or most moments. All of us do prison work, and two of us are ex political prisoners. Three of us are butch, and if you'll send a SASE we'll tell you who's available. Send \$20.00 and we'll send you life-sized photographs for your home or office (specify which butch).

Bette Tallen is a 38-year-old Jewish lesbian feminist separatist who lives in Mankato Minnesota where she chairs the Women's Studies Department (which has a wonderful M.S. program in Women's Studies). There are a few of us doing good work in lesbian theory here — but we're always looking for a few recruits!

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CALLS FOR SUBMISSION

EROTIC LESBIAN POETRY needed for anthology. No s/m, no previously published work. Deadline 6/1/89. Send with SASE to Sidewalk Revolution Press, PO Box 9062, Pittsburgh, PA 15224.

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WORD OF MOUTH: SHORT-SHORT WRITINGS BY WOMEN. Submissions on any topic, any form except poetry, app. 500 words each. Irene Zahava, 307 W. State St., Ithaca, NY 14850. Deadline: June, 1989.

LAS CHICANAS — a special issue of *FRONTIERS: A Journal of Women Studies*. Theme: Chicanas in an International Context/Chicanas en un contexto internacional. Material in all forms is welcome, particular interest in Chicana studies. Three copies to guest editors Cordelia Candelaria & Mary Romero, *FRONTIERS*, Women Studies Program, CB 246, Univ. of Colo., Boulder, CO 80309-0246. Deadline: Cinco de Mayo, 1989.

LA BELLA FIGURA — a literary journal for Italian-American women, with a special welcome for lesbians. Send SASE for guidelines and subscription info to Rose Romano, PO Box 411223, SF, CA 94141-1223.

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FEMINIST NON-FICTION BOOKS and book proposals are being solicited by South End Press, 116 St. Botolph St., Boston, MA 02115.

UPCOMING CONFERENCES

SECOND ANNUAL LESBIAN SEPARATIST CONFERENCE AND GATHERING, June 15-18, 1989, near Milwaukee, WI. To provide Lesbian Separatists opportunity to exchange ideas, present papers, participate in workshops & discussions, play, expand Separatist networks & spark new friendships. Sliding scale: \$85-\$150 includes lodging and meals. Some work exchange slots. For more info: Burning Bush, PO Box 3065, Madison, WI 53704-0065, USA.

WOMEN SHARING SPIRIT/SHARING SKILLS, April 14-16, 1989, central WI and WOMEN'S WELLNESS/WOMEN'S HEALING, July 21-23, southwest WI. For more information and brochure: Conference, RCG, PO Box 6021, Madison, WI 53716.

PARALLELS & INTERSECTIONS: a conference on Racism and Other Forms of Oppression, April 6-9, 1989. For info, write: Women Against Racism Committee, c/o Women's Resource and Action Center, Univ. of Iowa, 130 N. Madison St., Iowa City, IA 52242.

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ISIS BARTER NETWORK — a lesbian barter company, is building a network to utilize womynmade products and services. Great idea. Write: 113 E. Whiteman Street., Yellow Springs, OH 45387 for more information.

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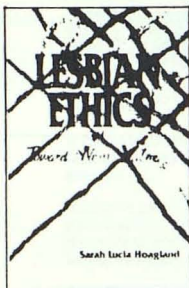
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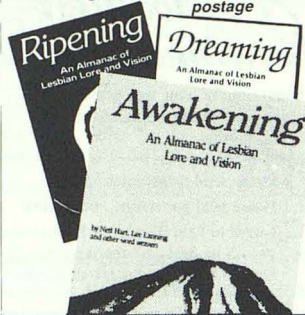
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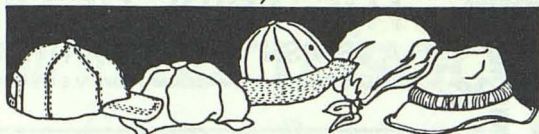
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a theory
that is
explicitly
lesbian
and
revolutionary
look like?”**

—*Bette Tallen*