

Radical Sense  
Reader Volume 3

**Kathy Acker**  
**All Girls Together**

ALL GIRLS TOGETHER; The Spice Girls are the biggest, brashest girlie group ever to have hit the British mainstream. Kathy Acker is an avant-garde American writer and academic. They met up in New York to swap notes - on boys, girls, politics. And what they really, really want.

Fifty-second street. West Side, New York City. Hell's Kitchen - one of those areas into which no one would once have walked unless loaded. Guns or drugs or both. But now it has been gentrified: the beautiful people have won. A man in middle-aged-rocker uniform, tight black jeans and nondescript T-shirt, lets Nigel, the photographer, and me through the studio doorway; then a chipmunk-sort-of-guy in shorts, with a Buddha tattooed on one of his arms, greets us warmly. This is Muff, the band's publicity officer. We're about to meet the Girls . . .

They are here to rehearse for an appearance on Saturday Night Live. Not only is this their first live TV performance, it's also the first time they'll be playing with what Mel C calls a 'real band'. If the Girls are to have any longevity in the music industry, they will have to break into the American market; and for this they will need the American media. Both the Girls and their record company believe that their appearance here tonight might do the trick. There is a refusal among America's music critics to take the Spice Girls seriously. The Rolling Stone review of Spice, their first album, refers to them as 'attractive young things . . . brought together by a manager with a marketing concept'. The main complaint, or explanation for disregard, is that they are a 'manufactured band'. What can this mean in a society of McDonald's, Coca-Cola and En Vogue? However, an e-mail from a Spice fan mentions that, even though he loves the girls, he detects a 'couple of stereotypes surrounding women in the band's general image. The brunette is the woman every man wants to date. Perfect for an adventure on a midnight train, or to hire as your mistress-secretary. The blonde is the woman you take home to mother, whereas the redhead is the wild woman, the woman-with-lots-of -evil-powers.' So who are these Girls? And how political is their notorious 'Girl Power'?

Even though I have seen many of their videos and photos, as soon as I'm in front of these women, I am struck by how they look far more remarkable than I had expected, even though Mel C is trying not to look as lovely as she is. I had intended to say something else, but instead I find myself asking them: 'If paradise existed, what would it look like?' Geri speaks first, and she is, I think, reprimanding me for being idealistic. 'Money makes the world what it is today,' she says, almost before I have time to think about my sudden outburst, 'a world infested with evil. All sorts of wars are going on at the moment. Everyone's kind of bickering, wanting to better themselves because their next -door neighbour's got a better lawn. That kind of thing.'

'Greed,' Victoria adds.

Mel C: 'Instead of trying to be better than someone else, you have to try to better yourself.'

In a few minutes, they are explaining to me that the Spice Girls is a type of paradise, Spice Girls is a lifestyle. 'It's community.' That's Geri again. She and Mel B - one in a funky, antique Hawaiian shirt, the other in diaphanous yellow bell-bottoms and top - do most of the talking. Mel C, in her gym clothes, is the quietest.

Geri: 'We're a community in which each one of us shines individually, without making any of the others feel insecure. We liberate each other. A community should be liberating. Nelson Mandela said that you know when someone is brilliant when having that person next to you makes you feel good. "Not envious," adds her cohort, Mel B. These are the two baddest Girls. At least on the surface. I suspect otherwise. 'It inspires you.' Geri again. 'That is what life's about. People should be inspiring.'

I can't keep up with these Girls. My generation, spoon-fed Marx and Hegel, thought we could change the world by altering what was out there - the political and economic configurations, all that seemed to make history. Emotions and personal - especially sexual - relationships were for girls, because girls were unimportant. Feminism changed this landscape; in England, the advent of Margaret Thatcher, sad to say, changed it more. The individual self became more important than the world.

To my generation, this signals the rise of selfishness; for the generation of the Spice Girls, self-consideration and self-analysis are political. When the Spices say, 'We're five completely separate people,' they're talking politically. 'Like when you're in a relationship,' Mel B takes over, 'and you're in love, you feel you're only you when you're with that person, so when you leave that person, you think 'I'm not me'. That's so wrong. It's downhill from then on, in yourself spiritually and in your whole environment. In this band, it's different. Each of us is just the way we are, and each of us respects that.'

'As Melanie says,' adds Geri, 'each of us wants to be her own person and, without snatching anyone else's energy, bring something creative and new and individual to the group. We're proof this is happening. When the Spice Girls first started as a unit, we respected the qualities we found in each other that we didn't have in ourselves. It was like, 'Wow! That's the Spicey life vibey thing, isn't it?'

Geri turns even more paradoxical: 'Normally, when you get fans of groups, they want to act like you, they copy what you're wearing, for instance. Whereas our fans, they might have pigtails and they might wear sweatclothes, but they are so individual, it's unbelievable. When you speak to them, they've got so much balls! It's like we've collected a whole group of our people together! It's really, really mad. I can remember someone coming up to us and going, 'Do you know what? I've just finished with my boyfriend! And you've given me the incentive to go 'Fuck this!' At this, the Spices cheer. up any hope of narrative continuity, I ask the girls if they want boys. 'Some of us are in relationships.' Mel B. 'I live with my boyfriend. For three years now, yeah.'

I tell them that I've never been good at balancing sexual love and work. 'Of course you can. It doesn't make me a lesser person; to be in a relationship makes me a better person. Because I can still go out and . . . flirting is natural.' I'm listening to Mel B, but all I can think, at the moment, is how beautiful she is. 'I can stay out all night and come in when I want. Your whole life doesn't have to change just because you're with somebody else. "It depends on the individual,' says Geri. 'I think whoever we would chose to be with should respect the way we are . . . and our job as well . . .' Mel B. 'The way we are together. None of us would be interested in a man that wanted to dominate, wanted to pull you down, and wanted you to do what he wanted you to do.'

I wonder what man could handle all this. 'If one of us was to go out with a dweeb

of a man,' says Mel B, 'he would probably feel threatened by the five of us. Because we do share things about our relationships, so it's like a gang. Like a gang, but we're not. We can have relationships, but they have to be on a completely different level.'

Emma talks only about her mother, and Mel C is very quiet. What hides, I wonder, behind that face, which appears more delicate and intense than in her photos? Victoria, I learn later, is upset about an ex-boyfriend's betrayal of her confidence; throughout our discussion she looks slightly upset. Several times she says that, above all, she wants privacy. Perhaps paradise is not as simple as it seems. I know that, to find out more about these Girls, I must change the subject, but instead, I just blurt out: 'Let's stop talking about boys!' 'Yeah,' agree the Girls.

Do they think the Spice Girls will go on forever? And if not, what will they do after it ends? What do you really want to do? 'We talked about that the other day, didn't we?' Geri, sitting on the floor, turns around to the three girls sprawled on a black sofa. Emma, in a white from-the-Sixties dress, perches on a high chair. Their hair has been done, their faces powdered, and they're ready for the photo. 'I want to own restaurants,' Victoria takes the lead. She wears a skin-tight designer outfit, perfectly positioned Wonderbra and heels seemingly too high to walk on. Unlike the other girls, she never lets her mask break open. 'The entrepreneur,' remarks Mel B fondly. 'Restaurants and art,' Victoria continues. 'I've always liked art. Ever since I was . . .' She pauses. 'And I'd like a nice big house, and to fill it with, you know . . .' 'Sculptures!' Mel B. 'Nude men.' That's Mel C.

All the girls are laughing. Victoria admits - and her emotions finally start to show - that's she's always fancied doing art. A few years ago, she and Geri were going to return to college, but they didn't have the time. Now the others are teasing her about her shoes.

I like these girls. I like being with them.

'I don't know what I want to do.' Mel C. The Spices who haven't yet said anything are now talking. 'At the moment I am completely into what I'm doing, and I find it hard to think, right now, what I want to do later on.' Mel B.

'I want a big family, like the Waltons,' Emma admits. 'I like taking care of people, I love kids.' 'You can look after mine.' Mel C.

Everyone's saying something. Victoria wants to live with her sister, and maybe her brother; Emma's thinking of her mother. I'm beginning to realise how different from each other the Girls are. Mel C says she likes living alone, but wishes she were geographically closer to her family.

'Me and Geri,' pipes up Mel B, who's rarely silent for more than a minute, 'come from up north. It's like living in a little community, isn't it? And moving down into London, it's like moving into the big wild world. I don't even know my next-door neighbour, do you?' 'No,' answers Mel C.

I like these girls. They're home girls.

'I'd be in a cult, or join a naturist camp or something, and just live there, like back in the Sixties in the hippy days,' Mel B is gesticulating, 'where everything's just One Love, everything's free, and there are no set rules, where nobody judges you...'

Geri tells me that she is a jack-of-all-trades. After speculating whether she might do her own TV show, or go into films, write a movie script, she announces that her model is Sylvester Stallone.

I think of Brigitte Nielsen. 'I'll tell you why.' He couldn't get a part in Hollywood, she explains, so he wrote, directed and produced Rambo himself. 'I just think that's what it takes; I always love it when the underdog comes through.'

The Girls have been in show business for years. Emma started when she was three. All of the others were professional by the age of 17 or 18. I'm beginning to understand why these Girls have been picked, consciously or unconsciously, by their generation to represent that generation. Especially, but not only, the female sector. In a society still dominated by class and sexism, very few of those not born to rule, women especially, are able to make choices about their own work and lifestyle. Very few know freedom. None of the Spices, not even Victoria, was born privileged nor, as they themselves note, are they traditional beauties. Christine, a student of mine, watching them on Saturday Night Live, remarked to me: 'They're not even slick dancers or exceptional singers! They're just the girl-next-door!'

And they are; they're just girls; as more than one of them remarked to me, 'We never really had a chance until this happened!' They're the girls never heard from before this in England; look, there are lots of them; ones who've known Thatcherite, post-Thatcherite society and nothing else, and now, thanks to the glory and the strangeness of British rock-pop society, they've found a voice. Listen to the voices of those who didn't go to Oxford or Cambridge, or even to Sussex or to art school...

Geri: 'I didn't really know that much, you know, history, but I knew about the suffragettes. They fought. It wasn't that long ago. They died to get a vote. The women's vote. Bloody ass-fucking mad, do you know what I mean? You remember that and you think, fucking hell. But to get back to what Victoria was saying about us, that we never got anywhere, you know, the underdog thing. This is why I feel so passionate. We've been told, time and time again, you're not pretty enough, you're too fat, you're too thin . . .'

All the Spice Girls are now roaring.' . . . You're not tall enough, you're not white, you're not black. What I passionately feel is that it is so wrong to have to fit into a role or a mould in order to succeed. What I think is fan-fucking-tastic about us now is that we are not perfect and we have made a big success of ourselves. I'm swelling with pride. 'But you are babes.' They all protest.

'We were all individually beaten down . . . Collectively, we've got something going,' says Geri. 'Individually, I don't think we'd be that great.' 'There's a chemistry that runs through us and gives us . . . where I'm bad at something, Melanie's good, or Geri's good at something at which the rest of us are bad,' says Victoria.

Look, I say, I'm feeling stranger and stranger about these politics based on individualism. There are lots of girls who have the same backgrounds as they do, right? 'Right.'

So what is holding those girls down? Keeping them from doing what they really want to do? They start to discuss this. I can hardly make out who's saying what in the ensuing commotion. I hear 'society and conditioning'; another one, Emma

perhaps, is talking about being in showbiz, receiving job rejection after job rejection; she's saying how strong you have to be to keep bouncing back. Geri mentions Freud, then states that parents' beliefs often hold back a child, parents and then the child's reception in her school.

'When you go and see a careers officer,' ponders Mel C, 'and you sit down and say, 'I want to be a spaceman', instead of responding 'Go study astrophysics', they go, 'Yeah, but what do you really want to do?' That is so wrong. I think there should be a class in - what do you call it? - self-motivation. Self-motivation classes, self-esteem classes.'

I still feel that a bit of economic realism is missing here, but I can't get a word in edgewise. Not in all the girl excitement. These females are angry.

'I think it all goes back to everyone wanting to feel that they're part of an ongoing society,' Geri tries to analyse. 'The humdrum nine-to-five, you know what it's like . . . What do you do when you leave school? You go and get a job to have money to pay off the mortgage, you get a flat and have a nice boyfriend, pay off your bills, you go to work with your briefcase and your suit, and that's it. That's people's normal, everyday thing, isn't it? And if you branch out from that, it's . . . well, what does she think she's doing? It's going against the grain a bit - which not many people do. It's not even going against the grain; it's just clinging on to the bit you want to do and thinking 'I'm going to do it, who cares?'

The Girls, including Geri, tell me that they've got an American philosophy, an American dream. 'But me,' says Mel B, 'before I was in the band, I thought I'd like to be a preacher. I still do. Something like that. They've actually got this place in London which is called Speaker's Corner. You get up on your stand there; you can speak about anything. I'd like to speak about people, the emotional or mental blocks people have, especially regarding other people, things like that. That's what the tattoo on my stomach means, 'Spirit Heart And Mind', because that's what fuels me; communication fuels me. You learn about yourself, about other people and life in general, through communication.' She says that's she's been writing since she was 11, writing everything down, 'why the world is this shape, what would happen if everyone on earth died . . .' 'Stoned questions . . .' murmurs another Spice.

'I'd love to go back to the Sixties,' Emma says in her clear voice. 'I'd love that. I wouldn't wear headbands though.'

What about some of the politics of the Sixties, I ask. Malcolm X? The fight against racism?

'The other day I watched The Killing Fields.' Now Geri's doing the talking. 'That was in the Sixties, Vietnam. I think it's very healthy that there's an element of that today. Through the media today we can see people demonstrating for human rights. In Cambodia, on the other side of the world. I think it's brilliant when you see people standing up, when they have a voice, it kicks the system, a little bit, into touch.'

But what about in England today? I mention that in the US, racism is still a big issue.

Mel B and Geri start talking about racism. Geri tells me that she's learned about

racial prejudice from Mel B, who says, 'The thing I find really bizarre about America and England . . . You say that the racism thing is worse in America, yet if you look at television here (in NYC), they're really scrupulous about making sure, for instance, that they have a black family in an advert. On the adverts in England, you wouldn't find that.'

Suddenly all the Spices are talking among themselves. I can't understand anything. Then we're on the subject of Madonna, of people who have inspired us, and Geri starts speaking about Margaret Thatcher. Why she admires her. 'But we won't go down there!'

'Don't go down there!' advise the Girls.

'We won't go down there, but . . .' and Geri, who never seems to listen to reason, begins. She says that when politicians discuss the economy, they're just talking about shifting money from one spot to another, and someone always suffers. This is the same distrust of government that so many Americans, both on the right and left - and especially among lower and working-class people - are feeling and articulating.

Mel C says softly, 'We talked about suffragettes and getting the vote to women, and all that. But a lot of women don't vote; a lot of our generation doesn't vote. I don't. I don't feel I should because I don't know anything about politics . . . "That was what I was going to say," adds Emma.

They blame the lack of political education in schools. Whether they like or dislike Margaret Thatcher or Tony Blair, they distrust both the political industry and the related media. 'Intellectual people chatting in bathrooms,' comments Mel B. 'We are society,' exclaims Geri, 'so really . . .' 'We should be running it,' Mel B finishes the statement.

'I'd like to run it for a day,' says Victoria, looking directly at me.

'But Victoria, who's going to let you do such a job?' Geri reminds her.

'The only way to go is growth,' says Mel B.

'I think everyone's turned a bit to the spiritual life.' 'You know,' interjects Victoria, 'if you believe in evolution, we only use 20 per cent of our brain . . . if that. So it's natural that we can evolve to the next level. We've got to, really.' 'Nowadays, people do sit down and ask themselves "Why am I doing this?"' Mel B continues.

'They question themselves and what they've got around them. I know I do it, and you find your own little mission. And you fucking go for it. A lot more people are like that now.' 'Do they all feel like that? There's a general quiet, then a "Yeah" all around me.'

I ask the Spices to describe themselves. For a moment, they're lost for words. Victoria: 'I love what I'm doing. I'm with my five best friends, and I've seen some great countries. I'm happy, I'm very happy. I care a lot about my family. Regarding my personality, I'm private. There are things for me to know and no one else to find out.' She hesitates. 'I just accept the way I am. You have to make the most of it, make the best of yourself. I'm a bit of a fretter. If I'm going to do something, I want to do it properly. I want to do the best I can. I'm a perfectionist.' Emma: 'Me, I'm definitely a bit of a brat. I worry about what other people are feeling, that sort of thing.' Geri: 'I have quite an active mind. Quite eccentric, really.'

A conversationalist. I believe in fate in a big way, a very big way.'

Mel B: 'I'm always asking inward questions about things. I live off the vibes, I do, that people give me. If I don't like someone then I won't speak to them, even though something might be coming out of their mouth that I should listen to. I like to think I'm a bit of a free spirit. I don't run by any rule book. I live on the edge a little bit. I always think, well, at least I'll die happy today rather than worrying about it tomorrow.' Mel C: 'I'm very regimented. I really enjoy my own company, although I love being with other people.' I'm watching the Spice Girls perform Wannabe on Saturday Night Live, but not seeing them. In my mind, I'm seeing England. When I returned there in July last year, lad culture was in full swing. Loaded was running what had once been a relatively intellectual magazine culture.

Feminism, especially female intellectuals, had become extinct. 'Where have all the women gone to?' I asked. Then came a twist named the Spice Girls. The Spices, though they deny it, are babes - the blonde, the redhead, the dark sultry fashion model - and they're more. They both are and represent a voice that has too long been repressed. The voices, not really the voice, of young women and, just as important, of women not from the educated classes.

It isn't only the lads sitting behind babe culture, bless them, who think that babes or beautiful lower and lower-middle class girls are dumb. It's also educated women who look down on girls like the Spice Girls, who think that because, for instance, girls like the Spice Girls take their clothes off, there can't be anything 'up there'.

The Spice Girls are having their cake and eating it. They have the popularity and the popular ear that an intellectual, certainly a female intellectual, almost never has in this society, and, what's more, they have found themselves, perhaps by fluke, in the position of social and political articulation. It little matters now how the Spice Girls started - if they were a 'manufactured band'.

What does this have to do with feminism? When I lived in England in the Eighties, a multitude of women, diverse and all intellectual, were continually heard from - people such as Michele Roberts, Jeanette Winterson, Sara Maitland, Jacqueline Rose, Melissa Benn. Is it also possible that the English feminism of the Eighties might have shared certain problems with the American feminism of the Seventies? English feminism, as I remember it back then, was anti-sex. And like their American counterparts, the English feminists were intellectuals, from the educated classes. There lurked the problem of elitism, and thus class.

I am speculating, but, perhaps due to Margaret Thatcher - though it is hard to attribute anything decent to her - a populist change has taken place in England. The Spice Girls, and girls like them, and the girls who like them, resemble their American counterparts in two ways: they are sexually curious, certainly pro-sex, and they do not feel that they are stupid or that they should not be heard because they did not attend the right universities.

If any of this speculation is valid, then it is up to feminism to grow, to take on what the Spice Girls, and women like them, are saying, and to do what feminism has always done in England, to keep on transforming society as society is best transformed, with lightness and in joy.





## FIVE

### Gaga Manifesto

No party or government, no army, school or institution will ever emancipate a single person.

—Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*

It cannot be denied that the university is a place of refuge, and it cannot be accepted that the university is a place of enlightenment. In the face of these conditions one can only sneak into the university and steal what one can. To abuse its hospitality, to spite its mission, to join its refugee colony, its gypsy encampment, to be in but not of—this is the path of the subversive intellectual in the modern university.

—Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, “The University and the Undercommons”

It’s all in the game, yo.

—Omar in *The Wire*

The manifesto, from Karl Marx to Valerie Solanas, has played with utopian possibility while also proposing a plan of action. For Marx, the plan was for the workers of the world to rise up and take action against those who profit from their labor; for Solanas, the manifesto was a modest proposal, a contract with future generations of women whom she would save from the inequities of patriarchy by “cutting up men.” For the futurists, an early-nineteenth-century art movement based in Italy, the manifesto voiced a break with the past, a definitive refusal to be bound to tradition and weighed down by  
1 history and expectation. And in Lady Gaga’s 2011 video *Born This Way*, the “Monster Mother’s Manifesto” is some weird sci-fi shit

about choosing good over evil after emerging from an egg covered in goo! Most manifestos combine the radical and the reactionary, the reasonable and the preposterous, hard cold analysis with fantastical visions. I am using my Gaga Manifesto to push us further into the crisis, into the eye of the hurricane, deep into the heart of nonsense. And so ... to continue:

IN A CRISIS, IN THIS CRISIS, DON'T REMAIN CALM ... GET AGITATED AND ADD TO THE CHAOS.

Organizations are obstacles to organizing ourselves.

The Invisible Committee

Welcome to the gagapocalypse! As the environmental crisis turns from bad to worse, as wars break out like wildfire across the globe, as bankers and corporate gamblers take higher and higher shares of the global markets, and as the social rituals that formerly held communities together lose their meaning, it is time to go gaga. In a crisis, do not remain calm, do not look for the nearest exit, do not stick your head in the sand; do agitate, do make things worse, do run screaming through the street, and do refuse to return to business as usual.

Business as usual is what created this mess in the first place. Business as usual has meant that businesspeople and corporate fat cats run/ruin the world and artists are out of luck; it has meant that education, spirituality, sexuality all must function on a business model and every attempt to make changes is greeted with a pragmatic question about whether changing things will also mean making money. Making money cannot be the goal of the new feminism. Putting women in positions of power is not what gaga feminism wants. What gaga feminism wants cannot be easily summarized, but it is not an independent bank account, not a profitable nonprofit; mama does not want a brand new bag. Mama wants revolution, but gaga revolution may not be one that Karl Marx or Valerie Solanas would recognize.

And as we have seen in the 2011 riots, protests, and occupations happening around the world, especially in urban centers, we seem to have entered a new era of anticorporate and anticolonial struggle in which the form matters as much as the content. No longer satisfied with simply marching or issuing a list of demands, these new movements turn politics into performance and combine anarchist mistrust of structure with queer notions of bodily riot and antinormative disruption.

The markers of this new form of politics, in addition to the lack of a clear agenda or list of demands and the strong presence of a clear belief in the rightness of the cause, display an unusual mix of whimsy and fierce purposefulness, ludic improvisation and staying power, passive resistance and loud refusals. The occupations recognize that in an economy that engineers success for an elite few at the expense of the failure of the many, failure becomes a location for resisting, blocking, slowing, jamming the economy and the social stability that depends upon it. So, in a world where 1 percent of the population benefits from the ruin of the other 99 percent, we might want to think about failure as what Professor James C. Scott calls one of the “weapons of the weak.”<sup>1</sup> Scott draws attention to the multiple ways in which radically disempowered people have exerted their own forms of resistance through actions and inactions that can be overlooked or misread but that constitute an elaborate web of subversive gestures. Foot-dragging, feigned incompetence, stupidity, and laziness are all cast as the features of a people who cannot rule themselves and so must be ruled, but can actually be understood better as a commitment to refuse the logic of rule—be it colonial, capitalist, feudal, or neoliberal. And while there are clear and important differences between the forms of power in each system—be it power exercised bureaucratically or financially, violently or hegemonically—there are always places where the most dispersed systems of power manifest as unadulterated violence and where the most forceful modes of resistance become more creative, surreptitious, or more cunning.

The 99 percents in many ways use the language of colonialism—occupation—and the techniques of anticolonial struggle—refusal and mimicry. They also circumvent certain logics of power that would dictate the terms of resistance and engage in activities that are hard to read as action at all. They don't want to present a manifesto, they actually are themselves the manifestation of discontent. The 99 percenters simply show up, take up space, make noise, witness. This is a form of political response that doesn't announce itself as politics; instead, it enters quietly into the public sphere, sits down, and refuses to leave. Insightful commentators such as Harsha Walia have pointed out that to some indigenous peoples, the occupation movements sound a rhetoric of territorialization that is all too familiar, and so Walia suggests that the movements need to acknowledge that they are occupying already occupied lands, lands that were already peopled by native groups and that settler colonialists claimed in the land grabs of the nineteenth century. Walia gives as examples the Hudson Bay Company in Canada and the East India Company in India, both of which were corporate interests that exploited land and people in the colonial period.<sup>2</sup> But Walia goes on to acknowledge the power of these movements and explains that their power lies in their ability to be “transitional” and to eschew individual rights projects in favor of the broad goal of imagining another kind of world. Walia also cites influential philosopher Slavoj Žižek, who addressed Occupy Wall Street protestors and warned the crowd of the danger of co-optation. Žižek cautioned: “The problem is that the system pushes you to give up. Beware not only of the enemies. But also of false friends who are already working to dilute this process ... They will try to make this into a harmless moral protest.”<sup>3</sup>

Here I depart from Walia and feel compelled to name Žižek as potentially one of the co-optors himself, in that he always anticipates co-optation and often even helps it along. Žižek denounced the

4 London riots in an article titled “Shoplifters of the World Unite,”<sup>4</sup> making it seem as if the rioters were just mall-rats on a consumer

rampage. When he addressed the OWS crowd, he commented: “Carnivals come cheap. What matters is the day after, when we will have to return to normal life. Will there be any changes then? I don’t want you to remember these days you know, like ‘oh, we were young, it was beautiful.’ Remember that our basic message is ‘We are allowed to think about alternatives.’” True indeed that the basic message is that there are always alternatives, but the idea that “carnivals come cheap” misses the point of the entire occupy movement. This is a carnival, and carnivals are precisely protests, and they are protests that never envision a return to “normal life” but see normal life as one of the fictions of colonial and neocolonial power, a fiction used to bludgeon the unruly back into resignation. Like many anticolonial and anticapitalist movements, this current movement refuses to envision an outcome, eschews utopian or pragmatic conjurings of what happens on the “morning after,” precisely because the outcome will be decided upon by the process of dissent, refusal, and carnivalesque failure. All we can know for sure is that the protests signal and announce a collective awareness of the end of “normal life.”

In Glenn Beck’s favorite book to hate of the last few years, *The Coming Insurrection*, the Invisible Committee, an anonymous group of French anarchists, write on behalf of their manifesto: “Everyone agrees. It’s about to explode.” They go on to urge that we exploit the current economic crisis by blocking the economy; that we build upon the ruins of the social by reimagining relation within a “wild and massive experimentation with new arrangements and fidelities”; and that we “organize beyond and against work.”<sup>5</sup> The book is a kind of contemporary Situationist manifesto: like the Situationists, a revolutionary group also founded in France, in 1957, the Invisible Committee strives to use art and social disruption to exploit economic crisis and bring about the collapse of capitalism. The Invisible Committee, like the

5 Situationists, believe that people need to be woken from their slumber by public actions, odd and eclectic events that shock and inspire people and compel us all to look for alternatives to the

status quo. *The Coming Insurrection* is inspired in its logic and uncanny in its timing (given the recent insurrections around the globe, from Europe to the Middle East), and it unites fragments from queer theory (“the future has no future”) and punk DIY ethics (“make the most of every crisis”) with feminist insights about the implication of the family in the “great social debacle” that we called economic prosperity (“everyone feels the inanity of the sad family nucleus”). Rarely are such insights brought together on a revolutionary platform.

The Invisible Committee, unlike other anarchist projects, does not just imagine a world free of state power, it follows the thread of that concept through other organizational units that stand in for the state. And so, queer anarchism would extend the critique of institutions to the family. While many anarchist thinkers—people like Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Peter Kropotkin, Emma Goldman and Guy Debord—believed in free love or polyamory, and while some (Goldman was one) issued stinging critiques of marriage, most have paid less attention to sex, love, and the family and more to economic exchange, questions of violence and revolution. But, as the Invisible Committee makes very clear, there can be no viable concept of revolt today that does not link the personal and political, the private and the public, the particular and the general. There can be no sidelining of feminism, queer politics, questions of intimacy and kinship.

Gaga feminism leads the way to an anarchist project of cultural riot and reciprocation: what Kropotkin called “mutual aid,”<sup>6</sup> the tendency for animals to cooperate rather than compete (in the way that Darwin presumed all species competed for survival), becomes today a newly vital model for human interaction. Mutual aid or mutual protection or new notions of exchange actually flourish already in the worlds we inhabit and those we are making as we go—open- source exchanges on the Web, cooperative food collectives, subcultures, new modes of kinship, and different understandings of our mutual responsibilities exist already for the

purpose of exchange and not profit, and this notion of working with others rather than in competition is probably the only thing that will save us from the greed of free-market economies.

And it is this gaga spirit of anarchy that I believe courses through Lady Gaga's music and forms the spine of a liberatory anthem. Forget about *Born This Way* and focus on the rhythmic freefall accomplished by Lady Gaga, especially in her live performances. Lady Gaga's music may not itself stray far from pop, but when she performs it in crazy costumes and with wild abandon, we have a sense of the new world that she opens up, for young people in particular. In recent years she has performed with a number of different artists who make up a kind of compressed history of gaga feminism: Yoko Ono, for example. Yoko Ono's 2009 album, *Between My Head and the Sky*, features a collection of rather spunky songs with dark themes but a bouncy, new-wave treatment. From the track "The Sun Is Down" to the final cut, a short statement set to a sparse percussion—"It's Me, I'm Alive," the seventy-six-year-old icon yelps, howls, and chants her way through a multigenre journey to the dark side. But, in Ono's wild duet with Lady Gaga from their live show together at the Orpheum in Los Angeles in 2010, captured by a fan and posted to YouTube, the point is not to mourn a life passed or an opportunity missed or the end of light. Ono and Gaga instead ride a cacophonous tide into a funky frenzy when they howl their way through "The Sun Is Down." The two join forces for this dark duet, dark both in terms of its theme and in the refusal of the forward momentum of the pop song, and they push each other to new levels of going gaga. The short video clip on YouTube presents a very different Gaga, a very different Ono. But the duet also crafts a family resemblance between Gaga and Ono and emphasizes the dark streak that resonates through Ono's performance history. Ono, of course, has had a long career of performance art marked by masochistic presentations like *Cut Piece*, where she allows the audience to cut off her clothes, or *Painting to Be Stepped On*, in which the audience marks up and in a way destroys her canvas, or *Hide and Seek Piece*, about which she wrote this in her book

*Grapefruit*: “Hide until everybody goes home. Hide until everybody forgets about you. Hide until everybody dies.”<sup>7</sup> Ono’s work with Gaga sits comfortably alongside her early jazz work with Ornette Coleman and John Cage, which is filled with screaming and vocal noise. But in performing this piece as a duet with Lady Gaga, Ono’s corpus, filled as it is with dark noise, circles of repetition, a resistance to sense making, speaks anew, and Lady Gaga’s media-friendly, pop-heavy orientation is quickly contaminated by the noisy riot of going gaga.

Lady Gaga does not emerge from a vacuum, nor does she spring fully formed in the space vacated by Madonna, Gwen Stefani, and Britney Spears. She is in fact the last manifestation of a long line of feminine and queer performers who have used their time in the spotlight to produce funky forms of anarchy, to demonstrate an antisentimental fascination with loss, lack, darkness, and wild performance and to dig into the intersections of punk and glamour to find songs of madness and mayhem. While most commentators on the Gaga phenomenon are content to trace Lady Gaga’s lineage back through her time at NYU and her connections to other blond performers, the real story is much richer—Gaga, according to an interview she gave in 2011 to fashion designer Jean Paul Gaultier, first started calling herself Lady Gaga after meeting Lady Starlight, a self-proclaimed scene queen and party promoter. Lady Starlight reportedly told Lady Gaga that she was doing something much more than making music, she was, said Lady Starlight, making art. Lady Starlight was quite right. Gaga goes beyond the pop songs and becomes art. This makes Lady Gaga part of a very different group of performers. Thus, instead of tethering her to pop hopefuls who came before her, we need to make the connections to a long line of feminine anarchists, musicians, and writers, people like Emma Goldman but also Grace Jones, Shulamith Firestone but also Yoko Ono, Marina Abramovic but also Ari Up of the Slits or Poly Styrene of X-Ray Spex. As Lady Gaga herself has said: “I mean not to be so direct but I just think that people need to come up with better references than Christina and Gwen and Madonna all the time.”<sup>8</sup>

Lady Gaga might be engaged in the same kind of project as the Invisible Committee. While they encourage people to “find each other” and start making different forms of connection, Lady Gaga coolly dissects the pop market and finds new sounds, new messages, and new forms of political engagement. She tweets, she texts, she uses every medium available; she sings about the phone and indeed becomes a phone. She knows about the Coming Insurrection because it partly takes the form of Gaga herself.

The Invisible Committee also implicates university systems in the production of false hierarchies motored by people “who always ask permission before taking. Who silently respect culture, the rules, and those with the best grades. Even their attachment to their great critical intellectuals,” they write, “and their rejection of capitalism are stamped by this love of school.”

I love this little book; it speaks to me and about me, calling to me in a way that much academic work does not. I like that it has no “author,” that it refuses grand narratives, and that it proceeds without the endless academic quarrels that drag down even the most inspired critical attempts to make bold interventions. The book engages some genres that we do not traffic in enough as professors and as people who speak and write for a living—namely, manifestos, bold predictions, calls to arms—and it also names some important truths about failing economies, failing family structures, elitist universities, and the opportunities that arise out of the ashes of an older form of politics as such. The book pulls together the strings of social upheaval and catches a slice of revolution in its net. “Everyone agrees,” they write. “It’s about to explode”—in Cairo, in Ramallah, in Athens, in Los Angeles, the insurrection is coming and the Invisible Committee urges us to “find each other” soon. It also reminds us that true anarchy is not the absence of all modes of organization; indeed, effective anarchy requires that the ground be cleared first. But what creative anarchy does insist upon is that we organize separate from organizations, because “organizations are an obstacle to organizing ourselves.” Creative anarchy, gaga anarchy, gaga feminism are all born of a

spirit of experimentation, cooperation, change, motility, combustibility, and urgency. Seek intellectual emancipation in new modes of communication and new forms of social relation. Failing that, clog the machinery that manufactures the new by simply repackaging the old.

Gaga feminism advocates for being the fly in the ointment, the wrench in the machinery, the obstacle to the smooth, the seamless, and the quiet extension of the status quo. To go gaga is to be loud in a world of silent collaborators, to be crazy in a room full of nice and normal people, to be unpredictable in a world of highly structured systems of meaning. But being gaga is not a mindless commitment to some neoliberal concept of difference and uniqueness. It is not another version of the sad, worn-out notion of human diversity. It does not sacrifice the whole for the part, the group for the individual, the multitude for the singular. Of course, we are all trained to write liberation in the tired language of human uniqueness, but while millions of people allow a deep-seated belief that everyone is different to legitimize their absolute investments in political uniformity, gaga feminists want to uncover bigger political prizes than splendid individualism.

As I was trying to sort through how and why it is that North Americans in particular continue to invest political hope in the chimera of individualism, I was listening to a Fleet Foxes song titled “Helplessness Blues.” The song first struck me as impossibly saccharine, hopelessly sentimental and needlessly shiny and good. But as you listen, the song pulls out of its peppy tune and descends into a grander and darker mood, and a different narrative emerges. The lyric begins as follows:

I was raised up believin’  
I was somehow unique  
like a snowflake, distinct among snowflakes  
unique in each way you can see

<sup>10</sup> Well, that was what got me at first—the old snowflakes analogy that appeals so much to those spreading the ideology of individualism. Hey, by the way, cancer is also defined in terms of its

uniqueness, but we rarely hear that analogy used to figure human diversity! As the author of the Pulitzer Prize–winning biography of cancer, *The Emperor of All Maladies*, Siddhartha Mukherjee puts it: “Normal cells are identically normal; malignant cells become unhappily malignant in unique ways.”<sup>9</sup> To me this is actually a far better description of uniqueness—what is unique to each human is not the normal but the mutation; either you value mutation and uniqueness or you invest in the normal and the lack of difference. To stretch the analogy even further, either you want uniqueness and therefore you deliberately deviate from the norm or you want conformity and you settle for being just like everyone else. And it is no accident that those brave souls who do choose mutation and deviance over stasis and obedience are often represented as a plague on society. But generally speaking, Americans want to have it both ways—they want to be unique and normal at the same time—uniquely normal! Sorry folks, it is one or the other, and each opens onto reactionary and revolutionary possibilities.

Back to the song then. Fleet Foxes dump the snowflake analogy quickly; almost as quickly as you recognize it and sneer at it, it is gone, and the alternative folk band sing:

And now after some thinkin'  
I'd say I'd rather be  
a functioning cog in some great machinery  
serving something beyond me.  
But I don't, I don't know what that will be.  
I'll get back to you someday  
Soon you will see.

In a compact poetic tribute to collectivity, Fleet Foxes put to rest the seductive definition of the human as unique, and then they float the idea of serving a higher cause than individualism, harking back to a notion that was romantic for earlier generations but that has faded from popularity as words like “socialism” have been beaten to a pulp in the age of global capitalism and the aftermath of Soviet misrule. Without needing to name the version of collectivity for which the song holds out hope (“I don't know what that will be”), the utopian  
<sup>11</sup>impulse of the song lies in its desire to locate both the possibility and the naming of that possibility somewhere in the future. A gaga

feminism does not need to know and name the political outcome of its efforts. More important is to identify the form that transformative struggle should take. In this book I have named these forms variously as: making peace with the anarchy of childishness, entering into new forms of relation and family, resisting the legitimizing structures of marriage and kinship, and finding creative spaces within which to go gaga and in the process catching a glimpse of the something else that we call the (queer) future.

