

Radical Sense
Reader Volume 4

*If we stopped distinguishing the sexes, who would notice
what differentiates them?*

— Milarepa

Why do we continue searching for the hidden sources of homosexuality, and devise guilty pathways for it, as if we necessarily had to wrench half of the world away from desire? Thought, by feeling mortal, has become the rival of nature, or has revolted against it. There is nothing else distinguishing humans from animals than this struggle against nature taking place under the guise of an alliance with it.

Man has become a counter-natural animal, and we have called that process the appearance of intelligence. As we rebel against our planet, our only option is to brand it with our filthy footprint, our moral calamity and our human pollution. Perhaps we will finally decide to derail the planet and desire it completely, its history and geography, its insects and hippopotamuses, its young and old, its males and females.

Homosexuality does not stem from any dirty little secret. The social mechanism repressing it is what generates guilt. There is a proportion of humans, oscillating between fifty and a hundred percent, that carries the desire for the same sex. Popular common sense, completely permeated by Judeo-Christian culture, refuses this obvious fact. And yet counter-culture sometimes unveils it in moments of lucidity, when it stops pretending to imitate nature, when it stops using nature, almost theologically, as an alibi.

There is no morality that does not claim to spring from the respect of nature, yet the foundations and the desire for morality are economic. (Let me remark that the most ferociously anti-abortionist of our ministers, whose stance supposedly arises out of a great respect for life, also presides over the production and distribution of the most killing machines, while his colleague in Public Health is brazen enough to declare, without fear of ridicule, that he finds some contradiction in seeing the same people campaign *against* the death penalty and *for* the massacre of innocent fetuses.)

Ants do not have abortions. Ants are not homosexual. Ants do not draft wills. Ants do not travel to the moon. Ants do not play football and do not play on Wall Street. Ants are natural. With the human machine, it's the opposite. We can read our condition most legibly in those areas that are the farthest

removed from our conditioning, those zones between order and desire where the sting of injury is the greatest, and the callus covering the wound is most developed.

Homosexuality is not the result of a pallid (and so-called individual) childhood adventure; it is rather a capital point of conflict between society and the cultural nature of man. It is sufficient that one species move beyond the animal for the homosexual alternative to become inherent and grow to define it, even if this species defends itself from it ferociously by invoking the laws of nature. Nature, however, is not made of laws but of phenomena. Ignoring this obvious fact, we go searching for morals where there have never been any: in the animal world, whose unbearable cruelty we are very careful to silence beforehand. Ours is a society of sublimated homosexuality. This is the only way that we can speak of a homosexual conception of the world.

If the human being, and man in particular, claims he is heterosexual with such insistence, and he produces such a wealth of moral and metaphysical justifications for this claim, it is, of course, because he condemns and represses the homosexuality in himself and refuses to recognize that he is as drawn to his gender as he is to the other. Such concealment, by burying that desire, only increases and deforms it. On the contrary, when a small group chooses to publicly express its homosexuality against all social regulations,

it does so by prohibiting heterosexuality and stamping it with the sign of damnation as the State imposed form of copulation. And thus, unrecognized, the homosexual entity becomes the source of two interdependent forms of racism which are nourished there. If, on the contrary, it were recognized and expressed by all, homosexuality would dissolve at the same time as heterosexuality, and desire's differentiation of its object would also eventually disappear.

This perspective, although easy to map out, is harder to implement because we live under the double law of monosexuality and of the couple. Across the political spectrum and in all social classes, except for certain libertine currents, these imperatives are followed: only make love with one of the genders, and only make love through copulation, that is, with a single person at a time.

The very idea of toppling this dictatorship can only occur to the sexually obsessed, as the bourgeoisie calls them, who are forcibly marginalized and more or less tolerated according to their social standing. But it is precisely these marginalized groups, because their powerful system of phantasy so particularizes their desire and brings about such maniacal erotic inscriptions on their body, which are pushed away from sexual polyvalence and act like antique collectors obsessing over glass vases.