And so, like Fleet Foxes, while we reject the comfy notion of human uniqueness, we celebrate variation, mutation, cooperation, transformation, deviance, perversion, and diversion. These modes of change, many of which carry negative connotations, actually name the way that people take the risks that are necessary to shove our inert social structures rudely into the path of the oncoming gagapocalypse. Making change means stepping off the beaten path, making detours around the usual, and distorting the everyday ideologies that go by the name of “truth” or “common sense.” Gaga feminism is what Del LaGrace Volcano, the notorious and brilliant photographer of queer bodies, would call a “sublime mutation,” a chance encounter between the desire for something new and the will to create it or to think it. In his book *Sublime Mutations*, a treatise on queer embodiments and the outrageous forms they sometimes take, LaGrace Volcano provides gorgeous glossy photographs of bodies in transition—from male to female, female to male, female to female, male to who knows what ... and so on.<sup>10</sup> Rather than simply providing a window onto bodily difference for voyeurs, however, LaGrace Volcano also highlights the new and complex attractions exerted by these new bodies. A trans man with a hormonally enhanced clitoris becomes, in LaGrace Volcano’s lens, not a failed man or a grotesque woman but a wild and new gender with different genitalia, representing new opportunities for eros in a world saturated with explicit imagery.

A clue as to how to accomplish this mode of thinking that  
12 bypasses the logic, the form, and the content of traditional  
thought comes in the form of what Italian Marxist philosopher

Paolo Virno calls “virtuosity,” and French iconoclast Jacques Rancière calls “improvisation.” While for Virno, virtuosity is what happens when the speaker/singer/musician begins to articulate without the benefit of a script, for Rancière, improvisation is a mode of breaking with the systems of recognition that keep us locked into the properly academic values of competence, legitimacy, and science.<sup>11</sup> Drawing from the example of the eighteenth-century educator Joseph Jacotot, Rancière claims that conventional, discipline-based pedagogy demands the presence of a master and schools students not to think critically but only to respect the superior knowledge, training, and intellect of the schoolmaster and to want to reproduce it. While the “good” teacher leads his students through the pathways of rationality, the “ignorant schoolmaster,” Jacotot discovered, must actually allow them to get lost in order for them to experience confusion and then find their own way out or back or around. Intellectual emancipation, then, stems from three principles for Jacotot: “All people have equal intelligence; every man can instruct himself; everything is in everything.” As we go loudly and grandly gaga, we should be aiming for nothing less than intellectual emancipation, nothing less than total transformation of learning, and nothing short of chaos. In order to disorder the university and to undo the hegemonic project of the university, we need to think small but act big, take risks, and propel ourselves into the path of all kinds of coming insurrections.

KNOW THE GAME, BE THE GAME, PLAY THE GAME, CHANGE THE GAME ...

If you know where to look, you can find pieces of gaga feminism and gaga ideology strewn across alternative forms of popular culture. In the acclaimed HBO series *The Wire*, we find many life lessons and hard-knock truths about “the game” or the perpetual struggle between the law and those people it fails to protect, the  
<sup>13</sup> street and those people who are sacrificed upon it, professions and those people who learn how to work their success while

engineering everyone's else's failure. *The Wire*, set in Baltimore, in five glorious seasons, explores the warfare between drug dealers and drug addicts, between detectives and city hall, between the fine shades of right and the nuanced areas of wrong. And all of these epic, Shakespearian dramas play out against the backdrop of school, kinship, intimacy, homoerotic bonding, lesbian parenting, divorce, alcoholism, courage, love, and loss.

There are so many great examples in *The Wire* of how the game is rigged, rigged in favor of white people, rich people, middle-class people, straight people, that it is hard to pick just one. But if we look at the symbolism of chess that plays through the whole series, we can find a few of the great moral lessons in creative anarchy laid out here. In an early episode from season one, D'Angelo, the ill-fated nephew of drug kingpin Barksdale, tries to teach some of his street soldiers, the drug slingers, the function of the various pieces on the chessboard. "Now, the king, he move one space any direction he damn choose, 'cause he's the king. Like this, this, this, a'ight? But he ain't got no hustle. But the rest of these motherfuckers on the team, they got his back. And they run so deep, he really ain't gotta do shit."<sup>12</sup> One of his buddies answers: "Like your uncle." Right, like D'Angelo's uncle, the chess king moves very little, gets good protection, and hides behind his army. The queen, however, who in *The Wire* comes in the form of the Robin Hood gay character Omar, the queen, says D'Angelo: "She smart, she fast. She move any way she want, as far as she want. And she is the go-get-shit-done piece." Like all queens, she will be sacrificed if necessary for the good of the king, but in the meantime, she can wreak havoc and mayhem. D'Angelo goes on to explain how the pawns live on the frontlines but move forward all the time trying to get to the promised land where they will become rich and protected themselves. "So, how do you get to be king?" asks one enterprising pawn. D'Angelo answers: "It ain't like that. See, the king stay the king, a'ight? Everything stay who he is. Except for the pawns.

<sup>14</sup> Now, if the pawn make it all the way down to the other dude's side, he get to be queen. And like I said, the queen ain't no bitch. She got

all the moves.” D’Angelo disabuses his audience of the idea that they can win the game—they can convert to queens, they can run wild, but more likely they will be gunned down and “out of the game early.” The king stays the king, the queen lives in glory for short spells but has everyone gunning for her, and the pawns are sacrificed along the way for bigger prizes. And that’s the game.

In *The Wire*, however, the game is not only played on the streets, it is also what defines the police department, which has its own kings, queens, and pawns, and in the final season, the press becomes another chessboard, with journalists and editors positioning themselves, ready to make hits, take hits, play the game, leave the game. In the pressroom, a white guy, watched closely by his black editor, begins to make up stories, embellish the truth, invent quotes in pursuit of good copy. The black editor calls him out on it, but lacking support from higher up, his objections are smothered. In a regular TV show, the bad journalist, like the bad cop or even the bad drug dealer, would go down in a blaze of ignominy and the person who brings him down would triumph and bask in the glory of being right, exposing wrong, and having integrity.

But this is *The Wire*, and the king, or power systems, “stay the king.” The renegade hustlers, the queens, have power, too, but their power is movement, oversight, knowledge—it is not necessarily the power to change the game. And so, in the pressroom, the king stays the king, the white guy who has fabricated the news wins a Pulitzer Prize; the Latina who writes true copy at the desk next to him gets punitively transferred to a small local paper; the black editor who could see through the fake stories, who knows right from wrong, truth from lies, gets demoted and watches the drama of rewards and privilege play out its sad script from a distance. The series ends on this note—kings stay kings, queens do damage and then get neutralized, pawns leave the game early, knights and bishops make the moves they make but ultimately stay in the middle of the board not moving up or down. And that’s the game, the game by which we all live and die; while a few win, most lose, and

ultimately the game plays us.

Gaga feminism recognizes that the world rewards the corrupt, the cheaters, and the liars, and that dishonesty pays. Therefore, the only way to advance toward total disruption of inertia and complacency is to steal from the rich, undermine the religious, and upset the moralists. You cannot win in a world where the game is fixed, so resign yourself to losing. Gaga feminism is for the failures, the losers, those for whom the price of success is too high and the effect of losing may even be to open more doors. Gaga feminism is the ideology that motivates the queen in the chess match—as the queen, you can make big moves, bold moves, aggressive moves. You can do damage, take others out, move at will. You will also have everyone gunning for you, coming for you, following you. You will go down. But, in the words of Lady Gaga: “Don’t be a drag, just be a queen.”

SURVIVE THE GAME ...

So, what do we have so far? A coming insurrection, a little intellectual emancipation through improvisation, a break with conventional knowledge, and a map to gaga feminism that will most likely take us to the edge, to the abyss, to chaos, to a new understanding of anarchy and to the road to unlearning. This manifesto offers insurrections, emancipation, insurgent, irrational revelry. It also reminds us that we are not here to win, to conquer, to rule. Our goals are simple and modest—gaga feminism proposes to be a new kind of gender politics for a new generation, a generation less bound to the romance of permanence (in the form of marriage, for example), more committed to the potential of flexibility (in the form of desire, for example), more tuned in to the fixity of power relations (in the form of capitalism), and less likely to buy the broken ideologies of uniqueness, American dreams, inclusivity, and respectability. The gaga generation, made up of men, women, and everyone else, knows that the future is now, <sup>16</sup> greed (think Hummers) is crass, mutation is possible, and insurrection is here, and it is you, and we are already singing the

crazy songs of a future world. And when you decide you are ready to go well and truly gaga, to leave behind the seeming rationality of contemporary life and love, when you are prepared to see through the lies of romance, the coercion of love and marriage, the fiction of equality and unity, when you are open to a new feminism, a gaga feminism that joins forces with the oppositional movements sweeping the globe, you will finally realize that we are already living in the future that we have always tried to imagine, a time and a place where the many say no to the few, the queer counsel the straight, the children teach their parents, and the lunatics, as the saying goes, have taken over the asylum. As the streets fill with the sounds of protest, the banks lose traction, the law loses credibility, the norm falters and collapses under the weight of its own contradictions, at that moment, you will be ready to say that we have all gone well and truly gaga, that we are staying gaga, and that the end of the old rings in a new set of possibilities out of which, hopefully, a few paths will lead us not home but into the playing field of a future that we cannot yet see, that we refuse to predict, and that will frame a new set of dreams. Lady Gaga may be the name now for a site of global popularity and global investments in difference, but this name too will change and what is gaga today will be something else entirely tomorrow. Let gaga feminism begin!



## Chapter Eight

# A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century<sup>1</sup>

### AN IRONIC DREAM OF A COMMON LANGUAGE FOR WOMEN IN THE INTEGRATED CIRCUIT

**T**his chapter is an effort to build an ironic political myth faithful to feminism, socialism, and materialism. Perhaps more faithful as blasphemy is faithful, than as reverent worship and identification. Blasphemy has always seemed to require taking things very seriously. I know no better stance to adopt from within the secular-religious, evangelical traditions of United States politics, including the politics of socialist feminism. Blasphemy protects one from the moral majority within, while still insisting on the need for community. Blasphemy is not apostasy. Irony is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, even dialectically, about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true. Irony is about humour and serious play. It is also a rhetorical strategy and a political method, one I would like to see more honoured within socialist-feminism. At the centre of my ironic faith, my blasphemy, is the image of the cyborg.

A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction. The international women's movements have constructed 'women's experience', as well as uncovered or discovered this crucial collective object. This experience is a fiction and fact of the most crucial, political kind. Liberation rests on the construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility. The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century. This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion.

Contemporary science fiction is full of cyborgs – creatures simultaneously animal and machine, who populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted.

Modern medicine is also full of cyborgs, of couplings between organism and machine, each conceived as coded devices, in an intimacy and with a power that was not generated in the history of sexuality. Cyborg 'sex' restores some of the lovely replicative baroque of ferns and invertebrates (such nice organic prophylactics against heterosexism). Cyborg replication is uncoupled from organic reproduction. Modern production seems like a dream of cyborg colonization work, a dream that makes the nightmare of Taylorism seem idyllic. And modern war is a cyborg orgy, coded by C<sup>3</sup>I, command-control-communication-intelligence, an \$84 billion item in 1984's US defence budget. I am making an argument for the cyborg as a fiction mapping our social and bodily reality and as an imaginative resource suggesting some very fruitful couplings. Michael Foucault's biopolitics is a flaccid premonition of cyborg politics, a very open field.

By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation. In the traditions of 'Western' science and politics – the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the productions of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other – the relation between organism and machine has been a border war. The stakes in the border war have been the territories of production, reproduction, and imagination. This chapter is an argument for *pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction. It is also an effort to contribute to socialist-feminist culture and theory in a postmodernist, non-naturalist mode and in the utopian tradition of imagining a world without gender, which is perhaps a world without genesis, but maybe also a world without end. The cyborg incarnation is outside salvation history. Nor does it mark time on an oedipal calendar, attempting to heal the terrible cleavages of gender in an oral symbiotic utopia or post-oedipal apocalypse. As Zoe Sofoulis argues in her unpublished manuscript on Jacques Lacan, Melanie Klein, and nuclear culture, *Lacklein*, the most terrible and perhaps the most promising monsters in cyborg worlds are embodied in non-oedipal narratives with a different logic of repression, which we need to understand for our survival.

The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity. In a sense, the cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense – a 'final' irony since the cyborg is also the awful apocalyptic *telos* of the

'West's' escalating dominations of abstract individuation, an ultimate self untied at last from all dependency, a man in space. An origin story in the 'Western', humanist sense depends on the myth of original unity, fullness, bliss and terror, represented by the phallic mother from whom all humans must separate, the task of individual development and of history, the twin potent myths inscribed most powerfully for us in psychoanalysis and Marxism. Hilary Klein has argued that both Marxism and psychoanalysis, in their concepts of labour and of individuation and gender formation, depend on the plot of original unity out of which difference must be produced and enlisted in a drama of escalating domination of woman/nature. The cyborg skips the step of original unity, of identification with nature in the Western sense. This is its illegitimate promise that might lead to subversion of its teleology as star wars.

The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence. No longer structured by the polarity of public and private, the cyborg defines a technological polis based partly on a revolution of social relations in the *oikos*, the household. Nature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other. The relationships for forming wholes from parts, including those of polarity and hierarchical domination, are at issue in the cyborg world. Unlike the hopes of Frankenstein's monster, the cyborg does not expect its father to save it through a restoration of the garden; that is, through the fabrication of a heterosexual mate, through its completion in a finished whole, a city and cosmos. The cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family, this time without the oedipal project. The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust. Perhaps that is why I want to see if cyborgs can subvert the apocalypse of returning to nuclear dust in the manic compulsion to name the Enemy. Cyborgs are not reverent; they do not re-member the cosmos. They are wary of holism, but needy for connection— they seem to have a natural feel for united front politics, but without the vanguard party. The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential.

I will return to the science fiction of cyborgs at the end of this chapter, but now I want to signal three crucial boundary breakdowns that make the following political-fictional (political-scientific) analysis possible. By the late twentieth century in United States scientific culture, the boundary between human and animal is thoroughly breached. The last beachheads of uniqueness have been polluted if not turned into amusement parks – language, tool

use, social behaviour, mental events, nothing really convincingly settles the separation of human and animal. And many people no longer feel the need for such a separation; indeed, many branches of feminist culture affirm the pleasure of connection of human and other living creatures. Movements for animal rights are not irrational denials of human uniqueness; they are a clear-sighted recognition of connection across the discredited breach of nature and culture. Biology and evolutionary theory over the last two centuries have simultaneously produced modern organisms as objects of knowledge and reduced the line between humans and animals to a faint trace re-etched in ideological struggle or professional disputes between life and social science. Within this framework, teaching modern Christian creationism should be fought as a form of child abuse.

Biological-determinist ideology is only one position opened up in scientific culture for arguing the meanings of human animality. There is much room for radical political people to contest the meanings of the breached boundary.<sup>2</sup> The cyborg appears in myth precisely where the boundary between human and animal is transgressed. Far from signalling a walling off of people from other living beings, cyborgs signal disturbingly and pleasurablely tight coupling. Bestiality has a new status in this cycle of marriage exchange.

The second leaky distinction is between animal-human (organism) and machine. Pre-cybernetic machines could be haunted; there was always the spectre of the ghost in the machine. This dualism structured the dialogue between materialism and idealism that was settled by a dialectical progeny, called spirit or history, according to taste. But basically machines were not self-moving, self-designing, autonomous. They could not achieve man's dream, only mock it. They were not man, an author to himself, but only a caricature of that masculinist reproductive dream. To think they were otherwise was paranoid. Now we are not so sure. Late twentieth-century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines. Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert.

Technological determination is only one ideological space opened up by the reconceptions of machine and organism as coded texts through which we engage in the play of writing and reading the world.<sup>3</sup> 'Textualization' of everything in poststructuralist, postmodernist theory has been damned by Marxists and socialist feminists for its utopian disregard for the lived relations of domination that ground the 'play' of arbitrary reading.<sup>4</sup> It is certainly true that postmodernist strategies, like my cyborg myth, subvert myriad organic wholes (for example, the poem, the primitive culture, the biological organism). In short, the certainty of what counts as nature – a

source of insight and promise of innocence – is undermined, probably fatally. The transcendent authorization of interpretation is lost, and with it the ontology grounding ‘Western’ epistemology. But the alternative is not cynicism or faithlessness, that is, some version of abstract existence, like the accounts of technological determinism destroying ‘man’ by the ‘machine’ or ‘meaningful political action’ by the ‘text’. Who cyborgs will be is a radical question; the answers are a matter of survival. Both chimpanzees and artefacts have politics, so why shouldn’t we (de Waal, 1982; Winner, 1980)?

The third distinction is a subset of the second: the boundary between physical and non-physical is very imprecise for us. Pop physics books on the consequences of quantum theory and the indeterminacy principle are a kind of popular scientific equivalent to Harlequin romances\* as a marker of radical change in American white heterosexuality: they get it wrong, but they are on the right subject. Modern machines are quintessentially microelectronic devices: they are everywhere and they are invisible. Modern machinery is an irreverent upstart god, mocking the Father’s ubiquity and spirituality. The silicon chip is a surface for writing; it is etched in molecular scales disturbed only by atomic noise, the ultimate interference for nuclear scores. Writing, power, and technology are old partners in Western stories of the origin of civilization, but miniaturization has changed our experience of mechanism. Miniaturization has turned out to be about power; small is not so much beautiful as pre-eminently dangerous, as in cruise missiles. Contrast the TV sets of the 1950s or the news cameras of the 1970s with the TV wrist bands or hand-sized video cameras now advertised. Our best machines are made of sunshine; they are all light and clean because they are nothing but signals, electromagnetic waves, a section of a spectrum, and these machines are eminently portable, mobile – a matter of immense human pain in Detroit and Singapore. People are nowhere near so fluid, being both material and opaque. Cyborgs are ether, quintessence.

The ubiquity and invisibility of cyborgs is precisely why these sunshine-belt machines are so deadly. They are as hard to see politically as materially. They are about consciousness – or its simulation.<sup>5</sup> They are floating signifiers moving in pickup trucks across Europe, blocked more effectively by the witch-weavings of the displaced and so unnatural Greenham women, who read the cyborg webs of power so very well, than by the militant labour of older masculinist politics, whose natural constituency needs defence jobs. Ultimately the ‘hardest’ science is about the realm of greatest boundary confusion, the realm of pure number, pure spirit, C<sup>3</sup>I, cryptography, and the preservation of potent secrets. The new machines are so clean and light. Their engineers are sun-worshippers mediating a new scientific revolution

\* The US equivalent of Mills & Boon.

associated with the night dream of post-industrial society. The diseases evoked by these clean machines are 'no more' than the minuscule coding changes of an antigen in the immune system, 'no more' than the experience of stress. The nimble fingers of 'Oriental' women, the old fascination of little Anglo-Saxon Victorian girls with doll's houses, women's enforced attention to the small take on quite new dimensions in this world. There might be a cyborg Alice taking account of these new dimensions. Ironically, it might be the unnatural cyborg women making chips in Asia and spiral dancing in Santa Rita jail\* whose constructed unities will guide effective oppositional strategies.

So my cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work. One of my premises is that most American socialists and feminists see deepened dualisms of mind and body, animal and machine, idealism and materialism in the social practices, symbolic formulations, and physical artefacts associated with 'high technology' and scientific culture. From *One-Dimensional Man* (Marcuse, 1964) to *The Death of Nature* (Merchant, 1980), the analytic resources developed by progressives have insisted on the necessary domination of technics and recalled us to an imagined organic body to integrate our resistance. Another of my premises is that the need for unity of people trying to resist world-wide intensification of domination has never been more acute. But a slightly perverse shift of perspective might better enable us to contest for meanings, as well as for other forms of power and pleasure in technologically mediated societies.

From one perspective, a cyborg world is about the final imposition of a grid of control on the planet, about the final abstraction embodied in a Star Wars apocalypse waged in the name of defence, about the final appropriation of women's bodies in a masculinist orgy of war (Sofia, 1984). From another perspective, a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints. The political struggle is to see from both perspectives at once because each reveals both dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point. Single vision produces worse illusions than double vision or many-headed monsters. Cyborg unities are monstrous and illegitimate; in our present political circumstances, we could hardly hope for more potent myths for resistance and recoupling. I like to imagine LAG, the Livermore Action Group, as a kind of cyborg society, dedicated to realistically converting the laboratories that most fiercely embody and spew out the tools

\* A practice at once both spiritual and political that linked guards and arrested anti-nuclear demonstrators in the Alameda County jail in California in the early 1980s.

of technological apocalypse, and committed to building a political form that acutely manages to hold together witches, engineers, elders, perverts, Christians, mothers, and Leninists long enough to disarm the state. Fission Impossible is the name of the affinity group in my town. (Affinity: related not by blood but by choice, the appeal of one chemical nuclear group for another, avidity.)<sup>6</sup>

### FRACTURED IDENTITIES

It has become difficult to name one's feminism by a single adjective – or even to insist in every circumstance upon the noun. Consciousness of exclusion through naming is acute. Identities seem contradictory, partial, and strategic. With the hard-won recognition of their social and historical constitution, gender, race, and class cannot provide the basis for belief in 'essential' unity. There is nothing about being 'female' that naturally binds women. There is not even such a state as 'being' female, itself a highly complex category constructed in contested sexual scientific discourses and other social practices. Gender, race, or class consciousness is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism. And who counts as 'us' in my own rhetoric? Which identities are available to ground such a potent political myth called 'us', and what could motivate enlistment in this collectivity? Painful fragmentation among feminists (not to mention among women) along every possible fault line has made the concept of *woman* elusive, an excuse for the matrix of women's dominations of each other. For me – and for many who share a similar historical location in white, professional middle-class, female, radical, North American, mid-adult bodies – the sources of a crisis in political identity are legion. The recent history for much of the US left and US feminism has been a response to this kind of crisis by endless splitting and searches for a new essential unity. But there has also been a growing recognition of another response through coalition – affinity, not identity.<sup>7</sup>

Chela Sandoval (n.d., 1984), from a consideration of specific historical moments in the formation of the new political voice called women of colour, has theorized a hopeful model of political identity called 'oppositional consciousness', born of the skills for reading webs of power by those refused stable membership in the social categories of race, sex, or class. 'Women of colour', a name contested at its origins by those whom it would incorporate, as well as a historical consciousness marking systematic breakdown of all the signs of Man in 'Western' traditions, constructs a kind of postmodernist identity out of otherness, difference, and specificity. This postmodernist identity is fully political, whatever might be said about other possible postmodernisms. Sandoval's oppositional consciousness is about contradic-

tory locations and heterochronic calendars, not about relativisms and pluralisms.

Sandoval emphasizes the lack of any essential criterion for identifying who is a woman of colour. She notes that the definition of the group has been by conscious appropriation of negation. For example, a Chicana or US black woman has not been able to speak as a woman or as a black person or as a Chicano. Thus, she was at the bottom of a cascade of negative identities, left out of even the privileged oppressed authorial categories called 'women and blacks', who claimed to make the important revolutions. The category 'woman' negated all non-white women; 'black' negated all non-black people, as well as all black women. But there was also no 'she', no singularity, but a sea of differences among US women who have affirmed their historical identity as US women of colour. This identity marks out a self-consciously constructed space that cannot affirm the capacity to act on the basis of natural identification, but only on the basis of conscious coalition, of affinity, of political kinship.<sup>8</sup> Unlike the 'woman' of some streams of the white women's movement in the United States, there is no naturalization of the matrix, or at least this is what Sandoval argues is uniquely available through the power of oppositional consciousness.

Sandoval's argument has to be seen as one potent formulation for feminists out of the world-wide development of anti-colonialist discourse; that is to say, discourse dissolving the 'West' and its highest product – the one who is not animal, barbarian, or woman; man, that is, the author of a cosmos called history. As orientalism is deconstructed politically and semiotically, the identities of the occident destabilize, including those of feminists.<sup>9</sup> Sandoval argues that 'women of colour' have a chance to build an effective unity that does not replicate the imperializing, totalizing revolutionary subjects of previous Marxisms and feminisms which had not faced the consequences of the disorderly polyphony emerging from decolonization.

Katie King has emphasized the limits of identification and the political/poetic mechanics of identification built into reading 'the poem', that generative core of cultural feminism. King criticizes the persistent tendency among contemporary feminists from different 'moments' or 'conversations' in feminist practice to taxonomize the women's movement to make one's own political tendencies appear to be the *telos* of the whole. These taxonomies tend to remake feminist history so that it appears to be an ideological struggle among coherent types persisting over time, especially those typical units called radical, liberal, and socialist-feminism. Literally, all other feminisms are either incorporated or marginalized, usually by building an explicit ontology and epistemology.<sup>10</sup> Taxonomies of feminism produce epistemologies to police deviation from official women's experience. And of course, 'women's culture', like women of colour, is consciously created by

mechanisms inducing affinity. The rituals of poetry, music, and certain forms of academic practice have been pre-eminent. The politics of race and culture in the US women's movements are intimately interwoven. The common achievement of King and Sandoval is learning how to craft a poetic/political unity without relying on a logic of appropriation, incorporation, and taxonomic identification.

The theoretical and practical struggle against unity-through-domination or unity-through-incorporation ironically not only undermines the justifications for patriarchy, colonialism, humanism, positivism, essentialism, scientism, and other unlamented -isms, but *all* claims for an organic or natural standpoint. I think that radical and socialist/Marxist-feminisms have also undermined their/our own epistemological strategies and that this is a crucially valuable step in imagining possible unities. It remains to be seen whether all 'epistemologies' as Western political people have known them fail us in the task to build effective affinities.

It is important to note that the effort to construct revolutionary standpoints, epistemologies as achievements of people committed to changing the world, has been part of the process showing the limits of identification. The acid tools of postmodernist theory and the constructive tools of ontological discourse about revolutionary subjects might be seen as ironic allies in dissolving Western selves in the interests of survival. We are excruciatingly conscious of what it means to have a historically constituted body. But with the loss of innocence in our origin, there is no expulsion from the Garden either. Our politics lose the indulgence of guilt with the *naïveté* of innocence. But what would another political myth for socialist-feminism look like? What kind of politics could embrace partial, contradictory, permanently unclosed constructions of personal and collective selves and still be faithful, effective – and, ironically, socialist-feminist?

I do not know of any other time in history when there was greater need for political unity to confront effectively the dominations of 'race', 'gender', 'sexuality', and 'class'. I also do not know of any other time when the kind of unity we might help build could have been possible. None of 'us' have any longer the symbolic or material capability of dictating the shape of reality to any of 'them'. Or at least 'we' cannot claim innocence from practising such dominations. White women, including socialist feminists, discovered (that is, were forced kicking and screaming to notice) the non-innocence of the category 'woman'. That consciousness changes the geography of all previous categories; it denatures them as heat denatures a fragile protein. Cyborg feminists have to argue that 'we' do not want any more natural matrix of unity and that no construction is whole. Innocence, and the corollary insistence on victimhood as the only ground for insight, has done enough damage. But the constructed revolutionary subject must give late-twentieth-

century people pause as well. In the fraying of identities and in the reflexive strategies for constructing them, the possibility opens up for weaving something other than a shroud for the day after the apocalypse that so prophetically ends salvation history.

Both Marxist/socialist-feminisms and radical feminisms have simultaneously naturalized and denatured the category 'woman' and consciousness of the social lives of 'women'. Perhaps a schematic caricature can highlight both kinds of moves. Marxian socialism is rooted in an analysis of wage labour which reveals class structure. The consequence of the wage relationship is systematic alienation, as the worker is dissociated from his (sic) product. Abstraction and illusion rule in knowledge, domination rules in practice. Labour is the pre-eminently privileged category enabling the Marxist to overcome illusion and find that point of view which is necessary for changing the world. Labour is the humanizing activity that makes man; labour is an ontological category permitting the knowledge of a subject, and so the knowledge of subjugation and alienation.

In faithful filiation, socialist-feminism advanced by allying itself with the basic analytic strategies of Marxism. The main achievement of both Marxist feminists and socialist feminists was to expand the category of labour to accommodate what (some) women did, even when the wage relation was subordinated to a more comprehensive view of labour under capitalist patriarchy. In particular, women's labour in the household and women's activity as mothers generally (that is, reproduction in the socialist-feminist sense), entered theory on the authority of analogy to the Marxian concept of labour. The unity of women here rests on an epistemology based on the ontological structure of 'labour'. Marxist/socialist-feminism does not 'naturalize' unity; it is a possible achievement based on a possible standpoint rooted in social relations. The essentializing move is in the ontological structure of labour or of its analogue, women's activity.<sup>11</sup> The inheritance of Marxian humanism, with its pre-eminently Western self, is the difficulty for me. The contribution from these formulations has been the emphasis on the daily responsibility of real women to build unities, rather than to naturalize them.

Catherine MacKinnon's (1982, 1987) version of radical feminism is itself a caricature of the appropriating, incorporating, totalizing tendencies of Western theories of identity grounding action.<sup>12</sup> It is factually and politically wrong to assimilate all of the diverse 'moments' or 'conversations' in recent women's politics named radical feminism to MacKinnon's version. But the teleological logic of her theory shows how an epistemology and ontology – including their negations – erase or police difference. Only one of the effects of MacKinnon's theory is the rewriting of the history of the polymorphous field called radical feminism. The major effect is the production of a theory

of experience, of women's identity, that is a kind of apocalypse for all revolutionary standpoints. That is, the totalization built into this tale of radical feminism achieves its end – the unity of women – by enforcing the experience of and testimony to radical non-being. As for the Marxist/socialist feminist, consciousness is an achievement, not a natural fact. And MacKinnon's theory eliminates some of the difficulties built into humanist revolutionary subjects, but at the cost of radical reductionism.

MacKinnon argues that feminism necessarily adopted a different analytical strategy from Marxism, looking first not at the structure of class, but at the structure of sex/gender and its generative relationship, men's constitution and appropriation of women sexually. Ironically, MacKinnon's 'ontology' constructs a non-subject, a non-being. Another's desire, not the self's labour, is the origin of 'woman'. She therefore develops a theory of consciousness that enforces what can count as 'women's' experience – anything that names sexual violation, indeed, sex itself as far as 'women' can be concerned. Feminist practice is the construction of this form of consciousness; that is, the self-knowledge of a self-who-is-not.

Perversely, sexual appropriation in this feminism still has the epistemological status of labour; that is to say, the point from which an analysis able to contribute to changing the world must flow. But sexual objectification, not alienation, is the consequence of the structure of sex/gender. In the realm of knowledge, the result of sexual objectification is illusion and abstraction. However, a woman is not simply alienated from her product, but in a deep sense does not exist as a subject, or even potential subject, since she owes her existence as a woman to sexual appropriation. To be constituted by another's desire is not the same thing as to be alienated in the violent separation of the labourer from his product.

MacKinnon's radical theory of experience is totalizing in the extreme; it does not so much marginalize as obliterate the authority of any other women's political speech and action. It is a totalization producing what Western patriarchy itself never succeeded in doing – feminists' consciousness of the non-existence of women, except as products of men's desire. I think MacKinnon correctly argues that no Marxian version of identity can firmly ground women's unity. But in solving the problem of the contradictions of any Western revolutionary subject for feminist purposes, she develops an even more authoritarian doctrine of experience. If my complaint about socialist/Marxian standpoints is their unintended erasure of polyvocal, unassimilable, radical difference made visible in anti-colonial discourse and practice, MacKinnon's intentional erasure of all difference through the device of the 'essential' non-existence of women is not reassuring.

In my taxonomy, which like any other taxonomy is a re-inscription of

history, radical feminism can accommodate all the activities of women named by socialist feminists as forms of labour only if the activity can somehow be sexualized. Reproduction had different tones of meanings for the two tendencies, one rooted in labour, one in sex, both calling the consequences of domination and ignorance of social and personal reality 'false consciousness'.

Beyond either the difficulties or the contributions in the argument of any one author, neither Marxist nor radical feminist points of view have tended to embrace the status of a partial explanation; both were regularly constituted as totalities. Western explanation has demanded as much; how else could the 'Western' author incorporate its others? Each tried to annex other forms of domination by expanding its basic categories through analogy, simple listing, or addition. Embarrassed silence about race among white radical and socialist feminists was one major, devastating political consequence. History and polyvocality disappear into political taxonomies that try to establish genealogies. There was no structural room for race (or for much else) in theory claiming to reveal the construction of the category woman and social group women as a unified or totalizable whole. The structure of my caricature looks like this:

socialist feminism – structure of class // wage labour // alienation  
labour, by analogy reproduction, by extension sex, by addition race  
radical feminism – structure of gender // sexual appropriation // objectification  
sex, by analogy labour, by extension reproduction, by addition race

In another context, the French theorist, Julia Kristeva, claimed women appeared as a historical group after the Second World War, along with groups like youth. Her dates are doubtful; but we are now accustomed to remembering that as objects of knowledge and as historical actors, 'race' did not always exist, 'class' has a historical genesis, and 'homosexuals' are quite junior. It is no accident that the symbolic system of the family of man – and so the essence of woman – breaks up at the same moment that networks of connection among people on the planet are unprecedentedly multiple, pregnant, and complex. 'Advanced capitalism' is inadequate to convey the structure of this historical moment. In the 'Western' sense, the end of man is at stake. It is no accident that woman disintegrates into women in our time. Perhaps socialist feminists were not substantially guilty of producing essentialist theory that suppressed women's particularity and contradictory interests. I think we have been, at least through unreflective participation in the logics, languages, and practices of white humanism and through searching for a single ground of domination to secure our revolutionary voice. Now we have less excuse. But in the consciousness of our failures, we

risk lapsing into boundless difference and giving up on the confusing task of making partial, real connection. Some differences are playful; some are poles of world historical systems of domination. 'Epistemology' is about knowing the difference.

### THE INFORMATICS OF DOMINATION

In this attempt at an epistemological and political position, I would like to sketch a picture of possible unity, a picture indebted to socialist and feminist principles of design. The frame for my sketch is set by the extent and importance of rearrangements in world-wide social relations tied to science and technology. I argue for a politics rooted in claims about fundamental changes in the nature of class, race, and gender in an emerging system of world order analogous in its novelty and scope to that created by industrial capitalism; we are living through a movement from an organic, industrial society to a polymorphous, information system – from all work to all play, a deadly game. Simultaneously material and ideological, the dichotomies may be expressed in the following chart of transitions from the comfortable old hierarchical dominations to the scary new networks I have called the informatics of domination:

Representation	Simulation
Bourgeois novel, realism	Science fiction, postmodernism
Organism	Biotic component
Depth, integrity	Surface, boundary
Heat	Noise
Biology as clinical practice	Biology as inscription
Physiology	Communications engineering
Small group	Subsystem
Perfection	Optimization
Eugenics	Population Control
Decadence, <i>Magic Mountain</i>	Obsolescence, <i>Future Shock</i>
Hygiene	Stress Management
Microbiology, tuberculosis	Immunology, AIDS
Organic division of labour	Ergonomics / cybernetics of labour
Functional specialization	Modular construction
Reproduction	Replication
Organic sex role specialization	Optimal genetic strategies
Biological determinism	Evolutionary inertia, constraints
Community ecology	Ecosystem
Racial chain of being	Neo-imperialism, United Nations humanism

Scientific management in home / factory	Global factory / Electronic cottage
Family / Market / Factory	Women in the Integrated Circuit
Family wage	Comparable worth
Public / Private	Cyborg citizenship
Nature / Culture	Fields of difference
Co-operation	Communications enhancement
Freud	Lacan
Sex	Genetic engineering
Labour	Robotics
Mind	Artificial Intelligence
Second World War	Star Wars
White Capitalist Patriarchy	Informatics of Domination

This list suggests several interesting things.<sup>13</sup> First, the objects on the right-hand side cannot be coded as 'natural', a realization that subverts naturalistic coding for the left-hand side as well. We cannot go back ideologically or materially. It's not just that 'god' is dead; so is the 'goddess'. Or both are revived in the worlds charged with microelectronic and biotechnological politics. In relation to objects like biotic components, one must think not in terms of essential properties, but in terms of design, boundary constraints, rates of flows, systems logics, costs of lowering constraints. Sexual reproduction is one kind of reproductive strategy among many, with costs and benefits as a function of the system environment. Ideologies of sexual reproduction can no longer reasonably call on notions of sex and sex role as organic aspects in natural objects like organisms and families. Such reasoning will be unmasked as irrational, and ironically corporate executives reading *Playboy* and anti-porn radical feminists will make strange bedfellows in jointly unmasking the irrationalism.

Likewise for race, ideologies about human diversity have to be formulated in terms of frequencies of parameters, like blood groups or intelligence scores. It is 'irrational' to invoke concepts like primitive and civilized. For liberals and radicals, the search for integrated social systems gives way to a new practice called 'experimental ethnography' in which an organic object dissipates in attention to the play of writing. At the level of ideology, we see translations of racism and colonialism into languages of development and under-development, rates and constraints of modernization. Any objects or persons can be reasonably thought of in terms of disassembly and reassembly; no 'natural' architectures constrain system design. The financial districts in all the world's cities, as well as the export-processing and free-trade zones, proclaim this elementary fact of 'late capitalism'. The entire universe of objects that can be known scientifically must be formulated as problems in

communications engineering (for the managers) or theories of the text (for those who would resist). Both are cyborg semiologies.

One should expect control strategies to concentrate on boundary conditions and interfaces, on rates of flow across boundaries – and not on the integrity of natural objects. ‘Integrity’ or ‘sincerity’ of the Western self gives way to decision procedures and expert systems. For example, control strategies applied to women’s capacities to give birth to new human beings will be developed in the languages of population control and maximization of goal achievement for individual decision-makers. Control strategies will be formulated in terms of rates, costs of constraints, degrees of freedom. Human beings, like any other component or subsystem, must be localized in a system architecture whose basic modes of operation are probabilistic, statistical. No objects, spaces, or bodies are sacred in themselves; any component can be interfaced with any other if the proper standard, the proper code, can be constructed for processing signals in a common language. Exchange in this world transcends the universal translation effected by capitalist markets that Marx analysed so well. The privileged pathology affecting all kinds of components in this universe is stress – communications breakdown (Hogness, 1983). The cyborg is not subject to Foucault’s biopolitics; the cyborg simulates politics, a much more potent field of operations.

This kind of analysis of scientific and cultural objects of knowledge which have appeared historically since the Second World War prepares us to notice some important inadequacies in feminist analysis which has proceeded as if the organic, hierarchical dualisms ordering discourse in ‘the West’ since Aristotle still ruled. They have been cannibalized, or as Zoe Sofia (Sofoulis) might put it, they have been ‘techno-digested’. The dichotomies between mind and body, animal and human, organism and machine, public and private, nature and culture, men and women, primitive and civilized are all in question ideologically. The actual situation of women is their integration/exploitation into a world system of production/reproduction and communication called the informatics of domination. The home, workplace, market, public arena, the body itself – all can be dispersed and interfaced in nearly infinite, polymorphous ways, with large consequences for women and others – consequences that themselves are very different for different people and which make potent oppositional international movements difficult to imagine and essential for survival. One important route for reconstructing socialist-feminist politics is through theory and practice addressed to the social relations of science and technology, including crucially the systems of myth and meanings structuring our imaginations. The cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self. This is the self feminists must code.

Communications technologies and biotechnologies are the crucial tools recrafting our bodies. These tools embody and enforce new social relations for women world-wide. Technologies and scientific discourses can be partially understood as formalizations, i.e., as frozen moments, of the fluid social interactions constituting them, but they should also be viewed as instruments for enforcing meanings. The boundary is permeable between tool and myth, instrument and concept, historical systems of social relations and historical anatomies of possible bodies, including objects of knowledge. Indeed, myth and tool mutually constitute each other.

Furthermore, communications sciences and modern biologies are constructed by a common move – *the translation of the world into a problem of coding*, a search for a common language in which all resistance to instrumental control disappears and all heterogeneity can be submitted to disassembly, reassembly, investment, and exchange.

In communications sciences, the translation of the world into a problem in coding can be illustrated by looking at cybernetic (feedback-controlled) systems theories applied to telephone technology, computer design, weapons deployment, or data base construction and maintenance. In each case, solution to the key questions rests on a theory of language and control; the key operation is determining the rates, directions, and probabilities of flow of a quantity called information. The world is subdivided by boundaries differentially permeable to information. Information is just that kind of quantifiable element (unit, basis of unity) which allows universal translation, and so unhindered instrumental power (called effective communication). The biggest threat to such power is interruption of communication. Any system breakdown is a function of stress. The fundamentals of this technology can be condensed into the metaphor C<sup>3</sup>I, command-control-communication-intelligence, the military's symbol for its operations theory.

In modern biologies, the translation of the world into a problem in coding can be illustrated by molecular genetics, ecology, sociobiological evolutionary theory, and immunobiology. The organism has been translated into problems of genetic coding and read-out. Biotechnology, a writing technology, informs research broadly.<sup>14</sup> In a sense, organisms have ceased to exist as objects of knowledge, giving way to biotic components, i.e., special kinds of information-processing devices. The analogous moves in ecology could be examined by probing the history and utility of the concept of the ecosystem. Immunobiology and associated medical practices are rich exemplars of the privilege of coding and recognition systems as objects of knowledge, as constructions of bodily reality for us. Biology here is a kind of cryptography. Research is necessarily a kind of intelligence activity. Ironies abound. A stressed system goes awry; its communication processes break down; it fails to recognize the difference between self and other. Human babies with

baboon hearts evoke national ethical perplexity – for animal rights activists at least as much as for the guardians of human purity. In the US gay men and intravenous drug users are the ‘privileged’ victims of an awful immune system disease that marks (inscribes on the body) confusion of boundaries and moral pollution (Treichler, 1987).

But these excursions into communications sciences and biology have been at a rarefied level; there is a mundane, largely economic reality to support my claim that these sciences and technologies indicate fundamental transformations in the structure of the world for us. Communications technologies depend on electronics. Modern states, multinational corporations, military power, welfare state apparatuses, satellite systems, political processes, fabrication of our imaginations, labour-control systems, medical constructions of our bodies, commercial pornography, the international division of labour, and religious evangelism depend intimately upon electronics. Micro-electronics is the technical basis of simulacra; that is, of copies without originals.

Microelectronics mediates the translations of labour into robotics and word processing, sex into genetic engineering and reproductive technologies, and mind into artificial intelligence and decision procedures. The new biotechnologies concern more than human reproduction. Biology as a powerful engineering science for redesigning materials and processes has revolutionary implications for industry, perhaps most obvious today in areas of fermentation, agriculture, and energy. Communications sciences and biology are constructions of natural-technical objects of knowledge in which the difference between machine and organism is thoroughly blurred; mind, body, and tool are on very intimate terms. The ‘multinational’ material organization of the production and reproduction of daily life and the symbolic organization of the production and reproduction of culture and imagination seem equally implicated. The boundary-maintaining images of base and superstructure, public and private, or material and ideal never seemed more feeble.

I have used Rachel Grossman’s (1980) image of women in the integrated circuit to name the situation of women in a world so intimately restructured through the social relations of science and technology.<sup>15</sup> I used the odd circumlocution, ‘the social relations of science and technology’, to indicate that we are not dealing with a technological determinism, but with a historical system depending upon structured relations among people. But the phrase should also indicate that science and technology provide fresh sources of power, that we need fresh sources of analysis and political action (Latour, 1984). Some of the rearrangements of race, sex, and class rooted in high-tech-facilitated social relations can make socialist-feminism more relevant to effective progressive politics.

### THE 'HOMEWORK ECONOMY' OUTSIDE 'THE HOME'

The 'New Industrial Revolution' is producing a new world-wide working class, as well as new sexualities and ethnicities. The extreme mobility of capital and the emerging international division of labour are intertwined with the emergence of new collectivities, and the weakening of familiar groupings. These developments are neither gender- nor race-neutral. White men in advanced industrial societies have become newly vulnerable to permanent job loss, and women are not disappearing from the job rolls at the same rates as men. It is not simply that women in Third World countries are the preferred labour force for the science-based multinationals in the export-processing sectors, particularly in electronics. The picture is more systematic and involves reproduction, sexuality, culture, consumption, and production. In the prototypical Silicon Valley, many women's lives have been structured around employment in electronics-dependent jobs, and their intimate realities include serial heterosexual monogamy, negotiating childcare, distance from extended kin or most other forms of traditional community, a high likelihood of loneliness and extreme economic vulnerability as they age. The ethnic and racial diversity of women in Silicon Valley structures a microcosm of conflicting differences in culture, family, religion, education, and language.

Richard Gordon has called this new situation the 'homework economy'.<sup>16</sup> Although he includes the phenomenon of literal homework emerging in connection with electronics assembly, Gordon intends 'homework economy' to name a restructuring of work that broadly has the characteristics formerly ascribed to female jobs, jobs literally done only by women. Work is being redefined as both literally female and feminized, whether performed by men or women. To be feminized means to be made extremely vulnerable; able to be disassembled, reassembled, exploited as a reserve labour force; seen less as workers than as servers; subjected to time arrangements on and off the paid job that make a mockery of a limited work day; leading an existence that always borders on being obscene, out of place, and reducible to sex. Deskilling is an old strategy newly applicable to formerly privileged workers. However, the homework economy does not refer only to large-scale deskilling, nor does it deny that new areas of high skill are emerging, even for women and men previously excluded from skilled employment. Rather, the concept indicates that factory, home, and market are integrated on a new scale and that the places of women are crucial – and need to be analysed for differences among women and for meanings for relations between men and women in various situations.

The homework economy as a world capitalist organizational structure is made possible by (not caused by) the new technologies. The success of the attack on relatively privileged, mostly white, men's unionized jobs is tied to

the power of the new communications technologies to integrate and control labour despite extensive dispersion and decentralization. The consequences of the new technologies are felt by women both in the loss of the family (male) wage (if they ever had access to this white privilege) and in the character of their own jobs, which are becoming capital-intensive; for example, office work and nursing.

The new economic and technological arrangements are also related to the collapsing welfare state and the ensuing intensification of demands on women to sustain daily life for themselves as well as for men, children, and old people. The feminization of poverty – generated by dismantling the welfare state, by the homework economy where stable jobs become the exception, and sustained by the expectation that women's wages will not be matched by a male income for the support of children – has become an urgent focus. The causes of various women-headed households are a function of race, class, or sexuality; but their increasing generality is a ground for coalitions of women on many issues. That women regularly sustain daily life partly as a function of their enforced status as mothers is hardly new; the kind of integration with the overall capitalist and progressively war-based economy is new. The particular pressure, for example, on US black women, who have achieved an escape from (barely) paid domestic service and who now hold clerical and similar jobs in large numbers, has large implications for continued enforced black poverty *with* employment. Teenage women in industrializing areas of the Third World increasingly find themselves the sole or major source of a cash wage for their families, while access to land is ever more problematic. These developments must have major consequences in the psychodynamics and politics of gender and race.

Within the framework of three major stages of capitalism (commercial/early industrial, monopoly, multinational) – tied to nationalism, imperialism, and multinationalism, and related to Jameson's three dominant aesthetic periods of realism, modernism, and postmodernism – I would argue that specific forms of families dialectically relate to forms of capital and to its political and cultural concomitants. Although lived problematically and unequally, ideal forms of these families might be schematized as (1) the patriarchal nuclear family, structured by the dichotomy between public and private and accompanied by the white bourgeois ideology of separate spheres and nineteenth-century Anglo-American bourgeois feminism; (2) the modern family mediated (or enforced) by the welfare state and institutions like the family wage, with a flowering of a-feminist heterosexual ideologies, including their radical versions represented in Greenwich Village around the First World War; and (3) the 'family' of the homework economy with its oxymoronic structure of women-headed households and its explosion of feminisms and the paradoxical intensification and erosion of gender itself.

This is the context in which the projections for world-wide structural unemployment stemming from the new technologies are part of the picture of the homework economy. As robotics and related technologies put men out of work in 'developed' countries and exacerbate failure to generate male jobs in Third World 'development', and as the automated office becomes the rule even in labour-surplus countries, the feminization of work intensifies. Black women in the United States have long known what it looks like to face the structural underemployment ('feminization') of black men, as well as their own highly vulnerable position in the wage economy. It is no longer a secret that sexuality, reproduction, family, and community life are interwoven with this economic structure in myriad ways which have also differentiated the situations of white and black women. Many more women and men will contend with similar situations, which will make cross-gender and race alliances on issues of basic life support (with or without jobs) necessary, not just nice.

The new technologies also have a profound effect on hunger and on food production for subsistence world-wide. Rae Lesser Blumberg (1983) estimates that women produce about 50 per cent of the world's subsistence food.<sup>17</sup> Women are excluded generally from benefiting from the increased high-tech commodification of food and energy crops, their days are made more arduous because their responsibilities to provide food do not diminish, and their reproductive situations are made more complex. Green Revolution technologies interact with other high-tech industrial production to alter gender divisions of labour and differential gender migration patterns.

The new technologies seem deeply involved in the forms of 'privatization' that Ros Petchesky (1981) has analysed, in which militarization, right-wing family ideologies and policies, and intensified definitions of corporate (and state) property as private synergistically interact.<sup>18</sup> The new communications technologies are fundamental to the eradication of 'public life' for everyone. This facilitates the mushrooming of a permanent high-tech military establishment at the cultural and economic expense of most people, but especially of women. Technologies like video games and highly miniaturized televisions seem crucial to production of modern forms of 'private life'. The culture of video games is heavily orientated to individual competition and extraterrestrial warfare. High-tech, gendered imaginations are produced here, imaginations that can contemplate destruction of the planet and a sci-fi escape from its consequences. More than our imaginations is militarized; and the other realities of electronic and nuclear warfare are inescapable. These are the technologies that promise ultimate mobility and perfect exchange – and incidentally enable tourism, that perfect practice of mobility and exchange, to emerge as one of the world's largest single industries.

The new technologies affect the social relations of both sexuality and of

reproduction, and not always in the same ways. The close ties of sexuality and instrumentality, of views of the body as a kind of private satisfaction- and utility-maximizing machine, are described nicely in sociobiological origin stories that stress a genetic calculus and explain the inevitable dialectic of domination of male and female gender roles.<sup>19</sup> These sociobiological stories depend on a high-tech view of the body as a biotic component or cybernetic communications system. Among the many transformations of reproductive situations is the medical one, where women's bodies have boundaries newly permeable to both 'visualization' and 'intervention'. Of course, who controls the interpretation of bodily boundaries in medical hermeneutics is a major feminist issue. The speculum served as an icon of women's claiming their bodies in the 1970s; that handcraft tool is inadequate to express our needed body politics in the negotiation of reality in the practices of cyborg reproduction. Self-help is not enough. The technologies of visualization recall the important cultural practice of hunting with the camera and the deeply predatory nature of a photographic consciousness.<sup>20</sup> Sex, sexuality, and reproduction are central actors in high-tech myth systems structuring our imaginations of personal and social possibility.

Another critical aspect of the social relations of the new technologies is the reformulation of expectations, culture, work, and reproduction for the large scientific and technical work-force. A major social and political danger is the formation of a strongly bimodal social structure, with the masses of women and men of all ethnic groups, but especially people of colour, confined to a homework economy, illiteracy of several varieties, and general redundancy and impotence, controlled by high-tech repressive apparatuses ranging from entertainment to surveillance and disappearance. An adequate socialist-feminist politics should address women in the privileged occupational categories, and particularly in the production of science and technology that constructs scientific-technical discourses, processes, and objects.<sup>21</sup>

This issue is only one aspect of enquiry into the possibility of a feminist science, but it is important. What kind of constitutive role in the production of knowledge, imagination, and practice can new groups doing science have? How can these groups be allied with progressive social and political movements? What kind of political accountability can be constructed to tie women together across the scientific-technical hierarchies separating us? Might there be ways of developing feminist science/technology politics in alliance with anti-military science facility conversion action groups? Many scientific and technical workers in Silicon Valley, the high-tech cowboys included, do not want to work on military science.<sup>22</sup> Can these personal preferences and cultural tendencies be welded into progressive politics among this professional middle class in which women, including women of colour, are coming to be fairly numerous?

## WOMEN IN THE INTEGRATED CIRCUIT

Let me summarize the picture of women's historical locations in advanced industrial societies, as these positions have been restructured partly through the social relations of science and technology. If it was ever possible ideologically to characterize women's lives by the distinction of public and private domains – suggested by images of the division of working-class life into factory and home, of bourgeois life into market and home, and of gender existence into personal and political realms – it is now a totally misleading ideology, even to show how both terms of these dichotomies construct each other in practice and in theory. I prefer a network ideological image, suggesting the profusion of spaces and identities and the permeability of boundaries in the personal body and in the body politic. 'Networking' is both a feminist practice and a multinational corporate strategy – weaving is for oppositional cyborgs.

So let me return to the earlier image of the informatics of domination and trace one vision of women's 'place' in the integrated circuit, touching only a few idealized social locations seen primarily from the point of view of advanced capitalist societies: Home, Market, Paid Work Place, State, School, Clinic-Hospital, and Church. Each of these idealized spaces is logically and practically implied in every other locus, perhaps analogous to a holographic photograph. I want to suggest the impact of the social relations mediated and enforced by the new technologies in order to help formulate needed analysis and practical work. However, there is no 'place' for women in these networks, only geometrics of difference and contradiction crucial to women's cyborg identities. If we learn how to read these webs of power and social life, we might learn new couplings, new coalitions. There is no way to read the following list from a standpoint of 'identification', of a unitary self. The issue is dispersion. The task is to survive in the diaspora.

*Home:* Women-headed households, serial monogamy, flight of men, old women alone, technology of domestic work, paid homework, re-emergence of home sweat-shops, home-based businesses and telecommuting, electronic cottage, urban homelessness, migration, module architecture, reinforced (simulated) nuclear family, intense domestic violence.

*Market:* Women's continuing consumption work, newly targeted to buy the profusion of new production from the new technologies (especially as the competitive race among industrialized and industrializing nations to avoid dangerous mass unemployment necessitates finding ever bigger new markets for ever less clearly needed commodities); bimodal buying power, coupled with advertising targeting of the numerous affluent groups and neglect of the previous mass markets; growing importance of

informal markets in labour and commodities parallel to high-tech, affluent market structures; surveillance systems through electronic funds transfer; intensified market abstraction (commodification) of experience, resulting in ineffective utopian or equivalent cynical theories of community; extreme mobility (abstraction) of marketing/financing systems; interpenetration of sexual and labour markets; intensified sexualization of abstracted and alienated consumption.

*Paid Work Place:* Continued intense sexual and racial division of labour, but considerable growth of membership in privileged occupational categories for many white women and people of colour; impact of new technologies on women's work in clerical, service, manufacturing (especially textiles), agriculture, electronics; international restructuring of the working classes; development of new time arrangements to facilitate the homework economy (flex time, part time, over time, no time); homework and out work; increased pressures for two-tiered wage structures; significant numbers of people in cash-dependent populations world-wide with no experience or no further hope of stable employment; most labour 'marginal' or 'feminized'.

*State:* Continued erosion of the welfare state; decentralizations with increased surveillance and control; citizenship by telematics; imperialism and political power broadly in the form of information rich/information poor differentiation; increased high-tech militarization increasingly opposed by many social groups; reduction of civil service jobs as a result of the growing capital intensification of office work, with implications for occupational mobility for women of colour; growing privatization of material and ideological life and culture; close integration of privatization and militarization, the high-tech forms of bourgeois capitalist personal and public life; invisibility of different social groups to each other, linked to psychological mechanisms of belief in abstract enemies.

*School:* Deepening coupling of high-tech capital needs and public education at all levels, differentiated by race, class, and gender; managerial classes involved in educational reform and refunding at the cost of remaining progressive educational democratic structures for children and teachers; education for mass ignorance and repression in technocratic and militarized culture; growing anti-science mystery cults in dissenting and radical political movements; continued relative scientific illiteracy among white women and people of colour; growing industrial direction of education (especially higher education) by science-based multinationals (particularly in electronics- and biotechnology-dependent companies); highly educated, numerous élites in a progressively bimodal society.

*Clinic-hospital:* Intensified machine-body relations; renegotiations of

public metaphors which channel personal experience of the body, particularly in relation to reproduction, immune system functions, and 'stress' phenomena; intensification of reproductive politics in response to world historical implications of women's unrealized, potential control of their relation to reproduction; emergence of new, historically specific diseases; struggles over meanings and means of health in environments pervaded by high technology products and processes; continuing feminization of health work; intensified struggle over state responsibility for health; continued ideological role of popular health movements as a major form of American politics.

*Church:* Electronic fundamentalist 'super-saver' preachers solemnizing the union of electronic capital and automated fetish gods; intensified importance of churches in resisting the militarized state; central struggle over women's meanings and authority in religion; continued relevance of spirituality, intertwined with sex and health, in political struggle.

The only way to characterize the informatics of domination is as a massive intensification of insecurity and cultural impoverishment, with common failure of subsistence networks for the most vulnerable. Since much of this picture interweaves with the social relations of science and technology, the urgency of a socialist-feminist politics addressed to science and technology is plain. There is much now being done, and the grounds for political work are rich. For example, the efforts to develop forms of collective struggle for women in paid work, like SEIU's District 925,\* should be a high priority for all of us. These efforts are profoundly tied to technical restructuring of labour processes and reformations of working classes. These efforts also are providing understanding of a more comprehensive kind of labour organization, involving community, sexuality, and family issues never privileged in the largely white male industrial unions.

The structural rearrangements related to the social relations of science and technology evoke strong ambivalence. But it is not necessary to be ultimately depressed by the implications of late twentieth-century women's relation to all aspects of work, culture, production of knowledge, sexuality, and reproduction. For excellent reasons, most Marxisms see domination best and have trouble understanding what can only look like false consciousness and people's complicity in their own domination in late capitalism. It is crucial to remember that what is lost, perhaps especially from women's points of view, is often virulent forms of oppression, nostalgically naturalized in the face of current violation. Ambivalence towards the disrupted unities mediated by high-tech culture requires not sorting consciousness into categories of 'clear-sighted critique grounding a solid political epistemology'

\* Service Employees International Union's office workers' organization in the US.

versus 'manipulated false consciousness', but subtle understanding of emerging pleasures, experiences, and powers with serious potential for changing the rules of the game.

There are grounds for hope in the emerging bases for new kinds of unity across race, gender, and class, as these elementary units of socialist-feminist analysis themselves suffer protean transformations. Intensifications of hardship experienced world-wide in connection with the social relations of science and technology are severe. But what people are experiencing is not transparently clear, and we lack sufficiently subtle connections for collectively building effective theories of experience. Present efforts – Marxist, psychoanalytic, feminist, anthropological – to clarify even 'our' experience are rudimentary.

I am conscious of the odd perspective provided by my historical position – a PhD in biology for an Irish Catholic girl was made possible by Sputnik's impact on US national science-education policy. I have a body and mind as much constructed by the post-Second World War arms race and cold war as by the women's movements. There are more grounds for hope in focusing on the contradictory effects of politics designed to produce loyal American technocrats, which also produced large numbers of dissidents, than in focusing on the present defeats.

The permanent partiality of feminist points of view has consequences for our expectations of forms of political organization and participation. We do not need a totality in order to work well. The feminist dream of a common language, like all dreams for a perfectly true language, of perfectly faithful naming of experience, is a totalizing and imperialist one. In that sense, dialectics too is a dream language, longing to resolve contradiction. Perhaps, ironically, we can learn from our fusions with animals and machines how not to be Man, the embodiment of Western logos. From the point of view of pleasure in these potent and taboo fusions, made inevitable by the social relations of science and technology, there might indeed be a feminist science.

### **CYBORGS: A MYTH OF POLITICAL IDENTITY**

I want to conclude with a myth about identity and boundaries which might inform late twentieth-century political imaginations (Plate 1). I am indebted in this story to writers like Joanna Russ, Samuel R. Delany, John Varley, James Tiptree, Jr, Octavia Butler, Monique Wittig, and Vonda McIntyre.<sup>23</sup> These are our story-tellers exploring what it means to be embodied in high-tech worlds. They are theorists for cyborgs. Exploring conceptions of bodily boundaries and social order, the anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966, 1970) should be credited with helping us to consciousness about how fundamental body imagery is to world view, and so to political language.

French feminists like Luce Irigaray and Monique Wittig, for all their differences, know how to write the body; how to weave eroticism, cosmology, and politics from imagery of embodiment, and especially for Wittig, from imagery of fragmentation and reconstitution of bodies.<sup>24</sup>

American radical feminists like Susan Griffin, Audre Lorde, and Adrienne Rich have profoundly affected our political imaginations – and perhaps restricted too much what we allow as a friendly body and political language.<sup>25</sup> They insist on the organic, opposing it to the technological. But their symbolic systems and the related positions of ecofeminism and feminist paganism, replete with organicisms, can only be understood in Sandoval's terms as oppositional ideologies fitting the late twentieth century. They would simply bewilder anyone not preoccupied with the machines and consciousness of late capitalism. In that sense they are part of the cyborg world. But there are also great riches for feminists in explicitly embracing the possibilities inherent in the breakdown of clean distinctions between organism and machine and similar distinctions structuring the Western self. It is the simultaneity of breakdowns that cracks the matrices of domination and opens geometric possibilities. What might be learned from personal and political 'technological' pollution? I look briefly at two overlapping groups of texts for their insight into the construction of a potentially helpful cyborg myth: constructions of women of colour and monstrous selves in feminist science fiction.

Earlier I suggested that 'women of colour' might be understood as a cyborg identity, a potent subjectivity synthesized from fusions of outsider identities and in the complex political-historical layerings of her 'biomythography', *Zami* (Lorde, 1982; King, 1987a, 1987b). There are material and cultural grids mapping this potential, Audre Lorde (1984) captures the tone in the title of her *Sister Outsider*. In my political myth, Sister Outsider is the offshore woman, whom US workers, female and feminized, are supposed to regard as the enemy preventing their solidarity, threatening their security. Onshore, inside the boundary of the United States, Sister Outsider is a potential amidst the races and ethnic identities of women manipulated for division, competition, and exploitation in the same industries. 'Women of colour' are the preferred labour force for the science-based industries, the real women for whom the world-wide sexual market, labour market, and politics of reproduction kaleidoscope into daily life. Young Korean women hired in the sex industry and in electronics assembly are recruited from high schools, educated for the integrated circuit. Literacy, especially in English, distinguishes the 'cheap' female labour so attractive to the multinationals.

Contrary to orientalist stereotypes of the 'oral primitive', literacy is a special mark of women of colour, acquired by US black women as well as

men through a history of risking death to learn and to teach reading and writing. Writing has a special significance for all colonized groups. Writing has been crucial to the Western myth of the distinction between oral and written cultures, primitive and civilized mentalities, and more recently to the erosion of that distinction in 'postmodernist' theories attacking the phallogocentrism of the West, with its worship of the monotheistic, phallic, authoritative, and singular work, the unique and perfect name.<sup>26</sup> Contests for the meanings of writing are a major form of contemporary political struggle. Releasing the play of writing is deadly serious. The poetry and stories of US women of colour are repeatedly about writing, about access to the power to signify; but this time that power must be neither phallic nor innocent. Cyborg writing must not be about the Fall, the imagination of a once-upon-a-time wholeness before language, before writing, before Man. Cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other.

The tools are often stories, retold stories, versions that reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalized identities. In retelling origin stories, cyborg authors subvert the central myths of origin of Western culture. We have all been colonized by those origin myths, with their longing for fulfilment in apocalypse. The phallogocentric origin stories most crucial for feminist cyborgs are built into the literal technologies – technologies that write the world, biotechnology and microelectronics – that have recently textualized our bodies as code problems on the grid of C<sup>3</sup>I. Feminist cyborg stories have the task of recoding communication and intelligence to subvert command and control.

Figuratively and literally, language politics pervade the struggles of women of colour; and stories about language have a special power in the rich contemporary writing by US women of colour. For example, retellings of the story of the indigenous woman Malinche, mother of the mestizo 'bastard' race of the new world, master of languages, and mistress of Cortés, carry special meaning for Chicana constructions of identity. Cherríe Moraga (1983) in *Loving in the War Years* explores the themes of identity when one never possessed the original language, never told the original story, never resided in the harmony of legitimate heterosexuality in the garden of culture, and so cannot base identity on a myth or a fall from innocence and right to natural names, mother's or father's.<sup>27</sup> Moraga's writing, her superb literacy, is presented in her poetry as the same kind of violation as Malinche's mastery of the conqueror's language – a violation, an illegitimate production, that allows survival. Moraga's language is not 'whole'; it is self-consciously spliced, a chimera of English and Spanish, both conqueror's languages. But it is this chimeric monster, without claim to an original language before

violation, that crafts the erotic, competent, potent identities of women of colour. Sister Outsider hints at the possibility of world survival not because of her innocence, but because of her ability to live on the boundaries, to write without the founding myth of original wholeness, with its inescapable apocalypse of final return to a deathly oneness that Man has imagined to be the innocent and all-powerful Mother, freed at the End from another spiral of appropriation by her son. Writing marks Moraga's body, affirms it as the body of a woman of colour, against the possibility of passing into the unmarked category of the Anglo father or into the orientalist myth of 'original illiteracy' of a mother that never was. Malinche was mother here, not Eve before eating the forbidden fruit. Writing affirms Sister Outsider, not the Woman-before-the-Fall-into-Writing needed by the phallogocentric Family of Man.

Writing is pre-eminently the technology of cyborgs, etched surfaces of the late twentieth century. Cyborg politics is the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism. That is why cyborg politics insist on noise and advocate pollution, rejoicing in the illegitimate fusions of animal and machine. These are the couplings which make Man and Woman so problematic, subverting the structure of desire, the force imagined to generate language and gender, and so subverting the structure and modes of reproduction of 'Western' identity, of nature and culture, of mirror and eye, slave and master, body and mind. 'We' did not originally choose to be cyborgs, but choice grounds a liberal politics and epistemology that imagines the reproduction of individuals before the wider replications of 'texts'.

From the perspective of cyborgs, freed of the need to ground politics in 'our' privileged position of the oppression that incorporates all other dominations, the innocence of the merely violated, the ground of those closer to nature, we can see powerful possibilities. Feminisms and Marxisms have run aground on Western epistemological imperatives to construct a revolutionary subject from the perspective of a hierarchy of oppressions and/or a latent position of moral superiority, innocence, and greater closeness to nature. With no available original dream of a common language or original symbiosis promising protection from hostile 'masculine' separation, but written into the play of a text that has no finally privileged reading or salvation history, to recognize 'oneself' as fully implicated in the world, frees us of the need to root politics in identification, vanguard parties, purity, and mothering. Stripped of identity, the bastard race teaches about the power of the margins and the importance of a mother like Malinche. Women of colour have transformed her from the evil mother of

masculinist fear into the originally literate mother who teaches survival.

This is not just literary deconstruction, but liminal transformation. Every story that begins with original innocence and privileges the return to wholeness imagines the drama of life to be individuation, separation, the birth of the self, the tragedy of autonomy, the fall into writing, alienation; that is, war, tempered by imaginary respite in the bosom of the Other. These plots are ruled by a reproductive politics – rebirth without flaw, perfection, abstraction. In this plot women are imagined either better or worse off, but all agree they have less selfhood, weaker individuation, more fusion to the oral, to Mother, less at stake in masculine autonomy. But there is another route to having less at stake in masculine autonomy, a route that does not pass through Woman, Primitive, Zero, the Mirror Stage and its imaginary. It passes through women and other present-tense, illegitimate cyborgs, not of Woman born, who refuse the ideological resources of victimization so as to have a real life. These cyborgs are the people who refuse to disappear on cue, no matter how many times a ‘Western’ commentator remarks on the sad passing of another primitive, another organic group done in by ‘Western’ technology, by writing.<sup>28</sup> These real-life cyborgs (for example, the Southeast Asian village women workers in Japanese and US electronics firms described by Aihwa Ong) are actively rewriting the texts of their bodies and societies. Survival is the stakes in this play of readings.

To recapitulate, certain dualisms have been persistent in Western traditions; they have all been systemic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of colour, nature, workers, animals – in short, domination of all constituted as others, whose task is to mirror the self. Chief among these troubling dualisms are self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, civilized/primitive, reality/appearance, whole/part, agent/resource, maker/made, active/passive, right/wrong, truth/illusion, total/partial, God/man. The self is the One who is not dominated, who knows that by the service of the other, the other is the one who holds the future, who knows that by the experience of domination, which gives the lie to the autonomy of the self. To be One is to be autonomous, to be powerful, to be God; but to be One is to be an illusion, and so to be involved in a dialectic of apocalypse with the other. Yet to be other is to be multiple, without clear boundary, frayed, insubstantial. One is too few, but two are too many.

High-tech culture challenges these dualisms in intriguing ways. It is not clear who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machine. It is not clear what is mind and what body in machines that resolve into coding practices. In so far as we know ourselves in both formal discourse (for example, biology) and in daily practice (for example, the homework economy in the integrated circuit), we find ourselves to be cyborgs, hybrids, mosaics, chimeras. Biological organisms have become biotic systems, com-

munications devices like others. There is no fundamental, ontological separation in our formal knowledge of machine and organism, of technical and organic. The replicant Rachel in the Ridley Scott film *Blade Runner* stands as the image of a cyborg culture's fear, love, and confusion.

One consequence is that our sense of connection to our tools is heightened. The trance state experienced by many computer users has become a staple of science-fiction film and cultural jokes. Perhaps paraplegics and other severely handicapped people can (and sometimes do) have the most intense experiences of complex hybridization with other communication devices.<sup>29</sup> Anne McCaffrey's pre-feminist *The Ship Who Sang* (1969) explored the consciousness of a cyborg, hybrid of girl's brain and complex machinery, formed after the birth of a severely handicapped child. Gender, sexuality, embodiment, skill: all were reconstituted in the story. Why should our bodies end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin? From the seventeenth century till now, machines could be animated – given ghostly souls to make them speak or move or to account for their orderly development and mental capacities. Or organisms could be mechanized – reduced to body understood as resource of mind. These machine/organism relationships are obsolete, unnecessary. For us, in imagination and in other practice, machines can be prosthetic devices, intimate components, friendly selves. We don't need organic holism to give impermeable wholeness, the total woman and her feminist variants (mutants?). Let me conclude this point by a very partial reading of the logic of the cyborg monsters of my second group of texts, feminist science fiction.

The cyborgs populating feminist science fiction make very problematic the statuses of man or woman, human, artefact, member of a race, individual entity, or body. Katie King clarifies how pleasure in reading these fictions is not largely based on identification. Students facing Joanna Russ for the first time, students who have learned to take modernist writers like James Joyce or Virginia Woolf without flinching, do not know what to make of *The Adventures of Alyx* or *The Female Man*, where characters refuse the reader's search for innocent wholeness while granting the wish for heroic quests, exuberant eroticism, and serious politics. *The Female Man* is the story of four versions of one genotype, all of whom meet, but even taken together do not make a whole, resolve the dilemmas of violent moral action, or remove the growing scandal of gender. The feminist science fiction of Samuel R. Delany, especially *Tales of Nevèrÿon*, mocks stories of origin by redoing the neolithic revolution, replaying the founding moves of Western civilization to subvert their plausibility. James Tiptree, Jr, an author whose fiction was regarded as particularly manly until her 'true' gender was revealed, tells tales of reproduction based on non-mammalian technologies like alternation of generations of male brood pouches and male nurturing. John Varley

constructs a supreme cyborg in his arch-feminist exploration of Gaea, a mad goddess-planet-trickster-old woman-technological device on whose surface an extraordinary array of post-cyborg symbioses are spawned. Octavia Butler writes of an African sorceress pitting her powers of transformation against the genetic manipulations of her rival (*Wild Seed*), of time warps that bring a modern US black woman into slavery where her actions in relation to her white master-ancestor determine the possibility of her own birth (*Kindred*), and of the illegitimate insights into identity and community of an adopted cross-species child who came to know the enemy as self (*Survivor*). In *Dawn* (1987), the first instalment of a series called *Xenogenesis*, Butler tells the story of Lilith Iyapo, whose personal name recalls Adam's first and repudiated wife and whose family name marks her status as the widow of the son of Nigerian immigrants to the US. A black woman and a mother whose child is dead, Lilith mediates the transformation of humanity through genetic exchange with extra-terrestrial lovers/rescuers/destroyers/genetic engineers, who reform earth's habitats after the nuclear holocaust and coerce surviving humans into intimate fusion with them. It is a novel that interrogates reproductive, linguistic, and nuclear politics in a mythic field structured by late twentieth-century race and gender.

Because it is particularly rich in boundary transgressions, Vonda McIntyre's *Superluminal* can close this truncated catalogue of promising and dangerous monsters who help redefine the pleasures and politics of embodiment and feminist writing. In a fiction where no character is 'simply' human, human status is highly problematic. Orca, a genetically altered diver, can speak with killer whales and survive deep ocean conditions, but she longs to explore space as a pilot, necessitating bionic implants jeopardizing her kinship with the divers and cetaceans. Transformations are effected by virus vectors carrying a new developmental code, by transplant surgery, by implants of microelectronic devices, by analogue doubles, and other means. Laenea becomes a pilot by accepting a heart implant and a host of other alterations allowing survival in transit at speeds exceeding that of light. Radu Dracul survives a virus-caused plague in his outerworld planet to find himself with a time sense that changes the boundaries of spatial perception for the whole species. All the characters explore the limits of language; the dream of communicating experience; and the necessity of limitation, partiality, and intimacy even in this world of protean transformation and connection. *Superluminal* stands also for the defining contradictions of a cyborg world in another sense; it embodies textually the intersection of feminist theory and colonial discourse in the science fiction I have alluded to in this chapter. This is a conjunction with a long history that many 'First World' feminists have tried to repress, including myself in my readings of *Superluminal* before being called to account by Zoe Sofoulis,

whose different location in the world system's informatics of domination made her acutely alert to the imperialist moment of all science fiction cultures, including women's science fiction. From an Australian feminist sensitivity, Sofoulis remembered more readily McIntyre's role as writer of the adventures of Captain Kirk and Spock in TV's *Star Trek* series than her rewriting the romance in *Superluminal*.