In addition, today's political exacerbation of sexual insurgency arises from an excessively doctrinaire

critique of foul social phallocracy and from a slightly simplistic reversal of the contentions of power, in the sense that these movements, influenced by Leftist methodology, are both overly irascible and overly ideological. It follows that these revolutionary projects have retained a multiplicity of postures of refusal fighting between themselves. Although they maintain a clear picture of their political enemies and oppressors, even amongst the so-called militants of desire, the willingness to expand desire is confronted with a radical refusal on the part of the different autonomous groups of sexual struggle, whether they be gays, lesbians or women's liberation.

They believe that the difficult pursuit of the non-differentiation of desire is politically premature, or that it is depoliticized and even tainted with mysticism. Thus a homosexual trying to allow heterosexual desire to reappear from beneath the tangle of his fears of women would be accused of treachery and assimilated to someone who, pulled in by orthodox psychoanalysis, accepts to be healed of perversion by a society to which he stands opposed. Or he would be accused of being an alibi for official sexual ideology since he would have joined it.

We are thus witness to the establishment of a series of counter-terrorisms that congeal and exclude one another. Their apparent alliance, such as the one struck up between the gays and lesbians, simply relies on different refutations of the same

system. All sexual minorities thus crystallize on their particular specificity. We might think that such atomization is in fact a necessary stage, because it is useful for the margins to encircle and encroach upon normalcy in a thousand different ways. Yet the margins should not combat the margins, for this will just strengthen normalcy.

Of all the political observations that can be made about desire, the most obvious is that there is nothing more racist than desire as it has been transmitted to us, and there is nothing more discriminatory than the absolute power of desire as it continues to tunnel along single-mindedly. We need to decide if we will allow this racism to develop in our sacrosanct desire, or if revolution must also, and perhaps foremost, start with desire's struggle to expulse its own racist foundations.

I hear cries of protest already. You interrupt to tell me that wanting to desire what we do not is simply Christian charity. You exclaim that we cannot impose any work at all upon desire. On the side of the true revolution, it is our duty to speak of desire, but we do not have the right to speak of will, for that immediately evokes voluntarism and even fascism. Many revolutions prohibit voluntarism even if that volition is oriented towards the wandering of sexual flows. Our desiring machines can misfire, of course, but only beyond our consciousness or behind our backs.

The concepts of work, of will, I know what they mean in the mouths of Brezhnev or Paul VI, and more generally in mouths that can spew out morals but never take in a dick. But work also means something in terms of fermentation, of imagination and of bringing to life. And I can never really forget that voluptuousness and volition share the same etymological origin.

For a homosexual, changing life, changing his life means, first of all, that he must start trying to live his desire openly, without any exquisite guilt or veiled terror. But must we wait for capitalist society to make homosexuality licit, as it has started to do in certain countries, to escape as if by contradiction the exclusive authority of homosexuality (of one homosexuality among many) and to start prophesizing in domains that will remain prohibited or cursed once the major perversions have ceased to be minor.

Will any desire, apart from obedience, ever be able to structure itself otherwise than as transgression or counter-transgression? The broadening of desire starts today, for those who anticipate or desire it so. Limiting oneself to a sexual path, under the pretext that it is one's desire and that it corresponds to a political opportunity for deviance, strengthens the bi-polarization of the ideology of desire that has been forged by the bourgeoisie.

And please do not tell me that I am touching here upon an embryonic morality that consists in going

towards women when we love men, and vice-versa. Desire must be allowed to function on any object. And not only on a body other than one's own. And not only on one body instead of two or more, simultaneously. And not only on the age class of youth or on the esthetic class of beauty, the formal elements of the class struggle. And not only on one of the two phantasmatic modalities of masochism or masochism disguised as sadism. And not only on one of the two sexes. And not only, assuming these differentiations will eventually disappear, on the human species.

Hearing this, it makes no difference if the touchy nationalists of homosexuality fear that they will lose their sexual identity; they might say this is utopia, political resignation or even a bourgeois orgy. Such an explosion of desire is not affiliated with the sham bisexuality put on by a certain libertine and hipster bourgeoisie when it engages in its cold and phallocratic lasciviousness. This path leads desiring machines towards the desire to desire and not to covetousness. It knows the urgency of the struggle against the phallus (which we must not, of course, confuse with the penis). And once desire spreads, it eludes the royalty of masculine libidinal economy, it contradicts the establishment of power based on the usage of sex, a power which is phallic in our society but which could possibly be clitoral or uterine in another.