Monsters have always defined the limits of community in Western imaginations. The Centaurs and Amazons of ancient Greece established the limits of the centred polis of the Greek male human by their disruption of marriage and boundary pollutions of the warrior with animality and woman. Unseparated twins and hermaphrodites were the confused human material in early modern France who grounded discourse on the natural and supernatural, medical and legal, portents and diseases – all crucial to establishing modern identity.<sup>30</sup> The evolutionary and behavioural sciences of monkeys and apes have marked the multiple boundaries of late twentieth-century industrial identities. Cyborg monsters in feminist science fiction define quite different political possibilities and limits from those proposed by the mundane fiction of Man and Woman.

There are several consequences to taking seriously the imagery of cyborgs as other than our enemies. Our bodies, ourselves; bodies are maps of power and identity. Cyborgs are no exception. A cyborg body is not innocent; it was not born in a garden; it does not seek unitary identity and so generate antagonistic dualisms without end (or until the world ends); it takes irony for granted. One is too few, and two is only one possibility. Intense pleasure in skill, machine skill, ceases to be a sin, but an aspect of embodiment. The machine is not an *it* to be animated, worshipped, and dominated. The machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment. We can be responsible for machines; *they* do not dominate or threaten us. We are responsible for boundaries; we are they. Up till now (once upon a time), female embodiment seemed to be given, organic, necessary; and female embodiment seemed to mean skill in mothering and its metaphoric extensions. Only by being out of place could we take intense pleasure in machines, and then with excuses that this was organic activity after all, appropriate to females. Cyborgs might consider more seriously the *partial*, fluid, sometimes aspect of sex and sexual embodiment. Gender might not be global identity after all, even if it has profound historical breadth and depth.

The ideologically charged question of what counts as daily activity, as experience, can be approached by exploiting the cyborg image. Feminists have recently claimed that women are given to dailiness, that women more than men somehow sustain daily life, and so have a privileged epistemological position potentially. There is a compelling aspect to this claim, one that makes visible unvalued female activity and names it as the ground of life.

But *the* ground of life? What about all the ignorance of women, all the exclusions and failures of knowledge and skill? What about men's access to daily competence, to knowing how to build things, to take them apart, to play? What about other embodiments? Cyborg gender is a local possibility taking a global vengeance. Race, gender, and capital require a cyborg theory of wholes and parts. There is no drive in cyborgs to produce total theory, but there is an intimate experience of boundaries, their construction and deconstruction. There is a myth system waiting to become a political language to ground one way of looking at science and technology and challenging the informatics of domination – in order to act potently.

One last image: organisms and organismic, holistic politics depend on metaphors of rebirth and invariably call on the resources of reproductive sex. I would suggest that cyborgs have more to do with regeneration and are suspicious of the reproductive matrix and of most birthing. For salamanders, regeneration after injury, such as the loss of a limb, involves regrowth of structure and restoration of function with the constant possibility of twinning or other odd topographical productions at the site of former injury. The regrown limb can be monstrous, duplicated, potent. We have all been injured, profoundly. We require regeneration, not rebirth, and the possibilities for our reconstitution include the utopian dream of the hope for a monstrous world without gender.

Cyborg imagery can help express two crucial arguments in this essay: first, the production of universal, totalizing theory is a major mistake that misses most of reality, probably always, but certainly now; and second, taking responsibility for the social relations of science and technology means refusing an anti-science metaphysics, a demonology of technology, and so means embracing the skilful task of reconstructing the boundaries of daily life, in partial connection with others, in communication with all of our parts. It is not just that science and technology are possible means of great human satisfaction, as well as a matrix of complex dominations. Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves. This is a dream not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia. It is an imagination of a feminist speaking in tongues to strike fear into the circuits of the super-savers of the new right. It means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, space stories. Though both are bound in the spiral dance, I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess.



# Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation

## Laboria Cuboniks

### ZERO

0x00 Ours is a world in vertigo. It is a world that swarms with technological mediation, interlacing our daily lives with abstraction, virtuality, and complexity. XF constructs a feminism adapted to these realities: a feminism of unprecedented cunning, scale, and vision; a future in which the realization of gender justice and feminist emancipation contribute to a universalist politics assembled from the needs of every human, regardless of race, ability, economic standing, or geographical position. No more futureless repetition on the treadmill of capital, no more submission to the drudgery of labour, productive and reproductive alike, no more reification of the given masked as critique. Our future requires depetrification. XF is not a bid for revolution, but a wager on the long game of history, demanding imagination, dexterity and persistence.

0x01 XF seizes alienation as an impetus to generate new worlds. We are all alienated – but have we ever been otherwise? It is through, and not despite, our alienated condition that we can free ourselves from the muck of immediacy. Freedom is not a given—and it's certainly not given by anything 'natural'. The construction of freedom involves not less but more alienation; alienation is the labour of freedom's construction. Nothing should be accepted as fixed, permanent, or 'given'—neither material conditions nor social forms. XF mutates, navigates and probes every horizon. Anyone who's been deemed 'unnatural' in the face of reigning biological norms, anyone who's experienced injustices wrought in the name of natural order, will realize that the glorification of 'nature' has nothing to offer us—the queer and trans among us, the differently-abled, as well as those who have suffered discrimination due to pregnancy or duties connected to child-rearing. XF is vehemently anti-naturalist. Essentialist naturalism reeks of theology—the sooner it is exorcised, the better.

- 0x02 Why is there so little explicit, organized effort to repurpose technologies for progressive gender political ends? XF seeks to strategically deploy existing technologies to re-engineer the world. Serious risks are built into these tools; they are prone to imbalance, abuse, and exploitation of the weak. Rather than pretending to risk nothing, XF advocates the necessary assembly of techno-political interfaces responsive to these risks. Technology isn't inherently progressive. Its uses are fused with culture in a positive feedback loop that makes linear sequencing, prediction, and absolute caution impossible. Technoscientific innovation must be linked to a collective theoretical and political thinking in which women, queers, and the gender non-conforming play an unparalleled role.
- 0x03 The real emancipatory potential of technology remains unrealized. Fed by the market, its rapid growth is offset by bloat, and elegant innovation is surrendered to the buyer, whose stagnant world it decorates. Beyond the noisy clutter of commodified craft, the ultimate task lies in engineering technologies to combat unequal access to reproductive and pharmacological tools, environmental cataclysm, economic instability, as well as dangerous forms of unpaid/underpaid labour. Gender inequality still characterizes the fields in which our technologies are conceived, built, and legislated for, while female workers in electronics (to name just one industry) perform some of the worst paid, monotonous and debilitating labour. Such injustice demands structural, machinic and ideological correction.
- 0x04 Xenofeminism is a rationalism. To claim that reason or rationality is 'by nature' a patriarchal enterprise is to concede defeat. It is true that the canonical 'history of thought' is dominated by men, and it is male hands we see throttling existing institutions of science and technology. But this is precisely why *feminism must be a rationalism*—because of this miserable imbalance, and not despite it. There is no 'feminine' rationality, nor is there a 'masculine' one. Science is not an expression but a suspension of gender. If today it is dominated by masculine egos, then it is at odds with itself—and this contradiction can be leveraged. Reason, like information, wants to be free, and patriarchy cannot give it freedom. *Rationalism must itself be a feminism*. XF marks the point where these claims intersect in a two-way dependency. It names reason as an engine of feminist emancipation, and declares the right of everyone to speak as no one in particular.

# INTERRUPT

- 0x05** The excess of modesty in feminist agendas of recent decades is not proportionate to the monstrous complexity of our reality, a reality cross-hatched with fibre-optic cables, radio and microwaves, oil and gas pipelines, aerial and shipping routes, and the unrelenting, simultaneous execution of millions of communication protocols with every passing millisecond. Systematic thinking and structural analysis have largely fallen by the wayside in favour of admirable, but insufficient struggles, bound to fixed localities and fragmented insurrections. Whilst capitalism is understood as a complex and ever-expanding totality, many would-be emancipatory anti-capitalist projects remain profoundly fearful of transitioning to the universal, resisting big-picture speculative politics by condemning them as necessarily oppressive vectors. Such a false guarantee treats universals as absolute, generating a debilitating disjuncture between the thing we seek to depose and the strategies we advance to depose it.
- 0x06** Global complexity opens us to urgent cognitive and ethical demands. These are Promethean responsibilities that cannot pass unaddressed. Much of twenty-first century feminism—from the remnants of postmodern identity politics to large swathes of contemporary ecofeminism—struggles to adequately address these challenges in a manner capable of producing substantial and enduring change. Xenofeminism endeavours to face up to these obligations as collective agents capable of transitioning between multiple levels of political, material and conceptual organization.
- 0x07** We are adamantly synthetic, unsatisfied by analysis alone. XF urges constructive oscillation between description and prescription to mobilize the recursive potential of contemporary technologies upon gender, sexuality and disparities of power. Given that there are a range of gendered challenges specifically relating to life in a digital age—from sexual harassment via social media, to doxxing, privacy, and the protection of online images—the situation requires a feminism at ease with computation. Today, it is imperative that we develop an ideological infrastructure that both supports and facilitates feminist interventions within connective, networked elements of the contemporary world. Xenofeminism is about more than digital self-defence and freedom from patriarchal networks. We want to cultivate the exercise of positive freedom—freedom-to rather than simply freedom-from—and urge feminists to equip themselves with the skills to redeploy existing technologies and invent novel cognitive and material tools in the service of common ends.
- 0x08** The radical opportunities afforded by developing (and alienating) forms of technological mediation should no longer be put to use in the exclusive interests of capital, which, by design, only benefits the few. There

are incessantly proliferating tools to be annexed, and although no one can claim their comprehensive accessibility, digital tools have never been more widely available or more sensitive to appropriation than they are today. This is not an elision of the fact that a large amount of the world's poor is adversely affected by the expanding technological industry (from factory workers labouring under abominable conditions to the Ghanaian villages that have become a repository for the e-waste of the global powers) but an explicit acknowledgement of these conditions as a target for elimination. Just as the invention of the stock market was also the invention of the crash, Xenofeminism knows that technological innovation must equally anticipate its systemic condition responsively.

## TRAP

**0x09** XF rejects illusion and melancholy as political inhibitors. Illusion, as the blind presumption that the weak can prevail over the strong with no strategic coordination, leads to unfulfilled promises and unmarshalled drives. This is a politics that, in wanting so much, ends up building so little. Without the labour of large-scale, collective social organisation, declaring one's desire for global change is nothing more than wishful thinking. On the other hand, melancholy—so endemic to the left—teaches us that emancipation is an extinct species to be wept over and that blips of negation are the best we can hope for. At its worst, such an attitude generates nothing but political lassitude, and at its best, installs an atmosphere of pervasive despair which too often degenerates into factionalism and petty moralizing. The malady of melancholia only compounds political inertia, and—under the guise of being realistic—relinquishes all hope of calibrating the world otherwise. It is against such maladies that XF inoculates.

**0x0A** We take politics that exclusively valorize the local in the guise of subverting currents of global abstraction, to be insufficient. To secede from or disavow capitalist machinery will not make it disappear. Likewise, suggestions to pull the lever on the emergency brake of embedded velocities, the call to slow down and scale back, is a possibility available only to the few—a violent particularity of exclusivity—ultimately entailing catastrophe for the many. Refusing to think beyond the microcommunity, to foster connections between fractured insurgencies, to consider how emancipatory tactics can be scaled up for universal implementation, is to remain satisfied with temporary and defensive gestures. XF is an affirmative creature on the offensive, fiercely insisting on the possibility of large-scale social change for all of our alien kin.

**0x0B** A sense of the world's volatility and artificiality seems to have faded from contemporary queer and feminist politics, in favour of a plural but static

constellation of gender identities, in whose bleak light equations of the good and the natural are stubbornly restored. While having (perhaps) admirably expanded thresholds of 'tolerance', too often we are told to seek solace in unfreedom, staking claims on being 'born' this way, as if offering an excuse with nature's blessing. All the while, the heteronormative centre chugs on. XF challenges this centrifugal referent, knowing full well that sex and gender are exemplary of the fulcrum between norm and fact, between freedom and compulsion. To tilt the fulcrum in the direction of nature is a defensive concession at best, and a retreat from what makes trans and queer politics more than just a lobby: that it is an arduous assertion of freedom against an order that seemed immutable. Like every myth of the given, a stable foundation is fabricated for a real world of chaos, violence, and doubt. The 'given' is sequestered into the private realm as a certainty, whilst retreating on fronts of public consequences. When the possibility of transition became real and known, the tomb under Nature's shrine cracked, and new histories—bristling with futures—escaped the old order of 'sex'. The disciplinary grid of gender is in no small part an attempt to mend that shattered foundation, and tame the lives that escaped it. The time has now come to tear down this shrine entirely, and not bow down before it in a piteous apology for what little autonomy has been won.

0x0C If 'cyberspace' once offered the promise of escaping the strictures of essentialist identity categories, the climate of contemporary social media has swung forcefully in the other direction, and has become a theatre where these prostrations to identity are performed. With these curatorial practices come puritanical rituals of moral maintenance, and these stages are too often overrun with the disavowed pleasures of accusation, shaming, and denunciation. Valuable platforms for connection, organization, and skill-sharing become clogged with obstacles to productive debate positioned as if they are debate. These puritanical politics of shame—which fetishize oppression as if it were a blessing, and cloud the waters in moralistic frenzies—leave us cold. We want neither clean hands nor beautiful souls, neither virtue nor terror. We want superior forms of corruption.

0x0D What this shows is that the task of engineering platforms for social emancipation and organization cannot ignore the cultural and semiotic mutations these platforms afford. What requires reengineering are the memetic parasites arousing and coordinating behaviours in ways occluded by their hosts' self-image; failing this, memes like 'anonymity', 'ethics', 'social justice' and 'privilege-checking' host social dynamisms at odds with the often-commendable intentions with which they're taken up. The task of collective self-mastery requires a hyperstitional manipulation of desire's puppet-strings, and deployment of semiotic operators over a terrain of highly networked cultural systems. The will will always be corrupted by the memes in which it traffics, but nothing prevents us from instrumentalizing this fact, and calibrating it in view of the ends it desires.

## PARITY

0x0E Xenofeminism is gender-abolitionist. 'Gender abolitionism' is not code for the eradication of what are currently considered 'gendered' traits from the human population. Under patriarchy, such a project could only spell disaster—the notion of what is 'gendered' sticks disproportionately to the feminine. But even if this balance were redressed, we have no interest in seeing the sexuate diversity of the world reduced. Let a hundred sexes bloom! 'Gender abolitionism' is shorthand for the ambition to construct a society where traits currently assembled under the rubric of gender, no longer furnish a grid for the asymmetric operation of power. 'Race abolitionism' expands into a similar formula—that the struggle must continue until currently racialized characteristics are no more a basis of discrimination than the color of one's eyes. Ultimately, every emancipatory abolitionism must incline towards the horizon of class abolitionism, since it is in capitalism where we encounter oppression in its transparent, denaturalized form: you're not exploited or oppressed because you are a wage labourer or poor; you are a labourer or poor because you are exploited.

0x0F Xenofeminism understands that the viability of emancipatory abolitionist projects—the abolition of class, gender, and race—hinges on a profound reworking of the universal. The universal must be grasped as generic, which is to say, intersectional. Intersectionality is not the morcellation of collectives into a static fuzz of cross-referenced identities, but a political orientation that slices through every particular, refusing the crass pigeonholing of bodies. This is not a universal that can be imposed from above, but built from the bottom up – or, better, laterally, opening new lines of transit across an uneven landscape. This non-absolute, generic universality must guard against the facile tendency of conflation with bloated, unmarked particulars—namely Eurocentric universalism—whereby the male is mistaken for the sexless, the white for raceless, the cis for the real, and so on. Absent such a universal, the abolition of class will remain a bourgeois fantasy, the abolition of race will remain a tacit white-supremacism, and the abolition of gender will remain a thinly veiled misogyny, even—especially—when prosecuted by avowed feminists themselves. (The absurd and reckless spectacle of so many self-proclaimed 'gender abolitionists' campaign against trans women is proof enough of this).

0x10 From the postmoderns, we have learnt to burn the facades of the false universal and dispel such confusions; from the moderns, we have learnt to sift new universals from the ashes of the false. Xenofeminism seeks to construct a coalitional politics, a politics without the infection of purity. Wielding the universal requires thoughtful qualification and precise self-reflection so as to become a ready-to-hand tool for multiple political bodies and something that can be appropriated against the numerous oppressions

that transect with gender and sexuality. The universal is no blueprint, and rather than dictate its uses in advance, we propose XF as a platform. The very process of construction is therefore understood to be a negentropic, iterative, and continual refashioning. Xenofeminism seeks to be a mutable architecture that, like open source software, remains available for perpetual modification and enhancement following the navigational impulse of militant ethical reasoning. Open, however, does not mean undirected. The most durable systems in the world owe their stability to the way they train order to emerge as an 'invisible hand' from apparent spontaneity; or exploit the inertia of investment and sedimentation. We should not hesitate to learn from our adversaries or the successes and failures of history. With this in mind, XF seeks ways to seed an order that is equitable and just, injecting it into the geometry of freedoms these platforms afford.

## ADJUST

- 0x11 Our lot is cast with technoscience, where nothing is so sacred that it cannot be reengineered and transformed so as to widen our aperture of freedom, extending to gender and the human. To say that nothing is sacred, that nothing is transcendent or protected from the will to know, to tinker and to hack, is to say that nothing is supernatural. 'Nature'—understood here, as the unbounded arena of science—is all there is. And so, in tearing down melancholy and illusion; the unambitious and the non-scaleable; the libidinized puritanism of certain online cultures, and Nature as an un-remakeable given, we find that our normative anti-naturalism has pushed us towards an unflinching ontological naturalism. There is nothing, we claim, that cannot be studied scientifically and manipulated technologically.
- 0x12 This does not mean that the distinction between the ontological and the normative, between fact and value, is simply cut and dried. The vectors of normative anti-naturalism and ontological naturalism span many ambivalent battlefields. The project of untangling what ought to be from what is, of dissociating freedom from fact, will from knowledge, is, indeed, an infinite task. There are many lacunae where desire confronts us with the brutality of fact, where beauty is indissociable from truth. Poetry, sex, technology and pain are incandescent with this tension we have traced. But give up on the task of revision, release the reins and slacken that tension, and these filaments instantly dim.

## CARRY

0x13 The potential of early, text-based internet culture for countering repressive gender regimes, generating solidarity among marginalised groups, and creating new spaces for experimentation that ignited cyberfeminism in the nineties has clearly waned in the twenty-first century. The dominance of the visual in today's online interfaces has reinstated familiar modes of identity policing, power relations and gender norms in self-representation. But this does not mean that cyberfeminist sensibilities belong to the past. Sorting the subversive possibilities from the oppressive ones latent in today's web requires a feminism sensitive to the insidious return of old power structures, yet savvy enough to know how to exploit the potential. Digital technologies are not separable from the material realities that underwrite them; they are connected so that each can be used to alter the other towards different ends. Rather than arguing for the primacy of the virtual over the material, or the material over the virtual, xenofeminism grasps points of power and powerlessness in both, to unfold this knowledge as effective interventions in our jointly composed reality.

0x14 Intervention in more obviously material hegemonies is just as crucial as intervention in digital and cultural ones. Changes to the built environment harbour some of the most significant possibilities in the reconfiguration of the horizons of women and queers. As the embodiment of ideological constellations, the production of space and the decisions we make for its organization are ultimately articulations about 'us' and reciprocally, how a 'we' can be articulated. With the potential to foreclose, restrict, or open up future social conditions, xenofeminists must become attuned to the language of architecture as a vocabulary for collective choreo-graphy—the coordinated writing of space.

0x15 From the street to the home, domestic space too must not escape our tentacles. So profoundly ingrained, domestic space has been deemed impossible to disembed, where the home as norm has been conflated with home as fact, as an un-remakeable given. Stultifying 'domestic realism' has no home on our horizon. Let us set sights on augmented homes of shared laboratories, of communal media and technical facilities. The home is ripe for spatial transformation as an integral component in any process of feminist futurity. But this cannot stop at the garden gates. We see too well that reinventions of family structure and domestic life are currently only possible at the cost of either withdrawing from the economic sphere—the way of the commune—or bearing its burdens manifold—the way of the single parent. If we want to break the inertia that has kept the moribund figure of the nuclear family unit in place, which has stubbornly worked to isolate women from the public sphere, and men from the lives of their children, while penalizing those who stray from it, we must overhaul the material

infrastructure and break the economic cycles that lock it in place. The task before us is twofold, and our vision necessarily stereoscopic: we must engineer an economy that liberates reproductive labour and family life, while building models of familiarity free from the deadening grind of wage labour.

0x16 From the home to the body, the articulation of a proactive politics for biotechnical intervention and hormones presses. Hormones hack into gender systems possessing political scope extending beyond the aesthetic calibration of individual bodies. Thought structurally, the distribution of hormones—who or what this distribution prioritizes or pathologizes—is of paramount import. The rise of the internet and the hydra of black market pharmacies it let loose—together with a publicly accessible archive of endocrinological knowhow—was instrumental in wresting control of the hormonal economy away from ‘gatekeeping’ institutions seeking to mitigate threats to established distributions of the sexual. To trade in the rule of bureaucrats for the market is, however, not a victory in itself. These tides need to rise higher. We ask whether the idiom of ‘gender hacking’ is extensible into a long-range strategy, a strategy for wetware akin to what hacker culture has already done for software—constructing an entire universe of free and open source platforms that is the closest thing to a practicable communism many of us have ever seen. Without the foolhardy endangerment of lives, can we stitch together the embryonic promises held before us by pharmaceutical 3D printing (‘Reactionware’), grassroots telemedical abortion clinics, gender hacktivist and DIY-HRT forums, and so on, to assemble a platform for free and open source medicine?

0x17 From the global to the local, from the cloud to our bodies, xenofeminism avows the responsibility in constructing new institutions of technomaterialist hegemonic proportions. Like engineers who must conceive of a total structure as well as the molecular parts from which it is constructed, XF emphasises the importance of the mesopolitical sphere against the limited effectiveness of local gestures, creation of autonomous zones, and sheer horizontalism, just as it stands against transcendent, or top-down impositions of values and norms. The mesopolitical arena of xenofeminism’s universalist ambitions comprehends itself as a mobile and intricate network of transits between these polarities. As pragmatists, we invite contamination as a mutational driver between such frontiers.

## OVERFLOW

0x18 XF asserts that adapting our behaviour for an era of Promethean complexity is a labour requiring patience, but a ferocious patience at odds with ‘waiting’. Calibrating a political hegemony or insurgent memplex not only implies the creation of material infra-structures to make the values it

articulates explicit, but places demands on us as subjects. How are we to become hosts of this new world? How do we build a better semiotic parasite—one that arouses the desires we want to desire, that orchestrates not an autophagic orgy of indignity or rage, but an emancipatory and egalitarian community buttressed by new forms of unselfish solidarity and collective self-mastery?

**0x19** Is xenofeminism a programme? Not if this means anything so crude as a recipe, or a single-purpose tool by which a determinate problem is solved. We prefer to think like the schemer or lisper, who seeks to construct a new language in which the problem at hand is immersed, so that solutions for it, and for any number of related problems, might unfurl with ease. Xenofeminism is a platform, an incipient ambition to construct a new language for sexual politics—a language that seizes its own methods as materials to be reworked, and incrementally bootstraps itself into existence. We understand that the problems we face are systemic and interlocking, and that any chance of global success depends on infecting myriad skills and contexts with the logic of XF. Ours is a transformation of seeping, directed subsumption rather than rapid overthrow; it is a transformation of deliberate construction, seeking to submerge the white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy in a sea of procedures that soften its shell and dismantle its defenses, so as to build a new world from the scraps.

**0x1A** Xenofeminism indexes the desire to construct an alien future with a triumphant X on a mobile map. This X does not mark a destination. It is the insertion of a topological-keyframe for the formation of a new logic. In affirming a future untethered to the repetition of the present, we militate for ampliative capacities, for spaces of freedom with a richer geometry than the aisle, the assembly line, and the feed. We need new affordances of perception and action unblinkered by naturalised identities. In the name of feminism, 'Nature' shall no longer be a refuge of injustice, or a basis for any political justification whatsoever!

If nature is unjust, change nature!





## 7. Towards a Feminist Perspective of a New Society

After the analysis of the interplay of the sexual and international division of labour within the framework of capital accumulation, and the effect this has on women's life and humanity, the most burning question now is, how do we get out of this situation? And what would a society be like in which women, nature and colonies were not exploited in the name of the accumulation of ever more wealth and money? Before I try to answer these questions, I would like to clarify my position with regard to the potentialities of the international feminist movement.

### **The case for a middle-class feminist movement**

The Western feminist movement is often accused by leftists, particularly in Third World countries, of being only a movement of educated, middle-class women, and of having been unable to build up a base among working-class women. Middle-class women in underdeveloped countries are admonished to go rather to the slums of the big cities or to the villages, and help the poor women to escape from the clutches of misery and exploitation. I have heard many urban middle-class women in India saying that they themselves were privileged, that they were not oppressed, and that work for women's liberation should start by making poor women conscious of their rights. Those middle-class women, who had begun to discuss women's oppression amongst themselves, were often accused of being self-centred and elitist. And often these women reacted with feelings of acute guilt for belonging to the class of 'privileged' women.

The reasoning behind this critique of so-called middle-class feminism is based on the assumption that women who have to fight to secure their survival from day to day cannot afford to indulge in such luxuries as fighting for 'women's liberation' or for 'human dignity'. It is said that poor women need 'bread' first, before they can think of liberation. On the other hand, women who, due to their class status, have access to modern education and employment, are considered to be already emancipated, particularly if they live in a liberal family atmosphere. It is obvious that such a concept of women's emancipation excludes precisely those sensitive dimensions of the patriarchal man-woman relation around which the new women's movement mobilized, particularly the aspect of violence against women.

But we have seen that an increase in violence against women was the issue in

India and other parts of the world which sparked off genuine feminist movements in many countries. The increase in India of dowry-murder, rape, wife-beating and other anti-women tendencies brought home to urban middle-class women that their so-called privileged class position did not protect them against sexual violence, not even from the men of their own class or family, nor from other men, nor even from the protectors of law and order, the police. In spite of all these experiences in recent years, one can still hear the argument that there is no need for women's liberation among educated urban middle-class women, because these are supposed to be already liberated or to have the means to liberate themselves. This argumentation is an example of the kind of blindness to reality which is often found among middle-class people, also in Third World countries. It is also an example of the economic equation of liberation with wealth. Contrary to this position, *I consider a feminist middle-class movement, both in the over- and in the under-developed countries, as an absolute historical necessity.*

There are a number of reasons to support this position, the most obvious being the already-mentioned fact that patriarchal oppression and exploitation, that sexual harassment and violence are as rampant in the middle classes everywhere as they are among workers or peasants. One could even say that they are more prevalent among this class than among peasants where old sexual taboos still function better. The second reason is that the very privileges middle-class women so often refer to as distinguishing them favourably from poor women do, in fact, expose them more to this kind of violence. They are supposed to be 'protected' women, protected by the men of their family. Therefore, they have not learned to move about freely or/and to defend themselves when they are attacked. Moreover, they are 'privileged' housewives; that means they are isolated in their homes, have hardly any social network of other women or men around them to support them. They are so self-sufficient in everything that they do not have to borrow from friends and neighbours. All this makes them much more vulnerable to patriarchal oppression than working-class or rural women who usually still live and work within a collective context, at least in Third World countries.

In addition, the education middle-class women have received has hardly equipped them to fight against male oppression. The virtues taught to girls in all educational institutions, including the family, are such that the girl loses all self-reliance, all courage and independence of thought and action. As marriage and family are still seen as the natural destiny of women, education means that girls are prepared for this role of housewife and mother.

This preparation for domesticity may have been supplemented by some kind of professional training, but has not been changed fundamentally.

The ideology that woman is basically a housewife is upheld and spread by this class. Home Economics is taught to girls of this class to give this ideology a scientific perspective. All the media, particularly the cinema, foster an image of women based on this ideology. Part of this image is also the idea of romantic love, which more than anything else has fettered women in the West emotionally to patriarchal and sexist man-woman relations.<sup>1</sup> All this, combined with the fact that the middle-class woman as an ideal type is economically dependent on a husband

as breadwinner, is enough to allow us to conclude that to be a middle-class woman or housewife is not a privilege, but a disaster.<sup>2</sup>

In most underdeveloped countries, however, the image of the middle-class woman, the housewife, is still upheld consciously or subconsciously and propagated as *the symbol of progress*. This is done not only by explicitly 'bourgeois' agencies and organizations like conservative women's organizations, but also by the scientific community, by politicians and administrators, and particularly by the development planners, nationally and internationally, and above all, by the business community. What is more, left organizations, too, which want to spread class consciousness among workers and peasants, have basically no other image of woman in their mind when they work among women. Not only are their cadres mainly middle-class men and women, but also the issues they consider as specific women's issues (childcare, health, family planning, housework) are related to this image. We have seen that, even in socialist countries which underwent revolutionary changes in the property relations, the middle-class image of woman as a (dependent) housewife has been at the core of the new economic policies of creating a subsidiary or informal sector.

The 'privileges' of middle-class women are not only that they are domesticated, isolated, dependent on a man, emotionally fettered and weakened, and tied down to an ideology that totally objectifies them. All this is combined with the fact that they, as housewives, have to spend the money their husbands earn. They have become – at least in the urban areas – the main agents of domestic consumption, who provide the necessary market for the commodities produced. It is this class of women which, to a large extent, are the subjects and objects of consumerism. In the West it is a common phenomenon that women compensate for their many frustrations by going on a shopping spree. But also middle-class women in poor countries follow the same pattern. African, Asian or Latin-American urban middle-class women follow more or less the same lifestyle and model of consumption. A look at African or Indian women's magazines suffices to show how middle-class women are mobilized as consumers.

National and international capitalists have a keen interest in upholding and spreading this image of woman, and the model of consumption that goes along with it, as the symbol of progress. Where would the national and multinational corporations sell their cosmetics, detergents, soaps, synthetic fibres, plastics, fast food, baby food, milk-powder, pills, etc., if middle-class women would not provide the market?

Therefore, it is the middle-class woman as housewife, mother and sex-symbol who is constantly mobilized to follow all fashions and fads, who is one of the main items in the advertising strategy of all marketing agencies. As Elisabeth Croll has remarked, the image of this woman has also made its appearance on the billboards of Peking where woman as the 'model worker' has been replaced by 'woman the consumer' of cosmetics, television, washing machines, toothpaste, watches, modern cooking pots. The new Chinese woman on these posters is curling her straight hair, using lipsticks, and beautifying her eyes. The protests of the Women's Federation against this kind of advertising had little effect, because this image of woman is intimately bound up with the growing commercial interests and connec-

tions the Chinese government is establishing with the West (Croll, 1983: 105). Thus, the Western middle-class woman as consumer appears as the symbol of progress also in the People's Republic of China. Western feminists are challenging this image of woman and the social reality behind it, not only because they have realized the gigantic bluff behind this image of the 'happy woman' in the face of so much direct and indirect brutality against women, but also because many are realizing that consumerism is the drug by which women and men are made to accept otherwise inhuman, and increasingly destructive, conditions of life. The new 'needs', created by industry in its desperate effort to keep the growth model going are all of the type of *addictions*. The satisfaction of these addictions is no longer contributing to more happiness and human fulfilment, but to more destruction of the human essence.

In the early 1970s, the women's movement together with other protest movements may still have believed that now, since 'we have enough of everything' the woman's question could be solved by a process of simple redistribution and the eventual realization of the promises of the bourgeois revolutions. But now it is evident that it is the very over-abundance of commodities and the paradigm behind this over-production which destroy the environment, as well as human life and happiness. Moreover, the sadistic, cynical woman-hatred of the whole capitalist-patriarchal civilization is so openly demonstrated today that feminists can no longer have the illusion that women's liberation will be possible within the context of this social paradigm.

This realization is not yet very widespread among middle-class feminists in underdeveloped countries. But I think they, too, have grounds enough not to feel apologetic about the existing and growing feminist movement in their class. Such a movement is, indeed, necessary if urban women are to defend themselves against the growing anti-woman tendencies we can observe worldwide. But it is also necessary that middle-class women themselves begin to destroy the myths, the images, the social values, which make them a false symbol of progress. If middle-class women in India, for instance, begin to question such patriarchal values as virginity, or the ideals of self-sacrificing womanhood propagated by mythology, like Sita or Savitri, or the modern housewife ideology, then they do not only contribute to their own liberation, but also to the liberation of working-class and peasant women. Because as symbols of progress, these images of women, these myths and values, are now brought to all Indian villages by the media, the cinema, the education system, as well as by developmentalists, activists and social workers. With the spread of the middle-class housewife ideology into the rural and slum areas, the problem is not only its intrinsic devaluation of the woman, but also that for most poor rural and urban women, these images will never become *reality*. And yet these images exert a great fascination on them, and many may try desperately to come up to the standard of these modern middle-class women. With TV also being available in many rural areas, American TV productions (like Dallas), or local ones imitating them, will reach all corners. It is, therefore, necessary that urban middle-class women, particularly those who want to work among poor rural and urban women in Third World countries, begin to criticize the ideology and reality of middle-class womanhood. The existence of a strong

middle-class feminist movement with a clear perspective is a safeguard against the further propagation of the false image of woman the housewife and consumer as a model for women's liberation and progress. Without such a movement and without the feminist critique of the middle-class woman as the bearer of a happier future, women activists who work among poor women will subconsciously transport this image to women who have no use for it.

There is yet another aspect. Without a radical feminist critique of the middle-class ideal of womanhood – with its specific national and cultural manifestations – there is the danger that middle-class women, even if they are genuinely committed to women's liberation and to liberation of all oppressed and exploited, will remain blind to the truly progressive and human elements to be found among the so-called 'backward' classes and communities with regard to women. These may be elements of a tradition which has not yet been totally subsumed under patriarchy, remnants of matriarchal or matrilineal traditions, or there may be pockets of women's power which these may derive from their still communal and collective way of living and working, or even from their long tradition of resistance to male, class and colonial oppression (Mies, 1983; Chaki-Sircar, 1984; Yamben, 1976; van Allen, 1972).

As Christine White has observed with regard to the Vietnamese communist leaders, their blindness regarding the matriarchal traditions in Vietnam, and the almost exclusive concentration on feudal and Confucian traditions is a manifestation of the male middle-class preoccupation with patriarchal civilization (White, 1980: 3–6). As the European bourgeoisie tried to emulate the lifestyle of the aristocracy, the working classes have imitated the bourgeoisie. The same process of emulation and imitating is taking place between Third World and First World countries. In this whole process, all national and local traditions whereby women had or still have some kind of autonomy and strength are defined as 'backward', 'primitive', 'savage'. It cannot be in women's interest to contribute to this destruction of women's history. A feminist middle-class movement could draw strength, inspiration and guidance from the history and the culture of these 'backward' women.

This is all the more urgent and necessary since the myth of 'man the breadwinner', the sun around which the middle-class women move like a planet, is rapidly being exploded. Increasing evidence is emerging that marriage and family are no longer an economic life insurance for women, that increasing numbers of men are shunning the responsibility for women and children, among the educated middle classes as well. Therefore, middle-class women would do well to go to their poorer sisters, and to learn from them how to survive under these circumstances. And how to survive with dignity.

## **Basic Principles and Concepts**

It is easier to know what one does not want than to know what one wants. To formulate a feminist perspective for a future society is a formidable task which no single individual can accomplish. Furthermore, there is no ideological or theoretical

centre in the women's movement which could assume the task of formulating a consistent theory, strategy and tactics. The international feminist movement is a truly anarchic movement in which any woman who feels committed and has something to say can contribute to the formulation of the vision of the future society. Some consider this as a weakness of the movement, others as its strength. But whatever position one may take, the fact remains that the feminist movement does not work otherwise. This is true at least for all the groups, organizations and individual women who do not subordinate the woman's question to any other, supposedly more general, question, who, in other words, want to maintain the autonomy of the movement.

The following thoughts have, therefore, to be understood as one such contribution to our common effort to work out a concrete feminist utopia of a new society. The perspective I want to present does not claim to be comprehensive, although I shall try to start from a consideration of the totality of the social reality in which we live. Nor is it all new and original; many ideas have been expressed already by others. But I shall try to draw some conclusions from our struggles, and the experiences, studies, reflections, and quarrels of the recent past, as well as from the history of the first women's movement. It is an effort to learn from our history. I feel that, unless we do this now, the roll-back tendencies observable everywhere today may succeed in again destroying the history of our struggles and ideas. What is more, they threaten to destroy the very essence of what so far has been understood as 'human'.

To develop a new perspective requires first that we step back, pause, and take a panoramic view of the reality that surrounds us. That means we have to start from a world-view that attempts, as far as possible, to comprise the totality of our reality.

Our analysis has shown that the capitalist-patriarchal paradigm of man-the-hunter which has shaped our present reality is characterized at all levels by dualistic and hierarchically structured divisions which are the basis of exploitative polarizations between parts of the whole: between humans and nature, man and woman, different classes, and different peoples, but also between different parts of the human body, for example, between 'head' and 'the rest', rationality and emotionality. On the level of ideas, these dualistic divisions are found in the hierarchical evaluation and polarization of the concepts of nature and culture, mind and matter, progress and retrogression, leisure and labour, etc. I call these divisions *colonizing divisions*. According to this paradigm, the totality is not only divided up in this manner, but, as was said before, the relationship established between the two sides is a dynamic, hierarchical and exploitative one, in which one side progresses at the expense of the other.

This cannot be otherwise, since the world is *finite*, at least the world in which we all live. However, the White Man, the incarnation of the capitalist patriarch, does not accept the finiteness of reality; he wants to be like God: almighty, eternal, omniscient. So he has invented the idea of infinite progress and of infinite evolution from the lower, more primitive, to ever higher and more complex levels of being. This idea, of course, is rooted materially in the historical experiences of conquest of patriarchal nomadic peoples, mainly the Jews and the Arians. Judaic and Christian theologies have given the necessary religious sanction to the idea of

the right to dominate and subordinate nature and to unlimited expansion. The scientific revolution in Europe in the 15th and 16th centuries only secularized this religious idea (cf. Merchant, 1983).

Since the finiteness of human beings and of the earth, however, could not be thought or speculated away, and since the principles of equality and freedom were formulated with a claim to universal applicability, the retrogression of the 'other side', pushed into the dark, could not be simply interpreted as God-ordained. It was interpreted as a 'lagging behind', as a 'lower stage' of evolution. In fact, the idea of evolutionary change became the centrepiece in the idea of progress of the 'advanced' peoples of the West. They became the symbol of progress for all 'backward' peoples, in the same way as men became the symbol of progress for women.

We have seen, however, that evolutionary progress for the colonized, namely, their accession to the level of the oppressors, is a logical impossibility within a finite world. Yet the illusion that they will eventually make it is held up by the 'ever progressing', 'advanced' side. This progress, however, is more than ever based on the progressive destruction of the foundations of life, of nature, of human nature, of human relationships, and particularly, of women. It is indeed a production of death. This is particularly true of the latest technological inventions of the White Man: atomic energy, micro-electronics and, above all, genetic engineering, biotechnology and space research. None of these so-called technological revolutions will be able to solve any of the big social problems based on exploitation. They will rather contribute to the further destruction of nature and the human essence.

In recent years, feminists and many others have begun to articulate their radical rejection of the paradigm of the White Man or Man-the-Hunter (Daly, 1978; Fergusson, 1980; Merchant, 1983; Griffin, 1980; Singh, 1976; Capra, 1982). In this they reject particularly the dualistic divisions within this model, and search to constitute a holistic approach, first to our bodies, then to reality at large. Many feminists, in their search for a new holistic paradigm, limit their analysis and their new perspective to the 'cultural' or ideological phenomena, or the sphere of the world-view or religion. Important though this may be, it is not sufficient to come to a realistic and politically concrete concept of a new society, a concept which would include the material life of the majority of the people in the world. To do so means not only to reject the colonial divisions in the realm of ideas, but those which exist in material reality, which shape our everyday life and the world at large.

Thus, a feminist perspective has to start with some basic *principles*, which can guide political action at all levels. The following seem to me the most basic:

1. Rejection and abolition of the principle of *colonizing dualistic divisions* (between men and women, different peoples and classes, man and nature, spirit and matter) based on exploitation for the sake of ever-expanding commodity production and capital accumulation.
2. This implies the creation of non-exploitative, non-hierarchical, reciprocal relationships between parts of our body; people and nature; women and men; different sections and classes of one society; different peoples.

3. A necessary consequence of non-exploitative relations with ourselves, nature, other human beings and other peoples or nations will be the regaining of *autonomy over our bodies and our lives*. This autonomy means, first and foremost, that we cannot be blackmailed, or forced to do things which are against human dignity in exchange for the means of our subsistence or our life. Autonomy in this sense should not be understood individualistically and idealistically – as it often is by feminists – because no single woman in our atomized society is able to preserve her autonomy. Indeed, it is the antithesis of autonomy if it is understood in this narrow egoistic sense. Because the enslavement of the consumers under capitalist conditions of generalized commodity production is brought about precisely by the illusion that each individual *can buy* her or his independence from other human beings and social relations by the purchase of commodities.<sup>3</sup>

Autonomy understood as freedom from coercion and blackmail regarding our lives and bodies, can be brought about only by collective effort in a decentralized, non-hierarchical way.

4. A rejection of the idea of infinite progress and acceptance of the idea that our *human* universe is finite, our body is finite, the earth is finite.
5. The aim of all work and human endeavour is not a never-ending expansion of wealth and commodities, but *human happiness* (as the early socialists had seen it), or the *production of life itself*.

If one tries to translate these more or less abstract principles into historical and everyday practice, one perceives immediately that the basic concepts, around which everyday life is organized, are formidable obstacles in the realization of these principles. The concept which, more than any others, has shaped life in capitalist patriarchy is the *concept of labour*. For a feminist perspective the concept of labour, prevalent in *all* capitalist and socialist societies, has to be changed radically. From this changed concept will follow a change of work, of work organization, of the sexual division of labour, of the products, of the relation between work and non-work, of the division between manual and mental work, of the relation between human beings and nature, of the relation to our bodies.

With regard to the concept of labour prevalent in our societies, there is no qualitative difference between capitalist societies and socialist societies. In both, labour is considered a *necessary burden*, which has to be reduced, as far as possible, by the development of productive forces or technology. Freedom, human happiness, the realization of our creative capacities, friendly unalienated relations to other human beings, the enjoyment of nature, of children's play, etc., all these are *excluded* from the realm of work and are possible only in the realm of non-work, that is, in leisure time. As *necessary labour* is defined as that labour which is required for the satisfaction of basic human needs – food, clothing, shelter – a reduction of this labour by machines is then the aim. It is assumed that the other 'higher' needs mentioned above (freedom, human happiness, 'culture', etc.), cannot be satisfied at the same time as one performs the labour necessary for the basic maintenance of one's life. 'Progress' is defined as a progressive reduction of necessary labour time and an increase of leisure time, when people can at last

fulfil their 'higher needs'. The capitalist, as well as the socialist, utopia, is one in which *machines* (computers, automats, artificially cloned work slaves?) do *all* necessary labour, and in which *people* can indulge in consumptive and creative activities.

Before attempting to specify a feminist concept of labour, it may be useful to have yet another look at the Marxist concept of labour because, in contradistinction to the capitalists, labour for socialists is not only the necessary curse or burden, but also the motor that leads mankind to the transition to the true communist society. Let us see whether the concept of labour used by Marx is adequate to fulfil these promises.

In *Capital*, Marx writes:

In fact, the realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production. Just as the savage must wrestle with nature to satisfy his wants, to maintain and reproduce life, so must civilized man, and he must do so in all possible modes of production. With his development this realm of physical necessity expands as a result of his wants, but at the same time, the forces of production which satisfy these wants also increase. Freedom in this field can only consist in socialized men, the associated producers rationally regulating their interchange with nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of their human nature. But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. *Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working day is its basic prerequisite* (Marx, *Capital*, vol. III: 799–800; emphasis added).

The most important idea in this passage is that the 'realm of freedom' will not come before 'labour which is determined by necessity . . . ceases'. Therefore, the goal of all economic, scientific and political endeavour is the 'shortening of the working day as the prerequisite of the advent of the realm of freedom', or as Alfred Schmidt writes: 'The problem of human freedom is reduced by Marx to the problem of *free time*' (Schmidt, 1973: 142; emphasis in the original). Shortening of the time necessary for the production of the basic requirements to maintain our physical existence will still remain a main social goal when private property and commodity production have been abolished. Marx writes about this in *Grundrisse*:

If we presuppose production in common, temporal determination naturally remains essential. The less time society needs to produce wheat, cattle, etc., the more time is gained for other kinds of production, material and intellectual. Just as in the case of the single individual, whose all-round development, enjoyment and activity depend on the amount of time saved. *All economics ultimately reduces itself to economy in time* (*Grundrisse*: 89; emphasis added).

The reduction of 'socially necessary labour time' and the jump to the realm of freedom are brought about by two processes: (1) the ever-increasing development of the forces of production, of science and technology, (2) the abolition of private

property, of class society, the socialization of means of production and the socialization or association of the producers. The first process will not only lead to a reduction in necessary labour time, but also to the *rationalization* of the associated producers themselves, whose domination over the 'blind forces of nature' is thus immensely increased. This 'rationalization' not only means domination and control over external nature, but even more importantly, suppression of one's 'instincts', of mere 'nature' or 'blind' 'animal nature' in man. The colonization of this 'lower' nature in man is both a prerequisite for and a consequence of the expanding development of science and technology, or as Marxists put it, the forces of production. Whereas for Engels the jump to the realm of freedom is achieved with the abolition of private property and continuing development of science (Engels, 1936: 311–12), Marx is more sceptical, because he does not expect that, in spite of the socialization of the means of production and the highest degree of technological progress, labour (also as a 'burden') can be totally abolished, even in communism. Because, as we saw in chapter 2, labour, according to Marx, is not only a burden, the weight of which is historically determined by the development of productive forces, but also, independent of history, a *human interaction with nature*, the 'everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence and therefore [it] is independent of every social form of that existence or rather is common to every such form' (*Capital*, vol. I: 183–4).

In this respect, Marx was more of a realist and materialist than Engels, but both men were optimistic and idealistic with regard to the potentiality of science and technology to transform society, particularly to abolish the divisions of labour which they considered in their early writings the main cause of man's alienation from himself: the social division of labour by class society, the division of labour in the (capitalist) work process and the alienation of the worker from his product, and the division of labour between head and hand.

The communist utopia is one in which socially necessary labour has been reduced to almost zero, where *man* has abundant leisure time for his self-realization and the human development of his rich individuality.

In *German Ideology*, they write:

For as soon as the distribution of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood. While in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity, but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic (Marx, Engels, vol. 5, 1976: 47).

Marx and Engels expected the realization of this utopian vision of a communist society (in which women seem to be absent, by the way) from the development of the forces of production, the abolition of private property and the socialization of production. In Marx's later works, however, the idyllic picture of how communist

man passes his day becomes blurred.

As Alfred Schmidt observes, according to Marx the process of replacement of human labour by machines and automats will be relatively independent of social organization. Under communism, this process will rather be accelerated than slowed down or stopped:

Marx emphasized in *Grundrisse* that the ceaseless transformation of nature in industry also proceeds under socialist conditions. The unity of knowledge and transformation of nature, realized on a large scale in industry, should in future become a still more determining feature of processes of production. He had in mind the *total automation* (*Verwissenschaftlichung*) of industry, which would change the worker's role more and more into that of the technical 'overseer and regulator' (Schmidt, 1973: 147; emphasis in the original).

The total permeation of the industrialized labour process by science, the increased shortening of labour time, the development of automation eventually result in making the worker as the main agent of production obsolete:

He stands beside the process of production, instead of being its main agent. In this metamorphosis, it is neither direct labour, done by man himself, nor the time he takes over it, but *rather the appropriation of his own general productive powers, his understanding of nature, and his mastery of the latter* through the agency of his existence as a member of society – in one phrase, the development of the social individual – which now appears as the great foundation of *production and wealth* (*Grundrisse*: 592 *et seq.*; emphasis added).

I have elaborated on the Marxist concept of labour, the Marxist views on technological progress and the communist vision of a true society because these ideas are shared by most socialists, as well as by many feminist socialists. Particularly the view that unlimited progress of science and technology is a kind of 'law of nature' or history, and will be the main force to transform human society and social relations has become a new faith with many people. Even people who are seriously looking for an alternative to destructive capitalism still base their blueprint of a new society on the wonders of technological innovation.

Thus, for André Gorz the time has now come for a straight march into the Marxist paradise because, with micro-electronics, computers and automation, necessary labour can almost be reduced to zero (Gorz, 1983). For Gorz, the only problem remaining is to distribute the rest of this labour among the people and to move forward to the realization of the Marxist paradise, in which people's main problem will be to fill their leisure time with creative activities. What Gorz and others systematically exclude is the underside of paradise, or 'hell'. This paradise of the Brave New World is based on continued imperialist exploitation of external colonies and of women, the internal colony of White Man. These will be the people who still produce *life*, and to a large extent in unfree, housewifized forms of labour in the so-called informal sector. Because in spite of complete automation and computerization, people still have bodies which need food and human care, etc., and this does not come from machines. As Claudia von Werlhof has pointed out, this paradise is not for women, but it is based on women's ongoing exploitation on a worldwide basis. It is the last desperate effort of White Man to realize his

technocratic utopia, based on domination of nature, women and colonies (v. Werlhof, 1984).

The conflict which Alfred Schmidt observes with regard to Marx's optimism about the quantitative development of a rich human individuality as the main aim of communism has been solved by modern left and alternative theoreticians in this way, that the colonies (nature, women, exotic peoples) are kept in bondage by Homo Oeconomicus and Homo Scientificus so that he is not totally cut off from nature, the earth, his sensuality, the ever-lasting condition of all human existence *and* happiness. As long as *this base* is secured, *he can go on with his unlimited development of productive forces, for the unlimited satisfaction of his unlimited wants (or rather addictions)*. For this man, the realm of freedom is indeed round the corner, but at the expense of the slavery of women and the Third World.

### **Towards a feminist concept of labour**

It is obvious from our above discussion that the development of a feminist concept of labour has to begin with a rejection of the distinction between socially necessary labour and leisure, and the Marxist view that self-realization, human happiness, freedom, autonomy – the realm of freedom – can be achieved only *outside* the sphere of necessity and of necessary labour, and by a reduction (or abolition) of the latter.

1. If we take as our model of a 'worker' not the white male industrial wage-worker (irrespective of whether he works under capitalist or socialist conditions), but a *mother*, we can immediately see that her work does not fit into the Marxian concept. For her, work is always both: a burden as well as a source of enjoyment, self-fulfilment, and happiness. Children may give her a lot of work and trouble, but this work is never totally alienated or dead. Even when children turn out to be a disappointment for the mother, when they eventually leave her or feel contempt for her – as in fact many do in our society – the pain she suffers at all this is still more human than the cold indifference of the industrial worker or engineer *vis-à-vis* his products, the commodities he produces and consumes.

The same unity of work as a burden *and* work as enjoyment can be found among peasants whose production is not yet totally subsumed under commodity production and the compulsions of the market. The peasants who have to work from dawn to dusk during the harvesting season, for instance, feel the burden of work more than anybody else in their bodies and in their muscles. But in spite of the hardship of this work, it is never only 'a curse'. I remember the times of haymaking or harvesting on our small subsistence farm in my childhood as times of extreme labour intensity for everybody – mother, children, father – and as times of the greatest excitement, enjoyment, social interaction. I found the same phenomenon among poor peasant and agricultural labourer women in India during the season of rice transplantation. Although in this case the work had to be done for an exploiting landlord, the combination of work and enjoyment, of labour and leisure was still there. Moreover, this time of intense work was also the time of the

most pronounced cultural activity of the women. During the collective work-processes in the fields, they sang an endless number of ballads which helped them to bear the burden of work more easily. And in the evening, after the evening meal, they danced and sang together till late (Mies, 1984). Anyone who has had an opportunity to observe the work-process of people involved in non-market oriented subsistence production will have found this interplay of work as necessity and burden, and work as a basic source of enjoyment and self-expression.<sup>4</sup>

The same is true for the work of the artisan or in handicrafts production, as long as this work is not yet fully subsumed under the compulsions of the market.

The main characteristics of the work-processes described above is that they are all connected with the *direct production of life* or of use values. A feminist concept of labour has to be oriented towards the *production of life* as the goal of work and not the production of *things and of wealth* (see the quotation from Marx above), of which the production of life is then a secondary derivative. The *production of immediate life* in all its aspects must be the core concept for the development of a feminist concept of work.

2. Apart from the unity of labour as a burden and labour as expression of our human nature and as enjoyment, a feminist concept of labour cannot be based on the Marxist (and capitalist) *economics of time*. The shortening of the daily labour time or of the labour time within a life span cannot be a method for the realization of a feminist utopia. Women have by now realized that the reduction of time spent in commodity production does not lead to more freedom for women, but rather to more housework, more non-wage work in household production, more relationship or emotional work, more consumption work. The vision of a society *in which almost all time is leisure time* and labour time is reduced to a minimum is for women in many respects a vision of horror, not only because housework and non-wage work have never been included in the labour that is supposed to be reduced by machines, but also because it *will be women* who have to restore to the then idle men a sense of reality, meaning and life.

A feminist concept of labour has, therefore, to be oriented towards a *different concept of time*, in which time is not segregated into portions of burdensome labour and portions of supposed pleasure and leisure, but in which times of work and times of rest and enjoyment are alternating and interspersed. If such a concept and such an organization of time prevail, the length of the working-day is no longer very relevant. Thus, a long working-day and even a lifetime full of work, will not then be felt as a curse but as a source of human fulfilment and happiness.

Such a new concept of time cannot, of course, be brought about unless the existing sexual division of labour is abolished. Such a change, however, will not come, as some women expect, by a reduction of the working-day or week through rationalization and automation. The men whose weekly or daily or life labour time has already been shortened through modern technology do not share more of the housework, but rather indulge in more drinking, more TV-watching, or in other male leisure time activities (like watching videofilms or playing computer games).<sup>5</sup> The whole reduction of the work-day since the times of Marx and Engels has nowhere resulted in a change in the sexual division of labour, has not resulted in men feeling more responsible for housework, children, or the production of life.

3. The third element which has to be stressed in a feminist concept of labour is the maintenance of work as a *direct and sensual interaction with nature, with organic matter and living organisms*. In the Marxist concept of labour, this sensual, bodily interaction with nature – human nature as well as external nature – is largely eliminated because more and more machines are inserted between the human body and nature. These machines are, of course, supposed to give man dominance and power over ‘wild’ ‘blind’ nature, but at the same time they reduce his own sensuality. With the elimination of labour as necessity and burden, the potential of the human body for enjoyment, for sensuality and for erotic and sexual satisfaction, is also eliminated. As our body will ever be the base for our enjoyment and happiness, the destruction of sensuality, resulting from the interaction with machines rather than with living organisms, will only result in a pathological search for an idealized ‘nature’. In a desperate effort to restore this lost sensuality to the (male) body, the female body is mystified as both ‘pure or base nature’ and as the goal of fulfilment of all desires.<sup>6</sup> The expropriation and eventual destruction of human sensuality by modern machinery is nowhere more pronounced than in the cult of the computer which at present can be observed everywhere. It is a typical male cult and meant for men whose sensuality has already been largely destroyed by the fact that technological progress has placed them ‘beside the process of production instead of being its main agent’ (Marx, see quotation above). Far from leading to man’s ‘appropriation of his own general productive powers, his understanding of nature, his mastery of the latter’ (Marx, see quotation above), computer technology is, indeed, destroying all productive human powers, all understanding of nature and, in particular, all capacity for sensual enjoyment. I consider this one of the reasons *why violence against women is increasing* in industrialized societies. Men who no longer *feel* their body in the work process itself try to regain some bodily and emotional feeling by *attacking* women. This is also the reason why horror and hard porn films are among the best sellers of the video industry. Their main consumers are men, many of them unemployed, or in computerized or service jobs in industry.

4. Direct and sensual interaction with nature in the work process is not yet sufficient, however. This could also be realized through some sport or hobby. And, indeed, the architects of modern society are visualizing an increase of such physical activities as a kind of *therapy* for people who have been made redundant as workers through automation. But how long will hobbies and sports provide a sense of purpose and meaning to people, even if their daily requirements are provided for by the welfare state?

A feminist concept of labour has to maintain that work *retains its sense of purpose, its character of being useful and necessary* for the people who do it and those around them. This also means that the *products* of this labour are *useful and necessary*, and not just some luxuries or superfluous trash as are most of the handicrafts made today by women in ‘income-generating activities’ in Third World countries.

5. This sense of usefulness, necessity and purpose with regard to work and its products, however, can only be restored as the division and the distance between production and consumption are gradually abolished. Today, the division and

alienation are, as we have seen, global. Third World women produce what they do not know, and First World women consume what they do not know.

Within a feminist perspective, *production of life* is the main goal of human activity. This necessitates that the processes of production of necessary things and processes of consumption are again brought together. Because only by *consuming* the things which we produce can we judge whether they are useful, meaningful and wholesome, whether they are necessary or superfluous. And only by *producing* what we consume can we know how much time is really necessary for the things we want to consume, what skills are necessary, what knowledge is necessary and what technology is necessary.

The abolition of the wide division between production and consumption, does not mean, of course, that every individual, or even every small community, must produce all they need and have to find everything in their ecological surroundings. But it does imply that the production of life is based on a certain autarkic relation of a certain community of people of a specific region, the size of which has to be determined on the basis of the principles spelt out at the beginning of this section. Goods and services imported into such a region should be the result of non-exploitative relations to nature, women and other peoples. The tendential bringing together of production and consumption will drastically reduce the possibilities for this exploitation, and largely increase the potential for resistance to economic and political blackmail and coercion.

### **An alternative economy**

It is obvious that such a concept of work transcends the framework of an economy based on ever-expanding growth of monetary revenue, and of ever-expanding forces of production in terms of high technology development. As this paradigm has led to the overdevelopment of some nations and to the underdevelopment of women, nature and colonies, a concept of work oriented towards the production of life requires a reversal and a transcendence of this framework.

We may not yet be in a position to present a fully worked out alternative framework for an economy not based on the exploitation of nature, women and colonies, but there are already quite a number of important features of such a society, spelled out in recent years by people who understood that overdevelopment is not only damaging for people in Asia, Latin America and Africa, but is also destroying the very essence of human life in the centres of overdevelopment itself (Caldwell, 1977; Singh, 1976, 1980).

The first basic requirement of an alternative economy is a change over, both in the overdeveloped and in the underdeveloped societies, from dependency for their basic subsistence needs – food, clothing, shelter – from economies *outside* their national boundaries towards greater *autarky*. Only societies which are to a large extent self-sufficient in the production of these basic necessities can maintain themselves free from political blackmail and hunger. In this, self-sufficiency in *food* is the first requirement.

Malcolm Caldwell has shown that such self-sufficiency in food, as well as in

energy would be quite possible in Britain, with the available cultivable land and its present population. It would equally be possible in any other of the overdeveloped countries of Europe or North America (Caldwell, 1977: 178). But what is more, if the governments of these overdeveloped countries had not bribed their working people by importing cheap food, cheap clothes, cheap raw materials, etc., from so-called cheap labour countries, these countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America could all be self-sufficient in food, clothing, shelter, etc. It is strange that people in the West have already forgotten that all the underdeveloped countries are not only rich in natural and human resources, but were also all self-sufficient societies before the conquest of White Man. If the protein food imported to Europe from Third World countries in the form of animal feed to produce milk seas, butter mountains, etc., was used to feed the local people, there would be no hunger in any of these regions (Collins & Lappé, 1977). In 1977, 90 per cent of the protein concentrates British farmers fed to their livestock was imported from underdeveloped countries. It is also well known that the energy efficiency (the ratio between the energy used to produce food and the energy gained by the consumption of this food) is lowest in the overdeveloped countries with their food mainly produced by agro-industry. Thus, the energy efficiency of greenhouse lettuce is only 0.0023, of white sliced bread 0.525, whereas local Mexican corn grown without the use of machinery has an energy efficiency factor of 30.60 (Caldwell, 1977: 179–180).

A largely<sup>7</sup> autarkic economy would necessarily lead towards a change in the existing exploitative and non-reciprocal international division of labour, a contraction of world trade and of export-oriented production, both in the overdeveloped countries (whose economies are dependent on the export of industrial products) and the underdeveloped countries who have to pay back their credits by exports of mainly primary goods.

A further consequence of a more or less self-sufficient economy would be a drastic reduction of all non-productive work, in the sense I use the term, particularly in the tertiary sector, a change in the composition of the workforce with a movement away from employment in industries towards employment in agriculture. If people of a given region want to live mainly by the natural and labour resources available in that region, then it follows that many more people will have to do necessary manual labour in food production. Within such a finite region, people would also be careful not to destroy the very ecology on whose balance the survival of all depends by use of too much agricultural chemical products and too much machinery, which again uses up too much energy. Therefore, as Malcolm Caldwell says, with reduced inputs of inanimate energy an increase in production could only come from an increase in muscle power (Caldwell, 1977: 180). Instead of capital intensive farming there would be labour intensive farming. It would be not concentrated in big agri-business farm factories, but in decentralized small farms. With such a change of the international division of labour, the division of labour between agriculture and industry, with agriculture oriented towards food self-sufficiency, many of the elements specified with regard to a changed feminist concept of labour would already be fulfilled; for example, the restoration of labour as necessary and meaningful, of its direct contact with nature or living

organisms, possibly also a different notion of labour time, the narrowing down of the gap between production and consumption and more autonomy of producers-consumers over what they produce and consume. Within such an economy there would be no room and no use for the production of unnecessary things and sheer waste, as is the case within the growth model. Because production decisions would be based on a realistic assessment of natural, ecological and human resources as well as on peoples' true needs for a human life. It would lead away from the creation and feeding of ever more destructive *addictions*, which at the present juncture are the only way by which capital can still hope to expand its markets in the overdeveloped regions. It would give people back more autonomy over their lives and the production of life. As Caldwell points out, this radical restructuring of the economy is not only a beautiful dream or a case of exhortatory politics, but will increasingly become a necessity, particularly for workers who have been made redundant for good by the rapid development of high tech and automation. He reminds us that already in 1976 massive unemployment in Italy led to a big movement of workers back to the land. About 100,000 workers returned to farming (Caldwell, 1977: 181). A similar movement back to the land took place two years ago in India during the strike of the textile workers in Bombay which lasted almost a year.

Although at present the movement back to the land may still appear as an option mainly open to the frustrated urban middle classes, growing poverty in the metropolitan centres, particularly among foreign workers, the youth and above all, among women, will transform the romanticism of many alternative land freaks into a necessary survival strategy. Such people may be the first to realize that one cannot eat money and that food does not grow out of computers.

Most ecologists and people who are searching for a radical alternative to the destructive society we live in would agree with the above ideas. So also would many feminists. But they would discover that the brief description of an alternative economy spelt out by Caldwell is again silent about the non-reciprocal, exploitative *division of labour between the sexes*. The perspective of a relative autarkic economy based on non-exploitative relations to the ecology, other peoples, people within a region, on small, decentralized units of production and consumption is, for feminists, not broad enough if it does not *start* with a radical change of the sexual division of labour. In most ecological writings, however, the 'woman question' is either not mentioned at all, or it is simply added on to a long list of other more urgent, more 'general' issues. I have already said, in the first chapter, that this 'adding on' will no longer do if we want to change the existing inhuman man-woman relation. The conception of an alternative economy is, therefore, not only incomplete without the goal of transcending the patriarchal sexual division of labour, it will rather be based on the *illusion* of change and therefore will not be able truly to transcend the *status quo*.

A feminist conception of an alternative economy will include all that has previously been said about autarky and decentralization. But it will place the transformation of the existing sexual division of labour (based on the breadwinner-housewife model) *at the centre* of the whole restructuring process. This is not mere narcissistic self-indulgence of women, but the result of our historical research as

well as our analysis of the functioning of capitalist patriarchy. Feminists do not start with the external ecology, economy and politics, but with the social ecology, the centre of which is the relation between men and women. *Autonomy over our bodies and lives* is, therefore, the first and most fundamental demand of the international feminist movement. Any search for ecological, economic and political autarky must start with the respect for the autonomy of women's bodies, their productive capacity to create new life, their productive capacity to maintain life through work, their sexuality. A change in the existing sexual division of labour would imply first and foremost that the *violence* that characterizes capitalist-patriarchal man-woman relations worldwide will be abolished not by women, but *by men*. *Men* have to refuse to define themselves any longer as Man-the-Hunter. *Men* have to start movements against violence against women if they want to preserve the essence of their own humanity.<sup>8</sup>

This demand for autonomy with regard to women's bodies also implies that any *state control* over women's fertility has to be rejected. Women have to be freed of their status of being a natural resource for individual men, as well as for the state as the Total Patriarch. True women's liberation will be the cheapest and most efficient method of restoring the balance between population growth and food production. This is, indeed, the main flaw in Caldwell's otherwise excellent exposé of an alternative, homeostatic society. 'Population control' is still considered the responsibility of the state; it is not in the hands of women. They are not considered as fully responsible human subjects as long as men or the state still try to exert control over their fertility.

Secondly, in an alternative economy men have to share the responsibility for the immediate production of life, for childcare, housework, the care of the sick and the old, the relationship work, all work so far subsumed under the term 'housework'. Where this work would have been socialized to some extent – which may be useful – men have to share this work on equal terms with women. In a community keen to preserve its autarky and to follow a non-exploitative path of human development, this 'housework' could not be paid. It would have to be free work for the community. But each man, each woman, and also children, would have to share this most important work. Nobody, particularly no man, should be able to *buy* himself free from this work in the production of immediate life. This would then immediately have the effect that men would have to spend more time with children, cooking, cleaning, taking care of the sick, etc., and would have less time for their destructive production in industry, less time for their destructive leisure time activities, less time for their wars. Positively put, they would regain the autonomy and the *wholeness* of their own bodies and minds, they would re-experience work as both a burden and enjoyment, and finally also develop a different scale of values altogether with regard to work. Only by *doing* this life-producing and life-preserving work *themselves* will they be able to develop a concept of work which transcends the exploitative capitalist patriarchal concept.

A change in the sexual division of labour would have the same effect on the level of the individuals which the change in the international division of labour would have on the level of whole regions or nations. A political decision in the

overdeveloped countries, to de-link their economies from the exploitative world-market system and to establish self-sufficiency in the main areas, will pave the way for autarkic economic development in the underdeveloped countries. Similarly, a conscious decision on the part of the 'overdeveloped' men to forego building up their ego and identity on the exploitation and violent subordination of women, and to accept their share of the unpaid work for the creation and preservation of life will make it easier for women to establish autonomy over their lives and bodies and to come to a new definition of what woman's identity is.

These processes of liberation are interrelated. It is not possible for women in our societies to break out of the cages of patriarchal relations, unless the men begin a movement in the same direction. A men's movement against patriarchy should not be motivated by benevolent paternalism, but by the desire to restore to themselves a sense of human dignity and respect. How can men respect themselves if they have no respect for women? In the same way, the overdeveloped peoples have to start rejecting and transcending the economic paradigm of ever-increasing commodity production and consumption as a model of progress for the underdeveloped economies.

Yet, the change in the exploitative international division of labour cannot come within a short time. Similarly, the establishment of ecologically balanced, autarkic economies will take time and demand an immense intellectual, moral and physical effort. But the change in the sexual division of labour could be started immediately. Each man and woman could start at his/her individual level; groups of women and men could develop different models; larger political movements like the peace movement, the ecology movement, national liberation movements could immediately experiment with a changed sexual division of labour and develop their alternative ideas about a better society from these central experiences. If this happened, feminists would lose their scepticism regarding many of these movements, because time and again we have seen that women's mobilization for such movements ended up with the old or a new patriarchal division of labour.

There is still another reason why feminists must insist on the centrality of the change in the sexual division of labour. Our analysis of the socialist countries has shown that the maintenance, or the creation, of the bourgeois, patriarchal, sexual division of labour and of the nuclear family is the apparently insignificant gate through which reactionary forces can again find entry into a society which tried to free itself from the clutches of imperialism and capitalism. As long as the sexual division of labour is not changed within the context of an alternative economy, capitalism will not be abolished. For the time being, however, feminists in the underdeveloped and the overdeveloped societies do well to keep their scepticism and critical sense. They must insist, again and again, that there will be no liberation for women unless there is also an end to the exploitation of nature and other peoples. On the other hand, they must also insist that there will be no true national liberation unless there is women's liberation and an end to the destruction of nature, or that there cannot be a true ecological society without a change in the sexual and international division of labour.

It is precisely by putting *one* of these contradictions into the limelight and by pushing the others into the darkness that capitalist patriarchy has been able to

build up and maintain its dominance. This strategy is at present followed by a number of people in the ecology and alternative movement. Following the old Marxist-Leninist strategy of primary and secondary contradictions, they have put the ecology crisis into the centre now. But they no longer talk of capitalist exploitation of Third World countries. Yet we know that the governments in Europe and the USA will try to solve the ecological and economic crises in their countries by dumping their dangerous factories and products into underdeveloped countries. And the cheap food, cheap clothes, cheap sexual services, etc., will be provided for this class of white *rentiers* by further exploitation of Third World countries and peoples. Of course, there are also white women who will belong to that international class of non-producing *rentiers* who are maintained and alimented by increased exploitation of Third and Second World countries, but by and large, women in the overdeveloped countries will increasingly share the destiny of the underdeveloped countries. By their invisible, low-paid or unpaid work, they will provide the base upon which the international male white class will march into the 'post-industrial' paradise.

### **Intermediate steps**

In discussions about alternatives to the existing destructive 'order', the question immediately arises: 'How does one get from here to there? How do such beautiful utopias help us to change reality in the direction we want? Are the powers that stand against us not overwhelming: internationally operating capital, the big transnational corporations, the ever-increasing interplay between the scientific, the economic, the military and the political establishments, the rivalry of the two superpowers and their never-ending spiral of producing ever more destructive arms, the extension of these destructive weapons into outer space, etc., etc.?' *Vis-à-vis* this formidable threat to all human life and to life as such, many women and men in the West feel utterly helpless and tend to close their eyes and wait in a defeatist manner for the unavoidable holocaust.

I think feminists cannot afford such defeatism, not only because it would be suicidal, but also because it is *unrealistic*. As long as class society exists, the collapse of a ruling class has been projected as the collapse of the universe. This is also the case today with the threat of collapse for the capitalist-patriarchal growth model. But our analysis has shown that women worldwide have nothing to gain in their human development from the growth of this gigantic parasite. On the contrary, therefore, we should here and now begin to refuse our allegiance to and our complicity with this system, because women are not only victims of capitalist patriarchy, they are also, in varying degrees and qualitatively different forms, collaborators with this system. This is particularly true for middle-class women worldwide, and for the white women in industrialized countries. If we want to regain autonomy over our bodies and over life in general, we must start by renouncing this complicity with patriarchy. How can that be done?

I think the strategy could be the same for women in overdeveloped and

underdeveloped countries, but the tactical steps might be different. In the following, I shall discuss some concrete steps that could be taken in the direction of freeing ourselves from the clutches of the anti-human and anti-women capitalist patriarchy. I shall begin with what could be done by Western feminists.

### **Autonomy over consumption**

An area which has been almost totally left out for political struggle in the West has been the area of *consumption*. Trade unions, political opposition groups, as well as the women's movement have addressed their protests and demands either to the bosses of the economy or to the state, or to men in general. Rarely have they discussed their own role in the exploitative system. And yet, it is common sense knowledge that capitalism cannot function unless it is able to create and expand the market for its ever-growing amount of material and non-material commodities. This market is partly provided by us, the buyers of these commodities. It is mainly provided by the masses in the overdeveloped countries who have the purchasing power, due to the exploitative, international and sexual division of labour. It is also provided, to a lesser degree, by the urban middle classes in the underdeveloped countries. And it is provided to a large extent by the states and their monopolies over huge areas of the economy, for example, education, health, the postal system, defence.

We may not be able to influence the whole marketing system. But a *consumer liberation movement*, started by feminists among women who, as housewives, are important agents of consumption and crucial pillars of the market, could go a long way towards undermining the capitalist-patriarchal system. Such a movement has a number of advantages in contrast to other social movements:

- It can be started immediately by each and every woman on an individual basis. The decision what to buy and what not to buy is not totally pre-determined by our needs and by what is offered in the market. Perhaps more than 50 per cent of what is bought and consumed in households in overdeveloped countries and overdeveloped classes is not only superfluous, but also harmful. This includes the consumption of alcohol, tobacco, drugs, a lot of luxury foods, fruits, flowers, but also most of what is produced today by the electronic industry: computers, video-sets, other media, music, TV. Particularly the products of the new growth-industries are no longer meant for the satisfaction of basic human needs, but for the creation and expansion of new addictions of *passive* consumers. We cannot say that we have no choice in buying or not buying these things; otherwise, we hand over the last bit of our subjective individual freedom to Mr Capital and agree to become mere puppets of consumption. Thus, the individual refusal to buy superfluous, and basically harmful, luxury items would enlarge the area of freedom within each individual woman.
- Apart from a boycott of luxury commodities, feminists, if they want to be true to their political goals, must boycott all items which reinforce a sexist image of

woman, or anti-woman tendencies in our society. Thus, the new wave of 'beautifying women', created by the garment and cosmetics industries as a kind of counter-attack against the feminist refusal to shape their bodies and appearance according to the standardized model of an 'attractive and sexy' woman, can be successfully disturbed if women openly boycott cosmetics and new sexy fashion fads.<sup>9</sup>

- Similarly, the manipulation of women as housewives and mothers, carried out by the multinational food and pharmaceutical industries and others, can be thwarted if women consciously refuse, as far as possible, to buy certain items, like, for example, the chocolate milk products, fast foods, drugs, etc., produced by such multinationals as Nestle or Unilever, Bayer or Hoechst. Of course, the enslavement of Western housewives to Mr Capital has already reached such an extent that a consistent boycott of *all* such items would lead to immediate starvation. Therefore, the boycott of items which reinforce the tendencies to define women as sex-objects and super-mothers can only be selective.
- A further essential criterion for the selection of commodities to be boycotted is the degree of exploitation of Third World producers, particularly of Third World women, incorporated and materialized in the commodities. Thus, women who buy lipsticks made by Unilever, or any of his 'daughter'-firms can be sure that they, too, are contributing to the further exploitation and expropriation of poor tribal women in India.<sup>10</sup> They, too, are responsible for the destruction of the autonomy these women had over their life-production. A boycott of such items would, therefore, mean both the liberation of women in the overdeveloped countries from a sexist image of woman, and increased autonomy of poor Third World women over their environment and subsistence production.
- Lipstick and cosmetics provide a good example of another criterion in the selection of articles to be boycotted by women: namely, the degree to which, in the production of these commodities, living organisms are being subjected to brutal violence, and how far the ecological balance of the producing areas and countries has been upset. In short, the destruction of nature which is inherent in commodity production must also be a criterion for refusing the purchase of certain commodities. This aspect has mobilized the friends of animals, for example, the animal protection associations, to campaign for a prohibition on experiments on living animals by the cosmetics industry. Feminists could certainly support such a campaign. But if they want not only to feel for the 'humanity' of the animals who are tortured as guinea-pigs in the production of cosmetics, but also to be aware of their own humanity, they must extend this campaign to a boycott of the cosmetics produced by these firms.

But how do we know about the various exploitative relations which are materialized in the commodities we buy and consume? How do we know that the lipstick I buy contains the starvation of women in Bihar as well as the torture of thousands of guinea-pigs and mice in the laboratories of the MNCs? Indeed, capitalist commodity production, with the almost total division between producers and consumers in an international, social and sexist division of labour, has been able to

mystify almost totally the exploitative relations incorporated in the commodities. Blind consumers are linked to blind producers!

A feminist consumer liberation movement, therefore, has to start with the lifting of this blindness, with a de-mystification of the commodities, a re-discovery of the exploitation of women, nature, colonies, inherent in these commodities, and an effort to transform the market relations which link us *de facto* to women, men, animals, plants, the earth, etc., into *true human relations*. This means to re-discover concrete people behind the abstract commodities. This can happen if we try to trace the path a certain commodity has travelled until it reached our tables or our bodies. At the end of this journey, we would meet in many cases poor women and men in the underdeveloped countries, and learn about how they produce certain items for the world market, what they get for their work, how this has changed their autonomy over their life production, what they feel about this, and how they struggle to maintain or regain their humanity.

A consumer liberation movement would, therefore, also imply a new and fascinating learning process, a *conscientization* different from that of the early feminist consciousness-raising groups, which would, indeed, clarify our minds about the really existing relations within which we live and work, both as objects *and* as subjects. The revival of social awareness of all the exploitative relations inherent in the commodities would extend the area of subjective freedom *within* people much more than any amount of book-knowledge accumulated by so-called experts. It would increase our autonomy over the *knowledge* about nature, foreign peoples and their lives and struggles, and enable us to decide what we need and what we do not need.

Concretely, this means that feminist groups in the overdeveloped and underdeveloped countries could begin to make such concrete studies of certain products, selected according to the criteria spelt out above, publish their results and feed them into the international networks of women's groups and organizations who would be ready to join such a consumer liberation movement.

This last point brings us to the question of the *politics* of such a movement. Although it can and should be started by each individual woman in her immediate surroundings, where she has a certain amount of power and freedom of choice, it is clear that individual acts of renunciation or boycott will not have the desired impact on the big capitalist corporations. Only a social and political boycott movement could have a major effect. This means women's groups or organizations must *publicly announce* their boycott campaign, accompany their actions with information and analysis about the exploitative relations in the product they have selected as target of their campaign and create as wide a publicity for this movement as is possible without betraying its basic principles. The formation of such action-and-reflection-groups would by itself have another liberating effect: It would liberate women in the affluent societies, particularly housewives, from their atomized, isolated existence within their tiny cages called households, liberate them from their depressions, drug addictions, the housewife-syndrome and their need for compensatory consumption. It would bring them back into the public sphere and make them aware of their place in the worldwide network of social relations.

The politics of a feminist consumer liberation movement would include, but go beyond, the strategies of the critical consumer movements started in the USA and Europe by people like Ralph Nader or Hans A. Pestalozzi. Whereas in most of the movements, the self-interest of the consumer in having clean, healthy, chemically unpolluted and unadulterated products is linked to the ecological consideration of preserving scarce energy resources and maintaining an ecological balance, the aspect of women's exploitation and of underdeveloped countries is mostly excluded. Thus, Pestalozzi is a spokesman of a critical consumer movement in Switzerland, but he believes that critical and ecologically conscious consumers would not endanger 'our system of a free society and economy'. He pleads for new marketing strategies to be adopted by the managers of capitalist corporations (Pestalozzi, 1979: 31 *et seq.*).

Feminists cannot be satisfied if international capital uses our consumer boycott of certain items only to develop a new marketing strategy to make us consume so-called health food, produced perhaps in alternative self-help enterprises which may work on a contract basis for the multinational food corporations, as we have already seen happening in the underdeveloped countries. We know by now that any such partial liberation, if it takes place *within* the framework of internationally operating capital, will be compensated for by the further exploitation and subjection of some other categories of people and of nature elsewhere.

A feminist consumer liberation movement could certainly subscribe to the slogan coined by the French organization, *Terre des Hommes – Frères des Hommes*: 'Ici vivre mieux/La-bas vaincre la faim' (To live better here and to fight hunger there). It would have to keep in mind, however, that 'to live better here' cannot mean an extension of the principle of egotistic self-interest, but has to be given a new content by creating non-exploitative, reciprocal relations to our bodies, between men and women, our natural environment, and people in the underdeveloped world. On the other hand, this slogan expresses the desire that the definition of what the 'good life' or human happiness is should no longer be left to the lieutenants of transnational capital, but that we ourselves begin to define it. Women should never forget that it is *we* who produce life, not capital.

### **Autonomy over production**

A feminist consumer boycott movement would be *one* step in the direction of our liberation. Another, equally necessary step, which would follow from the first, would be a movement to regain control over the production processes as such. This, of course, ultimately implies that women and producers in general regain control over the means of production. But before this can be achieved, control over the *production decisions* could become a goal for trade unions and other working-class organizations. It is absolutely absurd that the Western working classes accept the production decisions – for example, the automation of production, arms production, the production of dangerous chemicals, and of luxury items – all in the *name of preserving their jobs* and of an abstract idea of

progress. Meanwhile, it is obvious that they will neither save their jobs by this strategy, nor avoid this destructive production. But the male workers often advance the argument that they have no choice because they have to 'feed a family'. This argument is partly a pretext, because women are as much the breadwinners of their families as the men. But women who are serious about our liberation could go a long way to regain a greater measure of autonomy over production. This could start by producing more of the things we need ourselves. It could also mean that urban people could think of ways and means to grow food in the cities.

It could further mean to establish new local markets between small, ecologically-oriented peasant producers and urban women, where a direct link between production and consumption would be re-established. Through such a link, it would not be difficult for urban women and children to go to the countryside in their holidays, not as idle tourists, but as farm workers who would work on the farms of such small peasants for an exchange of the products thus commonly produced. This would come near Caldwell's vision of diverting industrial labour to labour intensive agriculture, but, in contrast to his vision, it would not be the state but producer-consumers themselves who would organize such a system of labour exchange between city and village.

It would be important, however, to make sure that such a system of production-consumption would not degenerate into the well-known 'informal' sector which then, in a dual economy, would only serve to feed the formal sector. This sector would go on as before to produce its destructive high tech and other useless commodities, and the informal sector production would again mainly subsidize wages in the formal sector. Therefore, autonomy over production must also eventually become a demand of the trade unions, of men and women in the trade unions and in other movements, like the ecology and alternative movements. A broad consumer liberation movement could be a direct challenge to the classical wage-workers' self-image that they are the necessary 'breadwinners' of their families. With more and more people returning to some new form of subsistence production, the myth of capital and wage-workers as *the* producers of life would have to disappear.

## **Struggles for human dignity**

It would be contrary to the principles of the autonomous women's movement if I tried to present a catalogue of what feminists in Africa, Asia and Latin America should do. Since the emergence of a feminist movement in many underdeveloped countries, the discussion on the analysis of their situation, on possible strategic and tactical steps, on necessary actions is carried out by Third World women among themselves. But since, according to our analysis, women in overdeveloped and underdeveloped countries are linked to each other by the world market, it would be unrealistic to pretend that we can concentrate only on our respective situations and movements and close our eyes to what is happening in other parts of the world. In particular, since the rebellion of Third World women against

patriarchal exploitation and oppression was sparked off by similar issues, for example, the issue of violence against women, we can identify several points on which Third World and First World women could be united. This is above all the case in the area of *body politics*, whereby women worldwide demand *autonomy over their lives and bodies*.

The following is not a full-fledged strategy for joint actions of feminists in overdeveloped and underdeveloped countries. I only want to point out certain areas where united struggles could take place and reflect on some experiences of such struggles.

Body politics implies a struggle against all forms of direct violence against women (rape, woman-beating, clitoridectomy, dowry-killings, the molestation of women), and against all forms of indirect or structural violence against women embedded in other exploitative and oppressive relations, like class and imperialist relations, as well as in patriarchal institutions like the family, medicine, and the educational systems. Within this sphere of *body politics*, there is unity among women about the central goal of their struggles. This is ultimately the insistence on the human essence of women, on their dignity, integrity and inviolability as human beings, and a rejection of their being made into *objects* or into natural resources for others.

I think that, if this deepest dimension and motive force of the above-mentioned struggles were recognized, it would no longer be possible for one exploited and oppressed group to expect its 'humanization' at the expense of another exploited and oppressed group, class or people. For instance, white women could not expect their humanization or liberation at the expense of black men and women; oppressed First and Third World middle-class women at the expense of poor rural and urban women, oppressed men (black *or* white workers and peasants) at the expense of 'their' women. The struggle for the human essence, for human dignity, cannot be divided and cannot be won unless *all* these colonizing divisions, created by patriarchy and capitalism, are rejected and transcended.

If we study the brief history of the new women's movement in underdeveloped and in overdeveloped countries, we can identify a number of struggles which started with the aim of preserving the human integrity and dignity of women, in the context of which these colonizing divisions were transcended, at least tendentially, and the prospect of a new solidarity emerged. This solidarity is not based on the narrow self-interest of the respective groups, but on the recognition that capitalist patriarchy destroys the human essence, not only in the oppressed, but also, and perhaps even more so, in those who apparently profit from this oppression.

Thus, the feminist struggles against male violence, against rape, wife-beating, the molestation and humiliation of women, have been a rallying point for women in First and Third World countries. The literature on these issues has been translated and read in many countries. Women can identify with 'the other woman' across class, racial and imperialist barriers, if they have begun themselves to struggle against male violence. Thus, in India, the struggle against rape and dowry-killings transcended the barriers created by caste and class. There was genuine solidarity among women on these issues, although these divisions did not disappear.

The barriers between women and men can also be transcended if women and men courageously begin to struggle against male violence. In traditional left organizations, the issues of rape, wife-beating, and the molestation of women are played down by the leaders. It is assumed that a campaign around such issues would be divisive for the unity of the oppressed class (the workers, the peasants). Thus, women in these organizations are told to subordinate their grievances about such 'private' matters to the general aim of class struggle, the anti-colonial struggle, the land struggle, etc. Third World, middle-class women are particularly susceptible to this line of thinking, and often ready to postpone the struggles around the man-woman relation to some distant future.

It has been my experience, however, that poor peasant women in India were not ready to accept this 'subsumptionist' strategy. They have shown that a determined struggle against male violence did not undermine the unity of the poor peasant class *vis-à-vis* the oppressive landlords, but that it rather doubled their unity and strength.<sup>11</sup>

One example of how the division between Third World and First World women can be successfully overcome was/is the combined international struggle of Western feminists in Holland and West Germany, and that of feminists in Thailand and the Philippines, who have launched a campaign against sex and prostitution tourism to Third World countries. One such joint action was organized by a group of Third and First World women in 1982, both at the airport at Schiphol (Holland) and in Bangkok. At Schiphol airport, the women informed the passengers on a flight to Bangkok about the inhuman exploitation of young women and girls in Thailand by the European sex tourist industry. At Bangkok airport a similar group greeted the European men, who had been flown in for a sex tour, with posters telling them that Thai women were not their prostitutes. This action was so embarrassing to the Minister of Tourism that he was compelled to make a statement, saying that the government welcomed tourists but that it did not want Thai women to be used as prostitutes by foreigners. A further outcome of this joint campaign is the creation of a centre for Asian women in Frankfurt, the entry point to Europe for many women from Asia who are brought there as 'wives' by German men and who, in most cases, end up in the brothels of Frankfurt or Hamburg.

Though this campaign started with the spontaneous rebellion of women against this cynical form of neo-patriarchy, it inevitably led them to recognize the joint commercial interests of the tourist industry and of men.

Similar joint campaigns and actions of Third World and First World women have been started around the issues of family planning, fertility control, genetic and reproductive engineering.<sup>12</sup> Here, too, the principle of autonomy over our lives and bodies has been the starting point. Whereas feminists in the West have been struggling for years against the state, which demands more white children from them, Third World women are beginning to realize that they are subjected to coercion and even femicidal tendencies because they are *not* supposed to breed more children. In such joint campaigns and actions, feminists are not only in a position to expose the policy of fascist 'selection and annihilation', but also to identify clearly the corporate interests and the people behind them who

manipulate women worldwide in their greed for ever-growing accumulation.

The case of Depoprovera, prohibited in the USA because of its cancerogenous qualities, but dumped in Third World countries, is perhaps the best-known example of how Third World and Western feminists can work together to expose these tactics. With the new developments in reproductive and genetic engineering, the combination of the experiences, analyses and the information of Third World and First World women will be absolutely crucial for any movement of resistance (cf. Corea, 1984).

All these struggles were/are taking place in the sphere of *body politics*. A combination of struggles and actions on the part of feminists in overdeveloped and underdeveloped countries can expose and undermine the double-faced policy of international capital towards women. Third World and First World feminists can overcome the colonial divisions by fighting jointly against the dehumanizing and anti-women tendencies of capitalist patriarchy.

It is more difficult to discover commonalities between women in overdeveloped and underdeveloped countries in the sphere of economics or economic struggles, because this sphere is, as we have seen, almost fully controlled by the international and sexual division of labour. Within this framework, Third World women producers are related to First World women consumers in a contradictory, even antagonistic way. If world market factories, producing garments and underwear for Western consumers, strike for better wages and work conditions, the companies can demand higher prices for their products from Western consumers. Even if Western women were made aware that such higher prices were the result of strikes in one of the re-located factories, it is not certain that such higher prices would reach the actual producers. On the one hand, if feminists were to start a boycott of such products in support of the striking women in these factories, the women there might not be able to understand such an action because, within the given structures, their immediate interest in keeping a job and getting a wage is intimately tied up with the interest of capital in selling its products.

On the other hand, women in Europe who worked in textile industries, which were relocated to Asia or Africa, lost their jobs to badly paid Asian or African women. And between these two categories of women workers, there is no material base for solidarity. If one set of women tries to better its material conditions as *wage-workers*, or *consumers*, not as human beings, capital will try to offset its possible losses by squeezing another set of women. Thus, within the given framework of the international division of labour and of the wage-workers' interests closely bound up with those of capital, there is little scope for true solidarity between Third World and First World women, at least not the type of solidarity which can go beyond paternalistic rhetoric and charity.

But if women are *ready to transcend* the boundaries set by the international and sexual division of labour, and by commodity production and marketing, *both* in the overdeveloped and underdeveloped worlds; if they accept the principles of a self-sufficient, more or less autarkic, economy; if they are ready, in Third World countries, to replace export-oriented production by production for the needs of the people, then it will be possible to combine women's struggles at both ends of

the globe in such a way that the victory of one group of women will not be the defeat of another group of women. This could happen, for instance, if the struggle of Third World women for the control over their own land and their subsistence production – often fought against the combined interests of international or national corporations and of their own men – was supported by a consumer boycott in the overdeveloped countries.

A feminist-led consumer liberation movement in the overdeveloped countries could prepare the ground, in many respects, for a women's production liberation movement in underdeveloped countries. This would be a movement of people to use the land and the human and material resources available in a given region for the production of those things which they need first: food, clothing, shelter, health, and education. At the same time, their economy would be partly de-linked from the world market, particularly from the international credit trap. The combination of a consumer liberation movement in the West with a production liberation movement in Asia, Africa and Latin America would not leave much incentive for the MNCs to further colonize these countries through the unjust international division of labour. Many of them would close down their sites and move back to their fatherlands. The local industries would then have to produce for a home market, and not for the already overflowing markets in the affluent societies. In the West, the drying up of cheap imports from Third World countries would lead to higher prices of all basic consumer goods, would force the economies to return to their own agricultural base, and would put an end to hypertrophic, wasteful and destructive production. It would be a logical consequence of such movements that the models of man-the-breadwinner, woman-the-housewife had to be given up. For, without the exploitative international division of labour, there would be very few men in the erstwhile overdeveloped countries who would be in a position to 'feed' and maintain a 'non-working' housewife. All would have to work for the production of life or for their subsistence. And the women would have to demand that men, too, accept their share in this life-production. The bourgeois model of the housewife would eventually lose its attraction as a symbol of progress.

## Notes

1. While working with battered women in Cologne, we found that it was not economic dependency on a male 'breadwinner' which fettered these women to men who abused and tortured them, sometimes over many years, but their self-concept of a woman. They were not able to have an identity of their own unless they were 'loved' by a man. The beatings of the man were often interpreted as signs of love. This is why a number of the women went back to their men. In our society, a woman who is not 'loved' by a man is a nobody.

2. This can be said as an analogy to what Marx wrote about the 'productive worker', the classical proletarian. In *Capital* he writes: 'To be a productive worker is, therefore, not a good thing but a bad thing' (my translation, *Das Kapital*, vol. I: 532).

3. I consider this individualism, which ultimately is based on the 'freedom' of private owners of property and their purchasing power, Western feminism's most serious handicap. Instead of seeking a social solution to some of the problems afflicting women, the market and technology offer them an individual solution in the form of a commodity, at least to those who have money. Thus, women who can afford to buy a car are much less exposed to male violence in the streets than those who cannot.

4. I noticed the same unity of work as enjoyment and as a burden among tribal people in Andhra Pradesh in India.

5. I have read that, in England, a new category of 'widows' has been identified by women sociologists. After the 'football-widow', it is now the 'computer-widow' who has lost her husband, this time to the machine.

6. This seems to be a kind of law in capitalist patriarchy. It applies to women, nature and colonies. Capitalist patriarchy and science have first to destroy woman or nature or other peoples as autarkic *subjects*. And then they are adored and phantasied as goals of all male desires. This is the basis of all romantic love, of romanticizing nature, of romanticizing exotic peoples or 'natives'.

7. In all discussions about an alternative economy, it is necessary to stress that the concept 'autarkic' does not imply *total* self-sufficiency. A totally self-sufficient economy or society is an abstraction, but a largely self-sufficient economy is possible.

8. There are a few hopeful signs that some men are beginning to understand this. In Hamburg, men have created a new initiative called 'Men against Male Violence against Women'.

9. Many women, including feminists, often argue that women have a need to beautify themselves. This may be, as it may be true for men, but this does not mean that we have to accept the standards of beauty set by the garment and cosmetics industries.

10. Unilever, with its Indian counterpart, Hindustan Lever, have developed a method to extract the oil from the seeds of the sal trees which grow wild in the jungle areas of Bihar in India. Formerly, these seeds were collected by the women of the Santhal tribe to make oil for their own use. Now the tribal women collect the sal seeds for the agents of Hindustan Lever for a paltry sum. The sal-oil derivatives are used as a substitute for cocoa-butter and for the production of cosmetics of all sorts. Due to its characteristic melting capacity, it is particularly useful for the production of lipstick. Thus, the production of lipstick or chocolate by Unilever deprives the tribal women of Bihar of control over their oil production (cf. Mies: 'Geschlechtliche und internationale Arbeitsteilung', in Heckmann & Winter, 1983: 34ff).

11. This struggle took place in the years 1980-81 in Nalgonda district, Andhra Pradesh, among poor peasant and agricultural women who, together with their men, had been organized in village and women's associations. The fact that they had separate women's organizations, not under the leadership of the men, gave them the courage to wage a struggle against wife-beating. The case of one of the women, who was regularly beaten by her husband when she attended the women's meetings, was the point which sparked off this struggle. It led to protracted discussions among poor peasant women in all the villages of the area. In these discussions, most of the women decided that, where women were regularly beaten by the husband and the two could no longer get along, the husband must leave the house, 'Because the house belongs to the woman'. This decision was then discussed

among the organizers and the men. It was recognized by them that if they treated their own women in the same way as the landlords treated them, they could never expect to escape from oppression and exploitation. The women had made wife-beating a public issue and they had suggested social sanctions against such men. In a later struggle against the landlords, the men realized that the women, who had not subordinated their 'women's struggle' to 'class struggle', were much more militant, courageous and persevering than the men. They also showed more commitment to the 'general cause' than many of the men, who could easily be bribed or corrupted by the landlords. This was understood by at least some of the men (Mies, 1983).

12. See the international congress, 'Women against Genetic Engineering and Reproductive Technology', which took place from 19 to 22 April 1985 in Bonn, and the Feminist International Network of Resistance against Reproductive and Genetic Engineering (FINRRAGE).



contraceptives or abortions have been promulgated. Sexual backlash was exploited in successful attacks on the Women's Studies Program at California State University at Long Beach.

The most ambitious right-wing legislative initiative has been the Family Protection Act (FPA), introduced in Congress in 1979. The Family Protection Act is a broad assault on feminism, homosexuals, non-traditional families, and teenage sexual privacy (Brown, 1981). The Family Protection Act has not and probably will not pass, but conservative members of Congress continue to pursue its agenda in a more piecemeal fashion. Perhaps the most glaring sign of the times is the Adolescent Family Life Program. Also known as the Teen Chastity Program, it gets some 15 million federal dollars to encourage teenagers to refrain from sexual intercourse, and to discourage them from using contraceptives if they do have sex, and from having abortions if they get pregnant. In the last few years, there have been countless local confrontations over gay rights, sex education, abortion rights, adult bookstores, and public school curricula. It is unlikely that the anti-sex backlash is over, or that it has even peaked. Unless something changes dramatically, it is likely that the next few years will bring more of the same.

Periods such as the 1880s in England, and the 1950s in the United States, recodify the relations of sexuality. The struggles that were fought leave a residue in the form of laws, social practices, and ideologies which then affect the way in which sexuality is experienced long after the immediate conflicts have faded. All the signs indicate that the present era is another of those watersheds in the politics of sex. The settlements that emerge from the 1980s will have an impact far into the future. It is therefore imperative to understand what is going on and what is at stake in order to make informed decisions about what policies to support and oppose.

It is difficult to make such decisions in the absence of a coherent and intelligent body of radical thought about sex. Unfortunately, progressive political analysis of sexuality is relatively underdeveloped. Much of what is available from the feminist movement has simply added to the mystification that shrouds the subject. There is an urgent need to develop radical perspectives on sexuality.

Paradoxically, an explosion of exciting scholarship and political writing about sex has been generated in these bleak years. In the 1950s, the early gay rights movement began and prospered while the bars were being raided and anti-gay laws were being passed. In the last six years, new erotic communities, political alliances, and analyses have been developed in the midst of the repression. In this essay, I will propose elements of a descriptive and conceptual framework for thinking about sex and its politics. I hope to contribute to the pressing task of creating an accurate, humane, and genuinely liberatory body of thought about sexuality.

### Sexual Thoughts

'You see, Tim', Phillip said suddenly, 'your argument isn't reasonable. Suppose I granted your first point that homosexuality is justifiable in certain instances and under certain controls. Then there is the catch: where does justification end and degeneracy begin? Society must condemn to protect. Permit even the intellectual homosexual a place of respect and the first bar is down. Then comes the next and the next until the sadist, the flagellist, the criminally insane demand their places, and society ceases to exist. So I ask again: where is the line drawn? Where does degeneracy begin if not at the beginning of individual freedom in such matters?'

[Fragment from a discussion between two gay men trying to decide if they may love each other (Barr, 1950, p. 310)]

A radical theory of sex must identify, describe, explain, and denounce erotic injustice and sexual oppression. Such a theory needs refined conceptual tools which can grasp the subject and hold it in view. It must build rich descriptions of sexuality as it exists in society and history. It requires a convincing critical language that can convey the barbarity of sexual persecution.

Several persistent features of thought about sex inhibit the development of such a theory. These assumptions are so pervasive in Western culture that they are rarely questioned. Thus, they tend to reappear in different political contexts, acquiring new rhetorical expressions but reproducing fundamental axioms.

One such axiom is sexual essentialism – the idea that sex is a natural force that exists prior to social life and shapes institutions. Sexual essentialism is embedded in the folk wisdoms of Western societies, which consider sex to be eternally unchanging, asocial, and transhistorical. Dominated for over a century by medicine, psychiatry, and psychology, the academic study of sex has reproduced essentialism. These fields classify sex as a property of individuals. It may reside in their hormones or their psyches. It may be construed as physiological or psychological. But within these ethnoscientific categories, sexuality has no history and no significant social determinants.

During the last five years, a sophisticated historical and theoretical scholarship has challenged sexual essentialism both explicitly and implicitly. Gay history, particularly the work of Jeffrey Weeks, has led this assault by showing that homosexuality as we know it is a relatively modern institutional complex.<sup>7</sup> Many historians have come to see the contemporary institutional forms of heterosexuality as an even more recent development (Hansen, 1979). An important contributor to the new scholarship is Judith Walkowitz, whose research has demonstrated the extent to which prostitution was transformed around the turn of the century. She provides meticulous descriptions of how the interplay of social forces such as ideology, fear, political agitation, legal reform, and medical practice can change the structure of sexual behaviour and alter its consequences (Walkowitz, 1980, 1982).

Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (1978) has been the most influential and emblematic text of the new scholarship on sex. Foucault criticizes the traditional understanding of sexuality as a natural libido yearning to break free of social constraint. He argues that desires are not pre-existing biological entities, but rather that they are constituted in the course of historically specific social practices. He emphasizes the generative aspects of the social organization of sex rather than its repressive elements by pointing out that new sexualities are constantly produced. And he points to a major discontinuity between kinship-based systems of sexuality and more modern forms.

The new scholarship on sexual behaviour has given sex a history and created a constructivist alternative to sexual essentialism. Underlying this body of work is an assumption that sexuality is constituted in society and history, not biologically ordained.<sup>8</sup> This does not mean the biological capacities are not prerequisites for human sexuality. It does mean that human sexuality is not comprehensible in purely biological terms. Human organisms with human brains are necessary for human cultures, but no examination of the body or its parts can explain the nature and variety of human social systems. The belly's hunger gives no clues as to the complexities of cuisine. The body, the brain, the genitalia, and the capacity for language are necessary for human sexuality. But they do not determine its content, its experiences, or its institutional forms. Moreover, we never encounter the body unmediated by the meanings that cultures give to it. To paraphrase Lévi-Strauss, my position on the relationship between biology and sexuality is a 'Kantianism without a transcendental libido'.<sup>9</sup>

It is impossible to think with any clarity about the politics of race or gender as long as these are thought of as biological entities rather than as social constructs. Similarly, sexuality is impervious to political analysis as long as it is primarily conceived as a biological phenomenon or an aspect of individual psychology. Sexuality is as much a human product as are diets, methods of transportation, systems of etiquette, forms of labour, types of entertainment, processes of production, and modes of oppression. Once sex is understood in terms of social analysis and historical understanding, a more realistic politics

of sex becomes possible. One may then think of sexual politics in terms of such phenomena as populations, neighbourhoods, settlement patterns, migration, urban conflict, epidemiology, and police technology. These are more fruitful categories of thought than the more traditional ones of sin, disease, neurosis, pathology, decadence, pollution, or the decline and fall of empires.

By detailing the relationships between stigmatized erotic populations and the social forces which regulate them, work such as that of Allan Bérubé, John D'Emilio, Jeffrey Weeks, and Judith Walkowitz contains implicit categories of political analysis and criticism. Nevertheless, the constructivist perspective has displayed some political weaknesses. This has been most evident in misconstructions of Foucault's position.

Because of his emphasis on the ways that sexuality is produced, Foucault has been vulnerable to interpretations that deny or minimize the reality of sexual repression in the more political sense. Foucault makes it abundantly clear that he is not denying the existence of sexual repression so much as inscribing it within a large dynamic (Foucault, 1978, p. 11). Sexuality in western societies has been structured within an extremely punitive social framework, and has been subjected to very real formal and informal controls. It is necessary to recognize repressive phenomena without resorting to the essentialist assumptions of the language of libido. It is important to hold repressive sexual practices in focus, even while situating them within a different totality and a more refined terminology (Weeks, 1981, p. 9).

Most radical thought about sex has been embedded within a model of the instincts and their restraints. Concepts of sexual oppression have been lodged within that more biological understanding of sexuality. It is often easier to fall back on the notion of a natural libido subjected to inhumane repression than to reformulate concepts of sexual injustice within a more constructivist framework. But it is essential that we do so. We need a radical critique of sexual arrangements that has the conceptual elegance of Foucault and the evocative passion of Reich.

The new scholarship on sex has brought a welcome insistence that sexual terms be restricted to their proper historical and social contexts, and a cautionary scepticism towards sweeping generalizations. But it is important to be able to indicate groupings of erotic behaviour and general trends within erotic discourse. In addition to sexual essentialism, there are at least five other ideological formations whose grip on sexual thought is so strong that to fail to discuss them is to remain enmeshed within them. These are sex negativity, the fallacy of misplaced scale, the hierarchical valuation of sex acts, the domino theory of sexual peril, and the lack of a concept of benign sexual variation.

Of these five, the most important is sex negativity. Western cultures generally consider sex to be a dangerous, destructive, negative force (Weeks, 1981, p. 22). Most Christian tradition, following Paul, holds that sex is inherently sinful. It may be redeemed if performed within marriage for procreative purposes and if the pleasurable aspects are not enjoyed too much. In turn, this idea rests on the assumption that the genitalia are an intrinsically inferior part of the body, much lower and less holy than the mind, the 'soul', the 'heart', or even the upper part of the digestive system (the status of the excretory organs is close to that of the genitalia).<sup>10</sup> Such notions have by now acquired a life of their own and no longer depend solely on religion for their perseverance.

This culture always treats sex with suspicion. It construes and judges almost any sexual practice in terms of its worst possible expression. Sex is presumed guilty until proven innocent. Virtually all erotic behaviour is considered bad unless a specific reason to exempt it has been established. The most acceptable excuses are marriage, reproduction, and love. Sometimes scientific curiosity, aesthetic experience, or a long-term intimate relationship may serve. But the exercise of erotic capacity, intelligence, curiosity, or creativity all require pretexts that are unnecessary for other pleasures, such as the enjoyment of food, fiction, or astronomy.

What I call the fallacy of misplaced scale is a corollary of sex negativity. Susan Sontag once commented that since Christianity focused 'on sexual behaviour as the root of virtue, everything pertaining to sex has been a "special case" in our culture' (Sontag, 1969, p. 46). Sex law has incorporated the religious attitude that heretical sex is an especially heinous sin that deserves the harshest punishments. Throughout much of European and American history, a single act of consensual anal penetration was grounds for execution. In some states, sodomy still carries twenty-year prison sentences. Outside the law, sex is also a marked category. Small differences in value or behaviour are often experienced as cosmic threats. Although people can be intolerant, silly, or pushy about what constitutes proper diet, differences in menu rarely provoke the kinds of rage, anxiety, and sheer terror that routinely accompany differences in erotic taste. Sexual acts are burdened with an excess of significance.

Modern Western societies appraise sex acts according to a hierarchical system of sexual value. Marital, reproductive heterosexuals are alone at the top erotic pyramid. Clamouring below are unmarried monogamous heterosexuals in couples, followed by most other heterosexuals. Solitary sex floats ambiguously. The powerful nineteenth-century stigma on masturbation lingers in less potent, modified forms, such as the idea that masturbation is an inferior substitute for partnered encounters. Stable, long-term lesbian and gay male couples are verging on respectability, but bar dykes and promiscuous gay men are hovering just above the groups at the very bottom of the pyramid. The most despised sexual castes currently include transsexuals, transvestites, fetishists, sadomasochists, sex workers such as prostitutes and porn models, and the lowliest of all, those whose eroticism transgresses generational boundaries.

Individuals whose behaviour stands high in this hierarchy are rewarded with certified mental health, respectability, legality, social and physical mobility, institutional support, and material benefits. As sexual behaviours or occupations fall lower on the scale, the individuals who practice them are subjected to a presumption of mental illness, disreputability, criminality, restricted social and physical mobility, loss of institutional support, and economic sanctions.

Extreme and punitive stigma maintains some sexual behaviours as low status and is an effective sanction against those who engage in them. The intensity of this stigma is rooted in Western religious traditions. But most of its contemporary content derives from medical and psychiatric opprobrium.

The old religious taboos were primarily based on kinship forms of social organization. They were meant to deter inappropriate unions and to provide proper kin. Sex laws derived from Biblical pronouncements were aimed at preventing the acquisition of the wrong kinds of affinal partners: consanguineous kin (incest), the same gender (homosexuality), or the wrong species (bestiality). When medicine and psychiatry acquired extensive powers over sexuality, they were less concerned with unsuitable mates than with unfit forms of desire. If taboos against incest best characterized kinship systems of sexual organization, then the shift to an emphasis on taboos against masturbation was more apposite to the newer systems organized around qualities of erotic experience (Foucault, 1978, pp. 106–7).

Medicine and psychiatry multiplied the categories of sexual misconduct. The section on psychosexual disorders in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental and Physical Disorders* (DSM) of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) is a fairly reliable map of the current moral hierarchy of sexual activities. The APA list is much more elaborate than the traditional condemnations of whoring, sodomy, and adultery. The most recent edition, *DSM-III*, removed homosexuality from the roster of mental disorders after a long political struggle. But fetishism, sadism, masochism, transsexuality, transvestism, exhibitionism, voyeurism, and paedophilia are quite firmly entrenched as psychological malfunctions (American Psychiatric Association, 1980). Books are still being written about the genesis, etiology, treatment, and cure of these assorted 'pathologies'.

Psychiatric condemnation of sexual behaviours invokes concepts of mental and emotional inferiority rather than categories of sexual sin. Low-status sex practices are vilified as mental diseases or symptoms of defective personality integration. In addition, psychological terms conflate difficulties of psycho-dynamic functioning with modes of erotic conduct. They equate sexual masochism with self-destructive personality patterns, sexual sadism with emotional aggression, and homoeroticism with immaturity. These terminological muddles have become powerful stereotypes that are indiscriminately applied to individuals on the basis of their sexual orientations.

Popular culture is permeated with ideas that erotic variety is dangerous, unhealthy, depraved, and a menace to everything from small children to national security. Popular sexual ideology is a noxious stew made up of ideas of sexual sin, concepts of psychological inferiority, anti-communism, mob hysteria, accusations of witchcraft, and xenophobia. The mass media nourish these attitudes with relentless propaganda. I would call this system of erotic stigma the last socially respectable form of prejudice if the old forms did not show such obstinate vitality, and new ones did not continually become apparent.

All these hierarchies of sexual value – religious, psychiatric, and popular – function in much the same ways as do ideological systems of racism, ethnocentrism, and religious chauvinism. They rationalize the well-being of the sexually privileged and the adversity of the sexual rabble.

Figure 9.1 diagrams a general version of the sexual value system. According to this system, sexuality that is 'good', 'normal', and 'natural' should ideally be heterosexual, marital, monogamous, reproductive, and non-commercial. It should be coupled, relational, within the same generation, and occur at home. It should not involve pornography, fetish objects, sex toys of any sort, or roles other than male and female. Any sex that violates these rules is 'bad', 'abnormal', or 'unnatural'. Bad sex may be homosexual, unmarried, promiscuous, non-procreative, or commercial. It may be masturbatory or take place at orgies, may be casual, may cross generational lines, and may take place in 'public', or at least in the bushes or the baths. It may involve the use of pornography, fetish objects, sex toys, or unusual roles (see Figure 9.1).

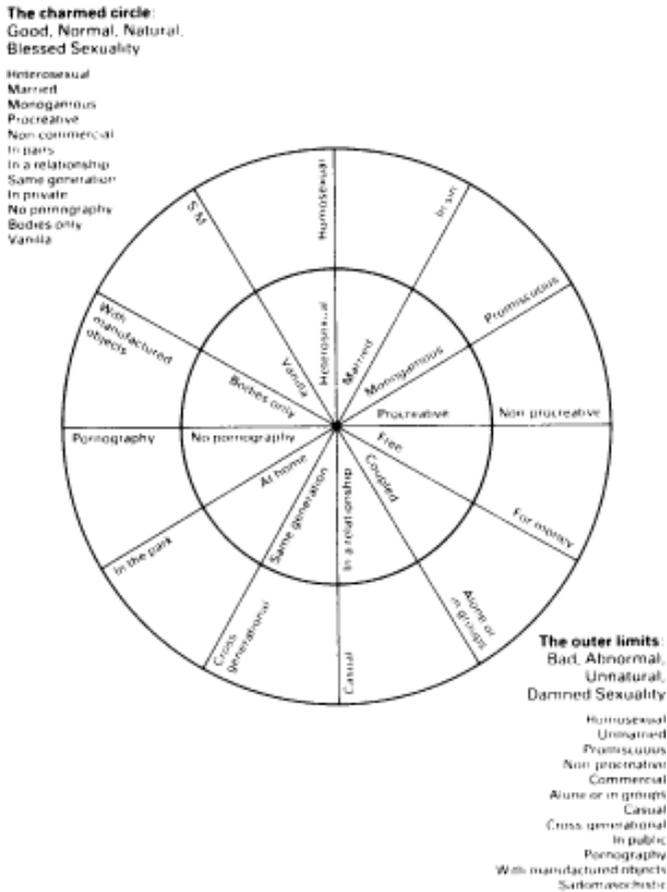
Figure 9.2 diagrams another aspect of the sexual hierarchy: the need to draw and maintain an imaginary line between good and bad sex. Most of the discourses on sex, be they religious, psychiatric, popular, or political, delimit a very small portion of human sexual capacity as sanctifiable, safe, healthy, mature, legal, or politically correct. The 'line' distinguishes these from all other erotic behaviours, which are understood to be the work of the devil, dangerous, psychopathological, infantile, or politically reprehensible. Arguments are then conducted over 'where to draw the line', and to determine what other activities, if any, may be permitted to cross over into acceptability.

All these models assume a domino theory of sexual peril. The line appears to stand between sexual order and chaos. It expresses the fear that if anything is permitted to cross this erotic DMZ, the barrier against scary sex will crumble and something unspeakable will skitter across.

Most systems of sexual judgment – religious, psychological, feminist, or socialist – attempt to determine on which side of the line a particular act falls. Only sex acts on the good side of the line are accorded moral complexity. For instance, heterosexual encounters may be sublime or disgusting, free or forced, healing or destructive, romantic or mercenary. As long as it does not violate other rules, heterosexuality is acknowledged to exhibit the full range of human experience. In contrast, all sex acts on the bad side of the line are considered utterly repulsive and devoid of all emotional nuance. The further from the line a sex act is, the more it is depicted as a uniformly bad experience.

As a result of the sex conflicts of the last decade, some behaviour near the border is inching across it. Unmarried couples living together, masturbation, and some forms of homosexuality are moving in the direction of respectability (see Figure 9.2). Most homosexuality is still on the bad side of the line. But if it is coupled and monogamous, the society is beginning to recognize that it includes the full range of human interaction. Promiscuous homosexuality, sadomasochism, fetishism, transsexuality,

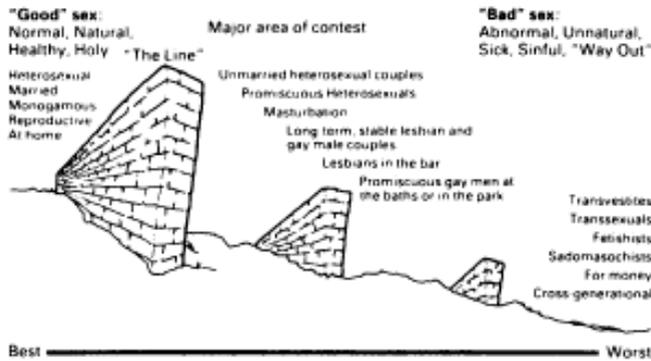
**Figure 9.1:** The sex hierarchy: the charmed circle vs. the outer limits



and cross-generational encounters are still viewed as unmodulated horrors incapable of involving affection, love, free choice, kindness, or transcendence.

This kind of sexual morality has more in common with ideologies of racism than with true ethics. It grants virtue to the dominant groups, and relegates vice to the underprivileged. A democratic morality should judge sexual acts by the way partners treat one another, the level of mutual consideration, the presence or absence of coercion, and quantity and quality of the pleasures they provide. Whether sex acts are gay or straight, coupled or in groups, naked or in underwear, commercial or free, with or without video, should not be ethical concerns.

It is difficult to develop a pluralistic sexual ethics without a concept of benign sexual variation. Variation is a fundamental property of all life, from the simplest biological organisms to the most complex human social formations. Yet sexuality is supposed to conform to a single standard. One of

**Figure 9.2:** The sex hierarchy: the struggle over where to draw the line

the most tenacious ideas about sex is that there is one best way to do it, and that everyone should do it that way.

Most people find it difficult to grasp that whatever they like to do sexually will be thoroughly repulsive to someone else, and that whatever repels them sexually will be the most treasured delight of someone, somewhere. One need not like or perform a particular sex act in order to recognize that someone else will, and that this difference does not indicate a lack of good taste, mental health, or intelligence in either party. Most people mistake their sexual preferences for a universal system that will or should work for everyone.

This notion of a single ideal sexuality characterizes most systems of thought about sex. For religion, the ideal is procreative marriage. For psychology, it is mature heterosexuality. Although its content varies, the format of a single sexual standard is continually reconstituted within other rhetorical frameworks, including feminism and socialism. It is just as objectionable to insist that everyone should be lesbian, non-monogamous, or kinky, as to believe that everyone should be heterosexual, married, or vanilla – though the latter set of opinions are backed by considerably more coercive power than the former.

Progressives who would be ashamed to display cultural chauvinism in other areas routinely exhibit it towards sexual differences. We have learned to cherish different cultures as unique expressions of human inventiveness rather than as the inferior or disgusting habits of savages. We need a similarly anthropological understanding of different sexual cultures.

Empirical sex research is the one field that does incorporate a positive concept of sexual variation. Alfred Kinsey approached the study of sex with the same uninhibited curiosity he had previously applied to examining a species of wasp. His scientific detachment gave his work a refreshing neutrality that enraged moralists and caused immense controversy (Kinsey *et al.*, 1948, 1953). Among Kinsey's successors, John Gagnon and William Simon have pioneered the application of sociological understandings to erotic variety (Gagnon and Simon, 1967, 1970; Gagnon, 1977). Even some of the older sexology is useful. Although his work is imbued with unappetizing eugenic beliefs, Havelock Ellis was an acute and sympathetic observer. His monumental *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* is resplendent with detail (Ellis, 1936).

Much political writing on sexuality reveals complete ignorance of both classical sexology and modern sex research. Perhaps this is because so few colleges and universities bother to teach human sexuality, and because so much stigma adheres even to scholarly investigation of sex. Neither

sexology nor sex research has been immune to the prevailing sexual value system. Both contain assumptions and information which should not be accepted uncritically. But sexology and sex research provide abundant detail, a welcome posture of calm, and a well-developed ability to treat sexual variety as something that exists rather than as something to be exterminated. These fields can provide an empirical grounding for a radical theory of sexuality more useful than the combination of psychoanalysis and feminist first principles to which so many texts resort.

### Sexual Transformation

As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology . . . The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. (Foucault, 1978, p. 43)

In spite of many continuities with ancestral forms, modern sexual arrangements have a distinctive character which sets them apart from preexisting systems. In Western Europe and the United States, industrialization and urbanization reshaped the traditional rural and peasant populations into a new urban industrial and service workforce. It generated new forms of state apparatus, reorganized family relations, altered gender roles, made possible new forms of identity, produced new varieties of social inequality, and created new formats for political and ideological conflict. It also gave rise to a new sexual system characterized by distinct types of sexual persons, populations, stratification, and political conflict.

The writings of nineteenth-century sexology suggest the appearance of a kind of erotic speciation. However outlandish their explanations, the early sexologists were witnessing the emergence of new kinds of erotic individuals and their aggregation into rudimentary communities. The modern sexual system contains sets of these sexual populations, stratified by the operation of an ideological and social hierarchy. Differences in social value create friction among these groups, who engage in political contest to alter or maintain their place in the ranking. Contemporary sexual politics should be reconceptualized in terms of the emergence and on-going development of this system, its social relations, the ideologies which interpret it, and its characteristic modes of conflict.

Homosexuality is the best example of this process of erotic speciation. Homosexual behaviour is always present among humans. But in different societies and epochs it may be rewarded or punished, required or forbidden, a temporary experience or a life-long vocation. In some New Guinea societies, for example, homosexual activities are obligatory for all males. Homosexual acts are considered utterly masculine, roles are based on age, and partners are determined by kinship status (Herdt, 1981; Kelly, 1976; Rubin, 1974, 1982; Baal, 1966; Williams, 1936). Although these men engage in extensive homosexual and pedophile behaviour, they are neither homosexuals nor pederasts.

Nor was the sixteenth-century sodomite a homosexual. In 1631, Mervyn Touchet, Earl of Castlehaven, was tried and executed for Sodomy. It is clear from the proceedings that the earl was not understood by himself or anyone else to be a particular kind of sexual individual. 'While from the twentieth-century viewpoint Lord Castlehaven obviously suffered from psychosexual problems requiring the services of an analyst, from the seventeenth-century viewpoint he had deliberately broken the Law of God and the Laws of England, and required the simpler services of an executioner' (Bingham, 1971, p. 465). The earl did not slip into his tightest doublet and waltz down to the

nearest gay tavern to mingle with his fellow sodomists. He stayed in his manor house and buggered his servants. Gay self-awareness, gay pubs, the sense of group commonality, and even the term homosexual were not part of the earl's universe.

The New Guinea bachelor and the sodomite nobleman are only tangentially related to a modern gay man, who may migrate from rural Colorado to San Francisco in order to live in a gay neighbourhood, work in a gay business, and participate in an elaborate experience that includes a selfconscious identity, group solidarity, a literature, a press, and a high level of political activity. In modern, Western, industrial societies, homosexuality has acquired much of the institutional structure of an ethnic group (Murray, 1979).

The relocation of homoeroticism into these quasi-ethnic, nucleated, sexually constituted communities is to some extent a consequence of the transfers of population brought by industrialization. As labourers migrated to work in cities, there were increased opportunities for voluntary communities to form. Homosexually inclined women and men, who would have been vulnerable and isolated in most pre-industrial villages, began to congregate in small corners of the big cities. Most large nineteenth-century cities in Western Europe and North America had areas where men could cruise for other men. Lesbian communities seem to have coalesced more slowly and on a smaller scale. Nevertheless, by the 1890s, there were several cafes in Paris near the Place Pigalle which catered to a lesbian clientele, and it is likely that there were similar places in the other major capitals of Western Europe.

Areas like these acquired bad reputations, which alerted other interested individuals of their existence and location. In the United States, lesbian and gay male territories were well established in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles in the 1950s. Sexually motivated migration to places such as Greenwich Village had become a sizable sociological phenomenon. By the late 1970s, sexual migration was occurring on a scale so significant that it began to have a recognizable impact on urban politics in the United States, with San Francisco being the most notable and notorious example.<sup>11</sup>

Prostitution has undergone a similar metamorphosis. Prostitution began to change from a temporary job to a more permanent occupation as a result of nineteenth-century agitation, legal reform, and police persecution. Prostitutes, who had been part of the general working-class population, became increasingly isolated as members of an outcast group (Walkowitz, 1980). Prostitutes and other sex workers differ from homosexuals and other sexual minorities. Sex work is an occupation, while sexual deviation is an erotic preference. Nevertheless, they share some common features of social organization. Like homosexuals, prostitutes are a criminal sexual population stigmatized on the basis of sexual activity. Prostitutes and male homosexuals are the primary prey of vice police everywhere.<sup>12</sup> Like gay men, prostitutes occupy well-demarcated urban territories and battle with police to defend and maintain those territories. The legal persecution of both populations is justified by an elaborate ideology which classifies them as dangerous and inferior undesirables who are not entitled to be left in peace.

Besides organizing homosexuals and prostitutes into localized populations, the 'modernization of sex' has generated a system of continual sexual ethnogenesis. Other populations of erotic dissidents – commonly known as the 'perversions' or the 'paraphilias' – also began to coalesce. Sexualities keep marching out of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* and on to the pages of social history. At present, several other groups are trying to emulate the successes of homosexuals. Bisexuals, sadomasochists, individuals who prefer cross-generational encounters, transsexuals, and transvestites are all in various states of community formation and identity acquisition. The perversions are not proliferating as much as they are attempting to acquire social space, small businesses, political resources, and a measure of relief from the penalties for sexual heresy.

## Sexual Stratification

An entire sub-race was born, different – despite certain kinship ties – from the libertines of the past. From the end of the eighteenth century to our own, they circulated through the pores of society; they were always hounded, but not always by laws; were often locked up, but not always in prisons; were sick perhaps, but scandalous, dangerous victims, prey to a strange evil that also bore the name of vice and sometimes crime. They were children wise beyond their years, precocious little girls, ambiguous schoolboys, dubious servants and educators, cruel or maniacal husbands, solitary collectors, ramblers with bizarre impulses; they haunted the houses of correction, the penal colonies, the tribunals, and the asylums; they carried their infamy to the doctors and their sickness to the judges. This was the numberless family of perverts who were on friendly terms with delinquents and akin to madmen.

(Foucault, 1978, p. 40)

The industrial transformation of Western Europe and North America brought about new forms of social stratification. The resultant inequalities of class are well known and have been explored in detail by a century of scholarship. The construction of modern systems of racism and ethnic injustice has been well documented and critically assessed. Feminist thought has analysed the prevailing organization of gender oppression. But although specific erotic groups, such as militant homosexuals and sex workers, have agitated against their own mistreatment, there has been no equivalent attempt to locate particular varieties of sexual persecution within a more general system of sexual stratification. Nevertheless, such a system exists, and in its contemporary form it is a consequence of Western industrialization.

Sex law is the most adamant instrument of sexual stratification and erotic persecution. The state routinely intervenes in sexual behaviour at a level that would not be tolerated in other areas of social life. Most people are unaware of the extent of sex law, the quantity and qualities of illegal sexual behaviour, and the punitive character of legal sanctions. Although federal agencies may be involved in obscenity and prostitution cases, most sex laws are enacted at the state and municipal level, and enforcement is largely in the hands of local police. Thus, there is a tremendous amount of variation in the laws applicable to any given locale. Moreover, enforcement of sex laws varies dramatically with the local political climate. In spite of this legal thicket, one can make some tentative and qualified generalizations. My discussion of sex law does not apply to laws against sexual coercion, sexual assault, or rape. It does pertain to the myriad prohibitions on consensual sex and the 'status' offenses such as statutory rape.

Sex law is harsh. The penalties for violating sex statutes are universally out of proportion to any social or individual harm. A single act of consensual but illicit sex, such as placing one's lips upon the genitalia of an enthusiastic partner, is punished in many states with more severity than rape, battery, or murder. Each such genital kiss, each lewd caress, is a separate crime. It is therefore painfully easy to commit multiple felonies in the course of a single evening of illegal passion. Once someone is convicted of a sex violation, a second performance of the same act is grounds for prosecution as a repeat offender, in which case penalties will be even more severe. In some states, individuals have become repeat felons for having engaged in homosexual love-making on two separate occasions. Once an erotic activity has been proscribed by sex law, the full power of the state enforces conformity to the values embodied in those laws. Sex laws are notoriously easy to pass, as legislators are loath to be soft on vice. Once on the books, they are extremely difficult to dislodge.

Sex law is not a perfect reflection of the prevailing moral evaluations of sexual conduct. Sexual variation *per se* is more specifically policed by the mental-health professions, popular ideology, and extra-legal social practice. Some of the most detested erotic behaviours, such as fetishism and

sadomasochism, are not as closely or completely regulated by the criminal justice system as somewhat less stigmatized practices, such as homosexuality. Areas of sexual behaviour come under the purview of the law when they become objects of social concern and political uproar. Each sex scare or morality campaign deposits new regulations as a kind of fossil record of its passage. The legal sediment is thickest – and sex law has its greatest potency – in areas involving obscenity, money, minors, and homosexuality.

Obscenity laws enforce a powerful taboo against direct representation of erotic activities. Current emphasis on the ways in which sexuality has become a focus of social attention should not be misused to undermine a critique of this prohibition. It is one thing to create sexual discourse in the form of psychoanalysis, or in the course of a morality crusade. It is quite another to depict sex acts or genitalia graphically. The first is socially permissible in a way the second is not. Sexual speech is forced into reticence, euphemism, and indirection. Freedom of speech about sex is a glaring exception to the protections of the First Amendment, which is not even considered applicable to purely sexual statements.

The anti-obscenity laws also form part of a group of statutes that make almost all sexual commerce illegal. Sex law incorporates a very strong prohibition against mixing sex and money, except via marriage. In addition to the obscenity statutes, other laws impinging on sexual commerce include anti-prostitution laws, alcoholic beverage regulations, and ordinances governing the location and operation of 'adult' businesses. The sex industry and the gay economy have both managed to circumvent some of this legislation, but that process has not been easy or simple. The underlying criminality of sex-oriented business keeps it marginal, underdeveloped, and distorted. Sex businesses can only operate in legal loopholes. This tends to keep investment down and to divert commercial activity towards the goal of staying out of jail rather than delivery of goods and services. It also renders sex workers more vulnerable to exploitation and bad working conditions. If sex commerce were legal, sex workers would be more able to organize and agitate for higher pay, better conditions, greater control, and less stigma.

Whatever one thinks of the limitations of capitalist commerce, such an extreme exclusion from the market process would hardly be socially acceptable in other areas of activity. Imagine, for example, that the exchange of money for medical care, pharmacological advice, or psychological counselling were illegal. Medical practice would take place in a much less satisfactory fashion if doctors, nurses, druggists, and therapists could be hauled off to jail at the whim of the local 'health squad'. But that is essentially the situation of prostitutes, sex workers, and sex entrepreneurs.

Marx himself considered the capitalist market a revolutionary, if limited, force. He argued that capitalism was progressive in its dissolution of pre-capitalist superstition, prejudice, and the bonds of traditional modes of life. 'Hence the great civilizing influence of capital, its production of a state of society compared with which all earlier stages appear to be merely local progress and idolatry of nature' (Marx, 1971, p. 94). Keeping sex from realizing the positive effects of the market economy hardly makes it socialist.

The law is especially ferocious in maintaining the boundary between childhood 'innocence' and 'adult' sexuality. Rather than recognizing the sexuality of the young, and attempting to provide for it in a caring and responsible manner, our culture denies and punishes erotic interest and activity by anyone under the local age of consent. The amount of law devoted to protecting young people from premature exposure to sexuality is breath-taking.

The primary mechanism for insuring the separation of sexual generations is age of consent laws. These laws make no distinction between the most brutal rape and the most gentle romance. A 20-year-old convicted of sexual contact with a 17-year-old will face a severe sentence in virtually every state, regardless of the nature of the relationship (Norton, 1981).<sup>13</sup> Nor are minors permitted access to 'adult' sexuality in other forms. They are forbidden to see books, movies, or television in which

sexuality is 'too' graphically portrayed. It is legal for young people to see hideous depictions of violence, but not to see explicit pictures of genitalia. Sexually active young people are frequently incarcerated in juvenile homes, or otherwise punished for their 'precocity'.

Adults who deviate too much from conventional standards of sexual conduct are often denied contact with the young, even their own. Custody laws permit the state to steal the children of anyone whose erotic activities appear questionable to a judge presiding over family court matters. Countless lesbians, gay men, prostitutes, swingers, sex workers, and 'promiscuous' women have been declared unfit parents under such provisions. Members of the teaching professions are closely monitored for signs of sexual misconduct. In most states, certification laws require that teachers arrested for sex offenses lose their jobs and credentials. In some cases, a teacher may be fired merely because an unconventional lifestyle becomes known to school officials. Moral turpitude is one of the few legal grounds for revoking academic tenure (Beserra, Franklin, and Clevenger, 1977, pp. 165–7). The more influence one has over the next generation, the less latitude one is permitted in behaviour and opinion. The coercive power of the law ensures the transmission of conservative sexual values with these kinds of controls over parenting and teaching.

The only adult sexual behaviour that is legal in every state is the placement of the penis in the vagina in wedlock. Consenting adults statutes ameliorate this situation in fewer than half the states. Most states impose severe criminal penalties on consensual sodomy, homosexual contact short of sodomy, adultery, seduction, and adult incest. Sodomy laws vary a great deal. In some states, they apply equally to homosexual and heterosexual partners and regardless of marital status. Some state courts have ruled that married couples have the right to commit sodomy in private. Only homosexual sodomy is illegal in some states. Some sodomy statutes prohibit both anal sex and oral–genital contact. In other states, sodomy applies only to anal penetration, and oral sex is covered under separate statutes (Beserra *et al.*, 1973, pp. 163–8).<sup>14</sup>

Laws like these criminalize sexual behaviour that is freely chosen and avidly sought. The ideology embodied in them reflects the value hierarchies discussed above. That is, some sex acts are considered to be so intrinsically vile that no one should be allowed under any circumstance to perform them. The fact that individuals consent to or even prefer them is taken to be additional evidence of depravity. This system of sex law is similar to legalized racism. State prohibition of same sex contact, anal penetration, and oral sex make homosexuals a criminal group denied the privileges of full citizenship. With such laws, prosecution is persecution. Even when they are not strictly enforced, as is usually the case, the members of criminalized sexual communities remain vulnerable to the possibility of arbitrary arrest, or to periods in which they become the objects of social panic. When those occur, the laws are in place and police action is swift. Even sporadic enforcement serves to remind individuals that they are members of a subject population. The occasional arrest for sodomy, lewd behaviour, solicitation, or oral sex keeps everyone else afraid, nervous, and circumspect.

The state also upholds the sexual hierarchy through bureaucratic regulation. Immigration policy still prohibits the admission of homosexuals (and other sexual 'deviates') into the United States. Military regulations bar homosexuals from serving in the armed forces. The fact that gay people cannot legally marry means that they cannot enjoy the same legal rights as heterosexuals in many matters, including inheritance, taxation, protection from testimony in court, and the acquisition of citizenship for foreign partners. These are but a few of the ways that the state reflects and maintains the social relations of sexuality. The law buttresses structures of power, codes of behaviour, and forms of prejudice. At their worst, sex law and sex regulation are simply sexual apartheid.

Although the legal apparatus of sex is staggering, most everyday social control is extra-legal. Less formal, but very effective social sanctions are imposed on members of 'inferior' sexual populations.

In her marvellous ethnographic study of gay life in the 1960s, Esther Newton observed that the homosexual population was divided into what she called the 'overts' and 'coverts'. 'The overts live

their entire working lives within the context of the [gay] community; the coverts live their *entire nonworking* lives within it' (Newton, 1972, p. 21, emphasis in the original). At the time of Newton's study, the gay community provided far fewer jobs than it does now, and the non-gay work world was almost completely intolerant of homosexuality. There were some fortunate individuals who could be openly gay and earn decent salaries. But the vast majority of homosexuals had to choose between honest poverty and the strain of maintaining a false identity.

Though this situation has changed a great deal, discrimination against gay people is still rampant. For the bulk of the gay population, being out on the job is still impossible. Generally, the more important and higher paid the job, the less the society will tolerate overt erotic deviance. If it is difficult for gay people to find employment where they do not have to pretend, it is doubly and triply so for more exotically sexed individuals. Sadoomasochists leave their fetish clothes at home, and know that they must be especially careful to conceal their real identities. An exposed paedophile would probably be stoned out of the office. Having to maintain such absolute secrecy is a considerable burden. Even those who are content to be secretive may be exposed by some accidental event. Individuals who are erotically unconventional risk being unemployable or unable to pursue their chosen careers.

Public officials and anyone who occupies a position of social consequence are especially vulnerable. A sex scandal is the surest method for hounding someone out of office or destroying a political career. The fact that important people are expected to conform to the strictest standards of erotic conduct discourages sex perverts of all kinds from seeking such positions. Instead, erotic dissidents are channeled into positions that have less impact on the mainstream of social activity and opinion.

The expansion of the gay economy in the last decade has provided some employment alternatives and some relief from job discrimination against homosexuals. But most of the jobs provided by the gay economy are low-status and low-paying. Bartenders, bathhouse attendants, and disc jockeys are not bank officers or corporate executives. Many of the sexual migrants who flock to places like San Francisco are downwardly mobile. They face intense competition for choice positions. The influx of sexual migrants provides a pool of cheap and exploitable labour for many of the city's businesses, both gay and straight.

Families play a crucial role in enforcing sexual conformity. Much social pressure is brought to bear to deny erotic dissidents the comforts and resources that families provide. Popular ideology holds that families are not supposed to produce or harbor erotic non-conformity. Many families respond by trying to reform, punish, or exile sexually offending members. Many sexual migrants have been thrown out by their families, and many others are fleeing from the threat of institutionalization. Any random collection of homosexuals, sex workers, or miscellaneous perverts can provide heartstopping stories of rejection and mistreatment by horrified families. Christmas is the great family holiday in the United States and consequently it is a time of considerable tension in the gay community. Half the inhabitants go off to their families of origin; many of those who remain in the gay ghettos cannot do so, and relive their anger and grief.

In addition to economic penalties and strain on family relations, the stigma of erotic dissidence creates friction at all other levels of everyday life. The general public helps to penalize erotic nonconformity when, according to the values they have been taught, landlords refuse housing, neighbours call in the police, and hoodlums commit sanctioned battery. The ideologies of erotic inferiority and sexual danger decrease the power of sex perverts and sex workers in social encounters of all kinds. They have less protection from unscrupulous or criminal behaviour, less access to police protection, and less recourse to the courts. Dealings with institutions and bureaucracies – hospital, police coroners, banks, public officials – are more difficult.

Sex is a vector of oppression. The system of sexual oppression cuts across other modes of social inequality, sorting out individuals and groups according to its own intrinsic dynamics. It is not

reducible to, or understandable in terms of, class, race, ethnicity, or gender. Wealth, white skin, male gender, and ethnic privileges can mitigate the effects of sexual stratification. A rich, white male pervert will generally be less affected than a poor, black, female pervert. But even the most privileged are not immune to sexual oppression. Some of the consequences of the system of sexual hierarchy are mere nuisances. Others are quite grave. In its most serious manifestations, the sexual system is a Kafkaesque nightmare in which unlucky victims become herds of human cattle whose identification, surveillance, apprehension, treatment, incarceration, and punishment produce jobs and self-satisfaction for thousands of vice police, prison officials, psychiatrists, and social workers.<sup>15</sup>

### Sexual Conflicts

The moral panic crystallizes widespread fears and anxieties, and often deals with them not by seeking the real causes of the problems and conditions which they demonstrate but by displacing them on to 'Folk Devils' in an identified social group (often the 'immoral' or 'degenerate'). Sexuality has had a peculiar centrality in such panics, and sexual 'deviants' have been omnipresent scapegoats. (Jeffrey Weeks, 1981, p. 14)

The sexual system is not a monolithic, omnipotent structure. There are continuous battles over the definitions, evaluations, arrangements, privileges, and costs of sexual behaviour. Political struggle over sex assumes characteristic forms.

Sexual ideology plays a crucial role in sexual experience. Consequently, definitions and evaluations of sexual conduct are objects of bitter contest. The confrontations between early gay liberation and the psychiatric establishment are the best example of this kind of fight, but there are constant skirmishes. Recurrent battles take place between the primary producers of sexual ideology – the churches, the family, the shrinks, and the media – and the groups whose experience they name, distort, and endanger.

The legal regulation of sexual conduct is another battleground. Lysander Spooner dissected the system of state-sanctioned moral coercion over a century ago in a text inspired primarily by the temperance campaigns. In *Vices Are Not Crimes: A Vindication of Moral Liberty*, Spooner argued that government should protect its citizens against crime, but that it is foolish, unjust, and tyrannical to legislate against vice. He discusses rationalizations still heard today in defense of legalized moralism – that 'vices' (Spooner is referring to drink, but homosexuality, prostitution, or recreational drug use may be substituted) lead to crimes, and should therefore be prevented; that those who practice 'vice' are *non compos mentis* and should therefore be protected from their self-destruction by state-accomplished ruin; and that children must be protected from supposedly harmful knowledge (Spooner, 1977). The discourse on victimless crimes has not changed much. Legal struggle over sex law will continue until basic freedoms of sexual action and expression are guaranteed. This requires the repeal of all sex laws except those few that deal with actual, not statutory, coercion; and it entails the abolition of vice squads, whose job it is to enforce legislated morality.

In addition to the definitional and legal wars, there are less obvious forms of sexual political conflict which I call the territorial and border wars. The processes by which erotic minorities form communities and the forces that seek to inhibit them lead to struggles over the nature and boundaries of sexual zones.

Dissident sexuality is rarer and more closely monitored in small towns and rural areas. Consequently, metropolitan life continually beckons to young perverts. Sexual migration creates concentrated pools

of potential partners, friends, and associates. It enables individuals to create adult, kin-like networks in which to live. But there are many barriers which sexual migrants have to overcome.

According to the mainstream media and popular prejudice, the marginal sexual worlds are bleak and dangerous. They are portrayed as impoverished, ugly, and inhabited by psychopaths and criminals. New migrants must be sufficiently motivated to resist the impact of such discouraging images. Attempts to counter negative propaganda with more realistic information generally meet with censorship, and there are continuous ideological struggles over which representations of sexual communities make it into the popular media.

Information on how to find, occupy, and live in the marginal sexual worlds is also suppressed. Navigational guides are scarce and inaccurate. In the past, fragments of rumour, distorted gossip, and bad publicity were the most available clues to the location of underground erotic communities. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, better information became available. Now groups like the Moral Majority want to rebuild the ideological walls around the sexual undergrounds and make transit in and out of them as difficult as possible.

Migration is expensive. Transportation costs, moving expenses, and the necessity of finding new jobs and housing are economic difficulties that sexual migrants must overcome. These are especially imposing barriers to the young, who are often the most desperate to move. There are, however, routes into the erotic communities which mark trails through the propaganda thicket and provide some economic shelter along the way. Higher education can be a route for young people from affluent backgrounds. In spite of serious limitations, the information on sexual behaviour at most colleges and universities is better than elsewhere, and most colleges and universities shelter small erotic networks of all sorts.

For poorer kids, the military is often the easiest way to get the hell out of wherever they are. Military prohibitions against homosexuality make this a perilous route. Although young queers continually attempt to use the armed forces to get out of intolerable hometown situations and closer to functional gay communities, they face the hazards of exposure, court martial, and dishonourable discharge.

Once in the cities, erotic populations tend to nucleate and to occupy some regular, visible territory. Churches and other anti-vice forces constantly put pressure on local authorities to contain such areas, reduce their visibility, or to drive their inhabitants out of town. There are periodic crackdowns in which local vice squads are unleashed on the populations they control. Gay men, prostitutes, and sometimes transvestites are sufficiently territorial and numerous to engage in intense battles with the cops over particular streets, parks, and alleys. Such border wars are usually inconclusive, but they result in many casualties.

For most of this century, the sexual underworlds have been marginal and impoverished, their residents subjected to stress and exploitation. The spectacular success of gay entrepreneurs in creating a variegated gay economy has altered the quality of life within the gay ghetto. The level of material comfort and social elaboration achieved by the gay community in the last fifteen years is unprecedented. But it is important to recall what happened to similar miracles. The growth of the black population in New York in the early part of the twentieth century led to the Harlem Renaissance, but that period of creativity was doused by the Depression. The relative prosperity and cultural florescence of the ghetto may be equally fragile. Like blacks who fled the South for the metropolitan North, homosexuals may have merely traded rural problems for urban ones.

Gay pioneers occupied neighbourhoods that were centrally located but run down. Consequently, they border poor neighbourhoods. Gays, especially low-income gays, end up competing with other low-income groups for the limited supply of cheap and moderate housing. In San Francisco, competition for low-cost housing has exacerbated both racism and homophobia, and is one source of the epidemic of street violence against homosexuals. Instead of being isolated and invisible in rural settings, city gays are now numerous and obvious targets for urban frustrations.

In San Francisco, unbridled construction of downtown skyscrapers and high-cost condominiums is causing affordable housing to evaporate. Megabuck construction is creating pressure on all city residents. Poor gay renters are visible in low-income neighbourhoods; multimillionaire contractors are not. The spectre of the 'homosexual invasion' is a convenient scapegoat which deflects attention from the banks, the planning commission, the political establishment, and the big developers. In San Francisco, the well-being of the gay community has become embroiled in the high-stakes politics of urban real estate.

Downtown expansion affects all the territorial erotic underworlds. In both San Francisco and New York, high investment construction and urban renewal have intruded on the main areas of prostitution, pornography, and leather bars. Developers are salivating over Times Square, the Tenderloin, what is left of North Beach, and South of Market. Anti-sex ideology, obscenity law, prostitution regulations, and the alcoholic beverage codes are all being used to dislodge seedy adult business, sex workers, and leathermen. Within ten years, most of these areas will have been bulldozed and made safe for convention centres, international hotels, corporate headquarters, and housing for the rich.

The most important and consequential kind of sex conflict is what Jeffrey Weeks has termed the 'moral panic'. Moral panics are the 'political moment' of sex, in which diffuse attitudes are channeled into political action and from there into social change.<sup>16</sup> The white slavery hysteria of the 1880s, the anti-homosexual campaigns of the 1950s, and the child pornography panic of the late 1970s were typical moral panics.

Because sexuality in Western societies is so mystified, the wars over it are often fought at oblique angles, aimed at phony targets, conducted with misplaced passions, and are highly, intensely symbolic. Sexual activities often function as signifiers for personal and social apprehensions to which they have no intrinsic connection. During a moral panic such fears attach to some unfortunate sexual activity or population. The media become ablaze with indignation, the public behaves like a rabid mob, the police are activated, and the state enacts new laws and regulations. When the furor has passed, some innocent erotic group has been decimated, and the state has extended its power into new areas of erotic behaviour.

The system of sexual stratification provides easy victims who lack the power to defend themselves, and a preexisting apparatus for controlling their movements and curtailing their freedoms. The stigma against sexual dissidents renders them morally defenceless. Every moral panic has consequences on two levels. The target population suffers most, but everyone is affected by the social and legal changes.

Moral panics rarely alleviate any real problem, because they are aimed at chimeras and signifiers. They draw on the pre-existing discursive structure which invents victims in order to justify treating 'vices' as crimes. The criminalization of innocuous behaviours such as homosexuality, prostitution, obscenity, or recreational drug use, is rationalized by portraying them as menaces to health and safety, women and children, national security, the family, or civilization itself. Even when activity is acknowledged to be harmless, it may be banned because it is alleged to 'lead' to something ostensibly worse (another manifestation of the domino theory).<sup>17</sup> Great and mighty edifices have been built on the basis of such phantasms. Generally, the outbreak of a moral panic is preceded by an intensification of such scapegoating.

It is always risky to prophesy. But it does not take much prescience to detect potential moral panics in two current developments: the attacks on sadomasochists by a segment of the feminist movement, and the right's increasing use of AIDS to incite virulent homophobia.

Feminist anti-pornography ideology has always contained an implied, and sometimes overt, indictment of sadomasochism. The pictures of sucking and fucking that comprise the bulk of pornography may be unnerving to those who are not familiar with them. But it is hard to make a convincing case that such images are violent. All of the early anti-porn slide shows used a highly selective sample of S/M imagery to sell a very flimsy analysis. Taken out of context, such images are

often shocking. This shock value was mercilessly exploited to scare audiences into accepting the anti-porn perspective.

A great deal of anti-porn propaganda implies sadomasochism is the underlying and essential 'truth' towards which all pornography tends. Porn is thought to lead to S/M porn which in turn is alleged to lead to rape. This is a just-so story that revitalizes the notion that sex perverts commit sex crimes, not normal people. There is no evidence that the readers of S/M erotica or practising sadomasochists commit a disproportionate number of sex crimes. Anti-porn literature scapegoats an unpopular sexual minority and its reading material for social problems they do not create.

The use of S/M imagery in anti-porn discourse is inflammatory. It implies that the way to make the world safe for women is to get rid of sadomasochism. The use of S/M images in the movie *Not a Love Story* was on a moral par with the use of depictions of black men raping white women, or of drooling old Jews pawing young Aryan girls, to incite racist or anti-Semitic frenzy.

Feminist rhetoric has a distressing tendency to reappear in reactionary contexts. For example, in 1980 and 1981, Pope John Paul II delivered a series of pronouncements reaffirming his commitment to the most conservative and Pauline understandings of human sexuality. In condemning divorce, abortion, trial marriage, pornography, prostitution, birth control, unbridled hedonism, and lust, the pope employed a great deal of feminist rhetoric about sexual objectification. Sounding like lesbian feminist polemicist Julia Penelope, His Holiness explained that 'considering anyone in a lustful way makes that person a sexual object rather than a human being worthy of dignity'.<sup>18</sup>

The right wing opposes pornography and has already adopted elements of feminist anti-porn rhetoric. The anti-S/M discourse developed in the women's movement could easily become a vehicle for a moral witch hunt. It provides a ready-made defenseless target population. It provides a rationale for the recriminalization of sexual materials which have escaped the reach of current obscenity laws. It would be especially easy to pass laws against S/M erotica resembling the child pornography laws. The ostensible purpose of such laws would be to reduce violence by banning so-called violent porn. A focused campaign against the leather menace might also result in the passage of laws to criminalize S/M behaviour that is not currently illegal. The ultimate result of such a moral panic would be the legalized violation of a community of harmless perverts. It is dubious that such a sexual witch hunt would make any appreciable contribution towards reducing violence against women.

An AIDS panic is even more probable. When fears of incurable disease mingle with sexual terror, the resulting brew is extremely volatile. A century ago, attempts to control syphilis led to the passage of the Contagious Diseases Acts in England. The Acts were based on erroneous medical theories and did nothing to halt the spread of the disease. But they did make life miserable for the hundreds of women who were incarcerated, subjected to forcible vaginal examination, and stigmatized for life as prostitutes (Walkowitz, 1980; Weeks, 1981).

Whatever happens, AIDS will have far-reaching consequences on sex in general, and on homosexuality in particular. The disease will have a significant impact on the choices gay people make. Fewer will migrate to the gay meccas out of fear of the disease. Those who already reside in the ghettos will avoid situations they fear will expose them. The gay economy, and political apparatus it supports, may prove to be evanescent. Fear of AIDS has already affected sexual ideology. Just when homosexuals have had some success in throwing off the taint of mental disease, gay people find themselves metaphorically welded to an image of lethal physical deterioration. The syndrome, its peculiar qualities, and its transmissibility are being used to reinforce old fears that sexual activity, homosexuality, and promiscuity led to disease and death.

AIDS is both a personal tragedy for those who contract the syndrome and a calamity for the gay community. Homophobes have gleefully hastened to turn this tragedy against its victims. One columnist has suggested that AIDS has always existed, that the Biblical prohibitions on sodomy were designed to protect people from AIDS, and that AIDS is therefore an appropriate punishment for violating the

Levitical codes. Using fear of infection as a rationale, local right-wingers attempted to ban the gay rodeo from Reno, Nevada. A recent issue of the *Moral Majority Report* featured a picture of a 'typical' white family of four wearing surgical masks. The headline read: 'AIDS: HOMOSEXUAL DISEASES THREATEN AMERICAN FAMILIES'.<sup>19</sup> Phyllis Schlafly has recently issued a pamphlet arguing that passage of the Equal Rights Amendment would make it impossible to 'legally protect ourselves against AIDS and other diseases carried by homosexuals' (cited in Bush, 1983, p. 60). Current rightwing literature calls for shutting down the gay baths, for a legal ban on homosexual employment in food-handling occupations, and for state-mandated prohibitions on blood donations by gay people. Such policies would require the government to identify all homosexuals and impose easily recognizable legal and social markers on them.

It is bad enough that the gay community must deal with the medical misfortune of having been the population in which a deadly disease first became widespread and visible. It is worse to have to deal with the social consequences as well. Even before the AIDS scare, Greece passed a law that enables police to arrest suspected homosexuals and force them to submit to an examination for venereal disease. It is likely that until AIDS and its methods of transmission are understood, there will be all sorts of proposals to control it by punishing the gay community and by attacking its institutions. When the cause of Legionnaires' Disease was unknown, there were no calls to quarantine members of the American Legion or to shut down their meeting halls. The Contagious Diseases Acts in England did little to control syphilis, but they caused a great deal of suffering for the women who came under their purview. The history of panic that has accompanied new epidemics, and of the casualties incurred by their scapegoats, should make everyone pause and consider with extreme scepticism any attempts to justify anti-gay policy initiatives on the basis of AIDS.

### The Limits of Feminism

We know that in an overwhelmingly large number of cases, sex crime is associated with pornography. We know that sex criminals read it, are clearly influenced by it. I believe that, if we can eliminate the distribution of such items among impressionable children, we shall greatly reduce our frightening sex-crime rate.

(J. Edgar Hoover, cited in Hyde, 1965, p. 31)

In the absence of a more articulated radical theory of sex, most progressives have turned to feminism for guidance. But the relationship between feminism and sex is complex. Because sexuality is a nexus of relationships between genders, much of the oppression of women is borne by, mediated through, and constituted within, sexuality. Feminism has always been vitally interested in sex. But there have been two strains of feminist thought on the subject. One tendency has criticized the restrictions on women's sexual behaviour and denounced the high costs imposed on women for being sexually active. This tradition of feminist sexual thought has called for a sexual liberation that would work for women as well as for men. The second tendency has considered sexual liberalization to be inherently a mere extension of male privilege. This tradition resonates with conservative, anti-sexual discourse. With the advent of the anti-pornography movement, it achieved temporary hegemony over feminist analysis.

The anti-pornography movement and its texts have been the most extensive expression of this discourse.<sup>20</sup> In addition, proponents of this viewpoint have condemned virtually every variant of sexual expression as anti-feminist. Within this framework, monogamous lesbianism that occurs within long-term, intimate relationships and which does not involve playing with polarized roles, has

replaced married, procreative heterosexuality at the top of the value hierarchy. Heterosexuality has been demoted to somewhere in the middle. Apart from this change, everything else looks more or less familiar. The lower depths are occupied by the usual groups and behaviours: prostitution, transsexuality, sadomasochism, and cross-generational activities (Barry, 1979, 1982; Raymond, 1979; Linden *et al.*, 1982; Rush, 1980). Most gay male conduct, all casual sex, promiscuity, and lesbian behaviour that does involve roles or kink or non-monogamy are also censured.<sup>21</sup> Even sexual fantasy during masturbation is denounced as a phallogentric holdover (Penelope, 1980).

This discourse on sexuality is less a sexology than a demonology. It presents most sexual behaviour in the worst possible light. Its descriptions of erotic conduct always use the worst available example as if it were representative. It presents the most disgusting pornography, the most exploited forms of prostitution, and the least palatable or most shocking manifestations of sexual variation. This rhetorical tactic consistently misrepresents human sexuality in all its forms. The picture of human sexuality that emerges from this literature is unremittingly ugly.

In addition, this anti-porn rhetoric is a massive exercise in scapegoating. It criticizes non-routine acts of love rather than routine acts of oppression, exploitation, or violence. This demon sexology directs legitimate anger at women's lack of personal safety against innocent individuals, practices and communities. Anti-porn propaganda often implies that sexism originates within the commercial sex industry and subsequently infects the rest of society. This is sociologically nonsensical. The sex industry is hardly a feminist utopia. It reflects the sexism that exists in the society as a whole. We need to analyse and oppose the manifestations of gender inequality specific to the sex industry. But this is not the same as attempting to wipe out commercial sex.

Similarly, erotic minorities such as sadomasochists and transsexuals are as likely to exhibit sexist attitudes or behaviour as any other politically random social grouping. But to claim that they are inherently anti-feminist is sheer fantasy. A good deal of current feminist literature attributes the oppression of women to graphic representations of sex, prostitution, sex education, sadomasochism, male homosexuality, and transsexualism. Whatever happened to the family, religion, education, child-rearing practices, the media, the state, psychiatry, job discrimination, and unequal pay?

Finally, this so-called feminist discourse recreates a very conservative sexual morality. For over a century, battles have been waged over just how much shame, distress, and punishment should be incurred by sexual activity. The conservative tradition has promoted opposition to pornography, prostitution, homosexuality, all erotic variation, sex education, sex research, abortion, and contraception. The opposing, pro-sex tradition has included individuals like Havelock Ellis, Magnus Hirschfeld, Alfred Kinsey, and Victoria Woodhull, as well as the sex education movement, organizations of militant prostitutes and homosexuals, the reproductive rights movement, and organizations such as the Sexual Reform League of the 1960s. This motley collection of sex reformers, sex educators, and sexual militants has mixed records on both sexual and feminist issues. But surely they are closer to the spirit of modern feminism than are moral crusaders, the social purity movement, and anti-vice organizations. Nevertheless, the current feminist sexual demonology generally elevates the anti-vice crusaders to positions of ancestral honour, while condemning the more liberatory tradition as antifeminist. In an essay that exemplifies some of these trends, Sheila Jeffreys blames Havelock Ellis, Edward Carpenter, Alexandra Kollantai, 'believers in the joy of sex of every possible political persuasion', and the 1929 congress of the World League for Sex Reform for making 'a great contribution to the defeat of militant feminism' (Jeffreys, 1981, p. 26).<sup>22</sup>

The anti-pornography movement and its avatars have claimed to speak for all feminism. Fortunately, they do not. Sexual liberation has been and continues to be a feminist goal. The women's movement may have produced some of the most retrogressive sexual thinking this side of the Vatican. But it has also produced an exciting, innovative, and articulate defense of sexual pleasure and erotic justice. This 'pro-sex' feminism has been spearheaded by lesbians whose sexuality does not conform to

movement standards of purity (primarily lesbian sadomasochists and butch/femme dykes), by unapologetic heterosexuals, and by women who adhere to classic radical feminism rather than to the revisionist celebrations of femininity which have become so common.<sup>23</sup> Although the antiporn forces have attempted to weed anyone who disagrees with them out of the movement, the fact remains that feminist thought about sex is profoundly polarized (Orlando, 1982b; Willis, 1982).

Whenever there is polarization, there is an unhappy tendency to think the truth lies somewhere in between. Ellen Willis has commented sarcastically that 'the feminist bias is that women are equal to men and the male chauvinist bias is that women are inferior. The unbiased view is that the truth lies somewhere in between' (Willis, 1982, p. 146).<sup>24</sup> The most recent development in the feminist sex wars is the emergence of a 'middle' that seeks to evade the dangers of anti-porn fascism, on the one hand, and a supposed 'anything goes' libertarianism, on the other.<sup>25</sup> Although it is hard to criticize a position that is not yet fully formed, I want to draw attention to some incipient problems.

The emergent middle is based on a false characterization of the poles of debate, construing both sides as equally extremist. According to B. Ruby Rich, 'the desire for a language of sexuality has led feminists into locations (pornography, sadomasochism) too narrow or overdetermined for a fruitful discussion. Debate has collapsed into a rumble' (Rich, 1983, p. 76). True, the fights between Women Against Pornography (WAP) and lesbian sadomasochists have resembled gang warfare. But the responsibility for this lies primarily with the anti-porn movement, and its refusal to engage in principled discussion. S/M lesbians have been forced into a struggle to maintain their membership in the movement, and to defend themselves against slander. No major spokeswoman for lesbian S/M has argued for any kind of S/M supremacy, or advocated that everyone should be a sadomasochist. In addition to self-defense, S/M lesbians have called for appreciation for erotic diversity and more open discussion of sexuality (Samois, 1979, 1982; Califia, 1980e, 1981a). Trying to find a middle course between WAP and Samois is a bit like saying that the truth about homosexuality lies somewhere between the positions of the Moral Majority and those of the gay movement.

In political life, it is all too easy to marginalize radicals, and to attempt to buy acceptance for a moderate position by portraying others as extremists. Liberals have done this for years to communists. Sexual radicals have opened up the sex debates. It is shameful to deny their contribution, misrepresent their positions, and further their stigmatization.

In contrast to cultural feminists, who simply want to purge sexual dissidents, the sexual moderates are willing to defend the rights of erotic non-conformists to political participation. Yet this defense of political rights is linked to an implicit system of ideological condescension. The argument has two major parts. The first is an accusation that sexual dissidents have not paid close enough attention to the meaning, sources, or historical construction of their sexuality. This emphasis on meaning appears to function in much the same way that the question of etiology has functioned in discussions of homosexuality. That is, homosexuality, sadomasochism, prostitution, or boy-love are taken to be mysterious and problematic in some way that more respectable sexualities are not. The search for a cause is a search for something that could change so that these 'problematic' eroticisms would simply not occur. Sexual militants have replied to such exercises that although the question of etiology or cause is of intellectual interest, it is not high on the political agenda and that, moreover, the privileging of such questions is itself a regressive political choice.

The second part of the 'moderate' position focuses on questions of consent. Sexual radicals of all varieties have demanded the legal and social legitimation of consenting sexual behaviour. Feminists have criticized them for ostensibly finessing questions about 'the limits of consent' and 'structural constraints' on consent (Orlando, 1983; Wilson, 1983, especially pp. 35–41). Although there are deep problems with the political discourse of consent, and although there are certainly structural constraints on sexual choice, this criticism has been consistently misapplied in the sex debates. It does not take into account the very specific semantic content that consent has in sex law and sex practice.

As I mentioned earlier, a great deal of sex law does not distinguish between consensual and coercive behaviour. Only rape law contains such a distinction. Rape law is based on the assumption, correct in my view, that heterosexual activity may be freely chosen or forcibly coerced. One has the legal right to engage in heterosexual behaviour as long as it does not fall under the purview of other statutes and as long as it is agreeable to both parties.

This is not the case for most other sexual acts. Sodomy laws, as I mentioned above, are based on the assumption that the forbidden acts are an 'abominable and detestable crime against nature'. Criminality is intrinsic to the acts themselves, no matter what the desires of the participants. 'Unlike rape, sodomy or an unnatural or perverted sexual act may be committed between two persons both of whom consent, and, regardless of which is the aggressor, both may be prosecuted.'<sup>26</sup> Before the consenting adults statute was passed in California in 1976, lesbian lovers could have been prosecuted for committing oral copulation. If both participants were capable of consent, both were equally guilty (Besera *et al.*, 1973, pp. 163–5).<sup>27</sup>

Adult incest statutes operate in a similar fashion. Contrary to popular mythology, the incest statutes have little to do with protecting children from rape by close relatives. The incest statutes themselves prohibit marriage or sexual intercourse between adults who are closely related. Prosecutions are rare, but two were reported recently. In 1979, a 19-year-old Marine met his 42-year-old mother, from whom he had been separated at birth. The two fell in love and got married. They were charged and found guilty of incest, which under Virginia law carries a maximum ten-year sentence. During their trial, the Marine testified, 'I love her very much. I feel that two people who love each other should be able to live together.'<sup>28</sup> In another case, a brother and sister who had been raised separately met and decided to get married. They were arrested and pleaded guilty to felony incest in return for probation. A condition of probation was that they not live together as husband and wife. Had they not accepted, they would have faced twenty years in prison (Norton, 1981, p. 18). In a famous S/M case, a man was convicted of aggravated assault for a whipping administered in an S/M scene. There was no complaining victim. The session had been filmed and he was prosecuted on the basis of the film. The man appealed his conviction by arguing that he had been involved in a consensual sexual encounter and had assaulted no one. In rejecting his appeal, the court ruled that one may not consent to an assault or battery 'except in a situation involving ordinary physical contact or blows incident to sports such as football, boxing, or wrestling'.<sup>29</sup> The court went on to note that the 'consent of a person without legal capacity to give consent, such as a child or insane person, is ineffective', and that 'It is a matter of common knowledge that a normal person in full possession of his mental faculties does not freely consent to the use, upon himself, of force likely to produce great bodily injury.'<sup>30</sup> Therefore, anyone who would consent to a whipping would be presumed *non compos mentis* and legally incapable of consenting. S/M sex generally involves a much lower level of force than the average football game, and results in far fewer injuries than most sports. But the court ruled that football players are sane, whereas masochists are not.

Sodomy laws, adult incest laws, and legal interpretations such as the one above clearly interfere with consensual behaviour and impose criminal penalties on it. Within the law, consent is a privilege enjoyed only by those who engage in the highest-status sexual behaviour. Those who enjoy lowstatus sexual behaviour do not have the legal right to engage in it. In addition, economic sanctions, family pressures, erotic stigma, social discrimination, negative ideology, and the paucity of information about erotic behaviour, all serve to make it difficult for people to make unconventional sexual choices. There certainly are structural constraints that impede free sexual choice, but they hardly operate to coerce anyone into being a pervert. On the contrary, they operate to coerce everyone towards normality.

The 'brainwash theory' explains erotic diversity by assuming that some sexual acts are so disgusting that no one would willingly perform them. Therefore, the reasoning goes, anyone who does so must

have been forced or fooled. Even constructivist sexual theory has been pressed into the service of explaining away why otherwise rational individuals might engage in variant sexual behaviour. Another position that is not yet fully formed uses the ideas of Foucault and Weeks to imply that the 'perversions' are an especially unsavoury or problematic aspect of the construction of modern sexuality (Valverde, 1980; Wilson, 1983, p. 38). This is yet another version of the notion that sexual dissidents are victims of the subtle machinations of the social system. Weeks and Foucault would not accept such an interpretation, since they consider all sexuality to be constructed, the conventional no less than the deviant.

Psychology is the last resort of those who refuse to acknowledge that sexual dissidents are as conscious and free as any other group of sexual actors. If deviants are not responding to the manipulations of the social system, then perhaps the source of their incomprehensible choices can be found in a bad childhood, unsuccessful socialization, or inadequate identity formation. In her essay on erotic domination, Jessica Benjamin draws upon psychoanalysis and philosophy to explain why what she calls 'sodomasochism' is alienated, distorted, unsatisfactory, numb, purposeless, and an attempt to 'relieve an original effort at differentiation that failed' (Benjamin, 1983, p. 292).<sup>31</sup> This essay substitutes a psycho-philosophical inferiority for the more usual means of devaluing dissident eroticism. One reviewer has already construed Benjamin's argument as showing that sodomasochism is merely an 'obsessive replay of the infant power struggle' (Ehrenreich, 1983, p. 247).

The position which defends the political rights of perverts but which seeks to understand their 'alienated' sexuality is certainly preferable to the WAP-style blood-baths. But for the most part, the sexual moderates have not confronted their discomfort with erotic choices that differ from their own. Erotic chauvinism cannot be redeemed by tarring it up in Marxist drag, sophisticated constructivist theory, or retro-psychobabble.

Whichever feminist position on sexuality – right, left, or centre – eventually attains dominance, the existence of such a rich discussion is evidence that the feminist movement will always be a source of interesting thought about sex. Nevertheless, I want to challenge the assumption that feminism is or should be the privileged site of a theory of sexuality. Feminism is the theory of gender oppression. To assume automatically that this makes it the theory of sexual oppression is to fail to distinguish between gender, on the one hand, and erotic desire, on the other.

In the English language, the word 'sex' has two very different meanings. It means gender and gender identity, as in 'the female sex' or 'the male sex'. But sex also refers to sexual activity, lust, intercourse, and arousal, as in 'to have sex'. This semantic merging reflects a cultural assumption that sexuality is reducible to sexual intercourse and that it is a function of the relations between women and men. The cultural fusion of gender with sexuality has given rise to the idea that a theory of sexuality may be derived directly out of a theory of gender.

In an earlier essay, 'The Traffic in Women', I used the concept of sex/gender system, defined as a 'set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity' (Rubin, 1975, p. 159). I went on to argue that 'Sex as we know it – gender identity, sexual desire and fantasy, concepts of childhood – is itself a social product' (*ibid.*, p. 66). In that essay, I did not distinguish between lust and gender, treating both as modalities of the same underlying social process.

'The Traffic in Women' was inspired by the literature on kin-based systems of social organization. It appeared to me at the time that gender and desire were systematically intertwined in such social formations. This may or may not be an accurate assessment of the relationship between sex and gender in tribal organizations. But it is surely not an adequate formulation for sexuality in Western industrial societies. As Foucault has pointed out, a system of sexuality has emerged out of earlier kinship forms and has acquired significant autonomy.

Particularly from the eighteenth century onward, Western societies created and deployed a new apparatus which was superimposed on the previous one, and which, without

completely supplanting the latter, helped to reduce its importance. I am speaking of the deployment of sexuality . . . For the first [kinship], what is pertinent is the link between partners and definite statuses; the second [sexuality] is concerned with the sensations of the body, the quality of pleasures, and the nature of impressions. (Foucault, 1978, p. 106)

The development of this sexual system has taken place in the context of gender relations. Part of the modern ideology of sex is that lust is the province of men, purity that of women. It is no accident that pornography and perversions have been considered part of the male domain. In the sex industry, women have been excluded from most production and consumption, and allowed to participate primarily as workers. In order to participate in the 'perversions', women have had to overcome serious limitations on their social mobility, their economic resources, and their sexual freedoms. Gender affects the operation of the sexual system, and the sexual system has had gender-specific manifestations. But although sex and gender are related, they are not the same thing, and they form the basis of two distinct arenas of social practice.

In contrast to my perspective in 'The Traffic in Women', I am now arguing that it is essential to separate gender and sexuality analytically to reflect more accurately their separate social existence. This goes against the grain of much contemporary feminist thought, which treats sexuality as a derivation of gender. For instance, lesbian feminist ideology has mostly analysed the oppression of lesbians in terms of the oppression of women. However, lesbians are also oppressed as queers and perverts, by the operation of sexual, not gender, stratification. Although it pains many lesbians to think about it, the fact is that lesbians have shared many of the sociological features and suffered from many of the same social penalties as have gay men, sadomasochists, transvestites, and prostitutes.

Catherine MacKinnon has made the most explicit theoretical attempt to subsume sexuality under feminist thought. According to MacKinnon, 'Sexuality is to feminism what work is to marxism . . . the moulding, direction, and expression of sexuality organizes society into two sexes, women and men' (MacKinnon, 1982, pp. 5–16). This analytic strategy in turn rests on a decision to 'use sex and gender relatively interchangeably' (MacKinnon, 1983, p. 635). It is this definitional fusion that I want to challenge.

There is an instructive analogy in the history of the differentiation of contemporary feminist thought from Marxism. Marxism is probably the most supple and powerful conceptual system extant for analysing social inequality. But attempts to make Marxism the sole explanatory system for all social inequalities have been dismal exercises. Marxism is most successful in the areas of social life for which it was originally developed – class relations under capitalism.

In the early days of the contemporary women's movement, a theoretical conflict took place over the applicability of Marxism to gender stratification. Since Marxist theory is relatively powerful, it does in fact detect important and interesting aspects of gender oppression. It works best for those issues of gender most closely related to issues of class and the organization of labour. The issues more specific to the social structure of gender were not amenable to Marxist analysis.

The relationship between feminism and a radical theory of sexual oppression is similar. Feminist conceptual tools were developed to detect and analyse gender-based hierarchies. To the extent that these overlap with erotic stratifications, feminist theory has some explanatory power. But as issues become less those of gender and more those of sexuality, feminist analysis becomes misleading and often irrelevant. Feminist thought simply lacks angles of vision which can fully encompass the social organization of sexuality. The criteria of relevance in feminist thought do not allow it to see or assess critical power relations in the area of sexuality.

In the long run, feminism's critique of gender hierarchy must be incorporated into a radical theory of sex, and the critique of sexual oppression should enrich feminism. But an autonomous theory and politics specific to sexuality must be developed.

It is a mistake to substitute feminism for Marxism as the last word in social theory. Feminism is no more capable than Marxism of being the ultimate and complete account of all social inequality. Nor is feminism the residual theory which can take care of everything to which Marx did not attend. These critical tools were fashioned to handle very specific areas of social activity. Other areas of social life, their forms of power, and their characteristic modes of oppression, need their own conceptual implements. In this essay, I have argued for theoretical as well as sexual pluralism.

### Conclusion

. . . these pleasures which we lightly call physical. . . (Colette, 1982, p. 72)

Like gender, sexuality is political. It is organized into systems of power, which reward and encourage some individuals and activities, while punishing and suppressing others. Like the capitalist organization of labour and its distribution of rewards and powers, the modern sexual system has been the object of political struggle since it emerged and as it has evolved. But if the disputes between labour and capital are mystified, sexual conflicts are completely camouflaged.

The legislative restructuring that took place at the end of the nineteenth century and in the early decades of the twentieth was a refracted response to the emergence of the modern erotic system. During that period, new erotic communities formed. It became possible to be a male homosexual or a lesbian in a way it had not been previously. Mass-produced erotica became available, and the possibilities for sexual commerce expanded. The first homosexual rights organizations were formed, and the first analyses of sexual oppression were articulated (Lauritsen and Thorstad, 1974).

The repression of the 1950s was in part a backlash to the expansion of sexual communities and possibilities which took place during World War II (D'Emilio, 1983; Bérubé, 1981a, 1981b). During the 1950s, gay rights organizations were established, the Kinsey reports were published, and lesbian literature flourished. The 1950s were a formative as well as a repressive era.

The current right-wing sexual counter-offensive is in part a reaction to the sexual liberalization of the 1960s and early 1970s. Moreover, it has brought about a unified and self-conscious coalition of sexual radicals. In one sense, what is now occurring is the emergence of a new sexual movement, aware of new issues and seeking a new theoretical basis. The sex wars out on the streets have been partly responsible for provoking a new intellectual focus on sexuality. The sexual system is shifting once again, and we are seeing many symptoms of its change.

In Western culture, sex is taken all too seriously. A person is not considered immoral, is not sent to prison, and is not expelled from her or his family, for enjoying spicy cuisine. But an individual may go through all this and more for enjoying shoe leather. Ultimately, of what possible social significance is it if a person likes to masturbate over a shoe? It may even be non-consensual, but since we do not ask permission of our shoes to wear them, it hardly seems necessary to obtain dispensation to come on them.

If sex is taken too seriously, sexual persecution is not taken seriously enough. There is systematic mistreatment of individuals and communities on the basis of erotic taste or behaviour. There are serious penalties for belonging to the various sexual occupational castes. The sexuality of the young is denied, adult sexuality is often treated like a variety of nuclear waste, and the graphic representation of sex takes place in a mire of legal and social circumlocution. Specific populations bear the brunt of the current system of erotic power, but their persecution upholds a system that affects everyone.

The 1980s have already been a time of great sexual suffering. They have also been a time of ferment and new possibility. It is up to all of us to try to prevent more barbarism and to encourage erotic creativity. Those who consider themselves progressive need to examine their preconceptions,

update their sexual educations, and acquaint themselves with the existence and operation of sexual hierarchy. It is time to recognize the political dimensions of erotic life.

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### A Note on Definitions

Throughout this essay, I use terms such as homosexual, sex worker, and pervert. I use 'homosexual' to refer to both women and men. If I want to be more specific, I use terms such as 'lesbian' or 'gay male'. 'Sex worker' is intended to be more inclusive than 'prostitute', in order to encompass the many jobs of the sex industry. Sex worker includes erotic dancers, strippers, porn models, nude women who will talk to a customer via telephone hook-up and can be seen but not touched, phone partners, and the various other employees of sex businesses such as receptionists, janitors and barkers. Obviously, it also includes prostitutes, hustlers, and 'male models'. I use the term 'pervert' as a shorthand for all the stigmatized sexual orientations. It is used to cover male and female homosexuality as well but as these become less disreputable, the term has increasingly referred to the other 'deviations'. Terms such as 'pervert' and 'deviant' have, in general use, a connotation of disapproval, disgust, and dislike. I am using these terms in a denotative fashion, and do not intend them to convey any disapproval on my part.



# III: Sluts in Utopia: The Future of Radical Sex

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[2000]

Most plans for creating a more just society focus on ameliorating human misery. They address unemployment, hunger, illiteracy, class-based inequity, unequal access to medical care, pollution, overpopulation, and discrimination based on sex, race, age, or membership in other devalued groups. While I care about all of those problems, I also wonder why so many of the proposed solutions make me shudder with dread. Perhaps it's because people who take on such enormous political chores are usually suffering from burnout. There's no room in their brave new worlds for fun, creativity, ornamentation, play, and desire. I am skeptical of utopian schemes that don't take into account the human need for adventure, risk, competition, self-display, pleasurable stimulation, and novelty.

In fact, many theoretical utopias are dreamed up by people who are afraid of diversity and deeply conservative about sex. Furthermore, they seem to think they can create tolerance by wiping out or minimizing differences. They envision worlds where men and women could barely be told apart—so of course there would be no sexism. Since gender would no longer be a social category, there would be no such thing as transvestitism or transsexuality. After all, how can you crossdress if both sexes are wearing the same clothes? Why would anybody envy or want to emulate the opposite sex if the distinctions between them had been blurred? The same argument is applied to homosexuality. If children were reared in an atmosphere of unconditional love without being threatened by corporal punishment or other abusive treatment, no one would eroticize bondage or a slap on the butt. Since there would be no prisons, restraint or captivity would cease to titillate. People would care more about ecology than about almost anything else, so Spandex, latex, spiked heels, and costume jewelry would go the way of the dinosaurs. Everyone would wear baggy clothing made out of “green” cotton that had been genetically engineered to grow in various shades of beige. In a “just” society, there wouldn't be anything to rebel against,

so there wouldn't be much call for rock 'n' roll or protest poetry. If the state was a benign entity that only served to take care of and nurture the people, why would anyone engage in civil disobedience?

Dreary, isn't it?

In the movie, *Personal Services*, a fictionalized account of the life of one of England's most famous professional dominatrices, a retired RAF officer proud of having flown several missions over Germany during World War II in panties and a bra announces, "The future lies in kinky people!" He was onto something. In a world where men and women were equal, people might choose to exaggerate (rather than abandon) their differences, if only to preserve erotic tension between the sexes. Some people might choose to be neither male nor female. If nobody could be arrested for "impersonating the opposite sex," you'd probably see a lot more drag on the street, not less. In some ways, the scions of the New Right who issue such stern warnings about the dire consequences of feminism and gay liberation are correct. Decriminalizing sex and empowering women and queers would cause an explosion of decadence, perversity, dirty talking, intuition, fetishes, intelligence, sex toys, satire, makeup, promiscuity, blasphemy, celebration, bangles, art, nudity, weird hair, and political upheaval. For the first time we'd get to take a look at what's really inside the Pandora's Box of human sexuality.

Each of us would probably find something different. This wouldn't be a world where anything goes. It would be a world where people got to make sexual choices based on what they liked and needed, not based on what they had been told they should want or what they thought was available. No one would have the right to limit somebody else's options or impose her or his morality upon the rest of us. Monogamy would be just one more choice, not the Gold Standard for every meaningful relationship. People who wanted to could be wild and crazy, but more sedate individuals wouldn't feel that they had to imitate that behavior. There would be license in the context of responsibility: people would not willfully injure one another.

"Sluts in Utopia: The Future of Radical Sex" includes just a few of many possibilities. There are articles about S/M, gender play, crossing the lines of sexual orientation, fetishism, sex and spirituality, nonmonogamy, and sex work. There's also a critical look at the sexual geography of the city. Any attempt to liberate sex must address the literal boundaries of the red-light district and the gay ghetto as well as bring down the barricades within our own psyches.

Since the Victorian era, the threat of sexually transmitted disease has been used to bully men and women into chastity, monogamy, and heterosexuality. The emergence of AIDS has triggered a new round of guilt disguised as medical

necessity. In the second decade of this epidemic, it becomes harder and harder to remember that viruses are amoral. It's not sin that is killing us. Fear-based campaigns to alter pleasure-seeking behavior that puts people at risk of contracting HIV have met with limited success. I wrote "The Necessity of Excess" to try to capture the healing power of carnality and mourn what we have lost.

What is the future of radical sex? That lies as much in your hands as it does in mine. When it comes to sex, most of us are afraid to be truthful even with ourselves. We've been browbeaten into thinking sex isn't that important. (And we're secretly afraid that if we ever got clear about what we really wanted, we wouldn't be able to have it anyway.) We need to let ourselves dream big. The first duty of a revolutionary may be, as Abby Hoffman said, to survive. But it's pretty difficult to survive without the nurturance of an all-consuming fantasy about where you are headed and what all this hard work is for.

Below are some ways that you can unleash your inner sex radical (a much more fun person to party with than that pesky inner child)

### **Forty-two Things that You Can Do to Make the Future Safe for Sex**

Defend an abortion clinic. Help women get through right-wing pickets and into the building.

Write a sex ad.

When your newspaper says police are cracking down on prostitution, call the police and tell them you don't like them spending your money to bust hookers. Then write a letter to the paper saying the same thing. Urge the government to decriminalize prostitution. Nobody should have to go to jail for trying to make a living.

Write a weekly letter to your congresspeople. Ask them to repeal RICO laws, vote against mandatory sentencing for drug offenses, allocate more money for addiction-treatment services and family planning, fund more research on breast cancer and AIDS, and shut down the Justice Department's antiporn campaign. Remind these rich enemies of the asshole that being poor is not a crime. The money we now spend on building new prisons should be spent to bring jobs to the inner city and to build better schools. The League of Women Voters can tell you who your representatives are and give you their addresses. Be sure to send a copy of your letter to the Presidential Bubba.

Study sex.

Write a weekly letter to your mayor, officials in city government, state representatives, and governor. Tell them you oppose sodomy laws, laws which make solicitation illegal, and laws that force sex offenders to register with the cops. Tell them you vote.

Vote.

Oppose attempts to get states to adopt a lower standard of obscenity (often known as the Miller standard).

Give away some pleasure.

Join a group like the American Civil Liberties Union, Californians Against Censorship Together, Feminists for Free Expression, the National Coalition Against Censorship, the National Campaign for Freedom of Expression, Planned Parenthood Federation of America, or Coyote. These groups are fighting for your sexual freedom. Be sure to enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope with your request for information.

Find a new fantasy.

If a convenience store is being picketed for carrying adult magazines, walk in and buy one. Tell the manager you support her or his decision to carry the materials the customers want.

Make art about how sex feels.

If an anti-porn group is photographing the customers of an adult bookstore, turn up with a Polaroid and take pictures of *them*.

Write a love letter to an unlovable part of your body.

Do regular self-examinations for breast or testicular cancer.

Teach somebody how to come with a rubber barrier.

If your city initiates a crackdown on baths or sex clubs, write to your elected representatives and send a copy of your letter to your local newspapers. Tell the powers that be that you want a clean, well-lighted place for random encounters with randy strangers. Don't forget to mention that having safe sex in a public place is much more healthy than having unsafe sex at home in the privacy of your own bedroom.

Seize the moral high ground. Be righteous in your indignation.

If somebody tries to ban a book at a school or public library, go to the hearing. You wouldn't believe how easy it is to win these battles if you just show up and speak up. Keeping books about sex in the libraries is even more important than keeping them in bookstores because they are free and more people see them (especially young people).

Look at a cervix. (Hint: Annie Sprinkle is not the only woman who has one!)

Find out what the sex education curriculum is like in your local schools. If you think it is inadequate, express your concerns to school officials. You don't have to be a parent to do this. Everybody gets taxed to pay for free public education, so we all have a right to shape public policy. Young people need to know about birth control, safer sex, and homosexuality.

Look at your genitals.

Tell record stores that you don't want labels on your music. Tell your state representative you don't want laws that limit what kind of music young people can buy.

Do not be shamed. Do not be stampeded by fear.

If your pharmacy keeps condoms behind the counter, ask that they be displayed where people can buy them without having to ask for them. Tell the manager that she or he will sell more of these items if the customer can avoid embarrassment. Ask for latex gloves. Ask for dental dams. Ask for water-based personal lubricants. Ask for leaflets about AIDS and safer sex.

Write to a prisoner.

Call ABC, NBC, and CBS (both the national offices and your local affiliates). Tell them you want to see condom ads during prime time.

Tell gay organizations that you want them to support the First Amendment and start tracking obscenity cases. Tell them you want to see them supporting needle-exchange volunteers. Tell them you want them to defend sex workers who get arrested. Tell them it's time to put the sex back into homosexuality.

Keep your eyes open the whole time.

Crossdress.

Talk to a sex worker, a transgendered person, a celibate, a sadomasochist, a heterosexual—anybody whose sexual identity or practices are different from yours.

Masturbate, and don't hurry.

Tell video stores that you enjoy being able to rent X-rated videos.

Give up the concept of trying to control other people's sexual tastes. It will give you more time to develop your own.

Make or buy a sex toy.

Volunteer for a rape crisis center, a shelter for battered women, or an AIDS hotline.

Hand out clean needles and free condoms. If you can't do this, give money to the people who are doing it for you.

Organize a neighborhood patrol. Let bashers know they can't get away with hate and violence in your little part of the world.

Live a long time and make waves. The name of this ride is "Rock the Boat," not "Pretend You're Dead Already."

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