Once homosexual desire emerges in someone's history, or in his or her environment, as *something other than a constraint or a transgression*, sex can no longer be heterosexual or homosexual unless it is stated to become reactionary. Yet this remains, perhaps, a rare occurrence. Perhaps we are underestimating repression and sexual misery. Perhaps this reflects a privileged attitude on our part, but we each must speak from where we stand.

Of course, wanting to extend the territories of sexual desire, through proliferation and wandering, calls for behaviors that are easier to adopt for gays than for lesbians. The former, by claiming to be revolutionaries, also claim to be ass fucks. The latter, on the contrary, can only be revolutionaries by negating the postulate of any male penetration and all forms of rape, real or tacit, that it entails. At present, a woman conscious of masculine oppression (even if this oppression has been incorporated into her desire) can find no form of rescue in a male, taken with all the horror the term implies, for she anticipates, senses and recognizes that she will inevitably become his prey.

What would happen if these natural allies, the gays and lesbians, although quite distant in their forms of desire, decided to make love between themselves. This strange perspective (that a logical mind would qualify as absurd) might allow us to discover whether pederasty hides the worst, most insidious cult of the phallus behind its revolt. Might it not

instigate a desire for tenderness rather than for covetousness? The theory of desiring-machines, although helpful, is so fashionable that we use it to cover up the tenderness in desire. As if tenderness, like cynicism, was not a part of the machine, as active as the others and just as interconnected with the libidinal-economic system.

If we want to get to the bottom, or the dick of this, we queers will eventually have to bring our bodies closer to those of women who refuse men. To stay away from women is almost as contemptuous as to exert the sadism of the hunt or of the family fucking. This kind of behavior is a remote imitation of what heterosexuals do when they cut women out of their lives and social circles, relegating them to the false alliance of the bedroom. If we want to end the shame that men have imposed on women, and to which our fear (or sacred veneration) of them contributes, our bodies must understand the reasons for the lesbian repulsion of men, and if it arises from what we have between our legs, or from what we do with it, and what that means.

Loving boys myself, I see no other way to do this but to encounter feminine homosexuality in a place where the naked body is not more important than speech or political struggle; where the entire game of skin and muscle is not obsessed by the incoercible need for penetration; where a smile is not necessarily the flash of white on a TV screen; where a kiss is

given, but not like in some country ball, for we all know where that leads.

I am not here prophesizing the good news. I am just expressing my desire, regardless of whether it is theoretical or carnal, and what difficulties it might encounter. I write down this desire, despite its contradiction, for I cannot imagine that it does not linger somewhere in other gays' minds or hidden behind a theoretical defense just like the one I have expounded. How can we gays and lesbians, through our bodies, dismantle this steam-hammer of the mutual negation of desire?

I am fed up with desire. Obsession is not what we do; it's what we don't do. I want to know what happens when I pretend not to desire. Or at least I want my desire to know it. I am tired of the officer saying: "*I don't want to know!*"

All research on desire should be research on non-desire, on what blocks desire. In the philosophy department at Vincennes where speech on desire holds sway, as it does here, I wanted to hold a day-long group investigation on non-desire that would be undertaken by people who declare they do not desire each other. Was it a ridiculous idea, a means to bury the claim to non-desire under its own absurdity? Can we even still believe in the usefulness of speaking about desire when those who speak continue to obey the prohibition of touch, as if speech and touch were absolutely separate domains?

Sometimes this situation of non-desire, for example, between gays and lesbians, seems to result from a tenacious optical illusion that any theoretical discourse, starting with mine, only reinforces. Because virility is also this desire to define and verbalize relations in order to give them meaning and usefulness. All philosophical discourse, all political and all economic discourse is discharged, instead of sperm, from men who are terrified of the opening they issue from, and to which their penis returns alone, without philosophy, without politics and without economics.

Crushed beneath the logic of man, woman is still incapable of living without him, and without his logic. Man is ancient. Woman is future. The masculine homosexual is caught between both. When he becomes feminine, it is only according to a masculine model. His only existence is the phallus. For his virile mythology, the lesbians who construct their relationships without the phallus seem like an empty mirror reflecting an empty mirror.

And yet they possess the lack he lacks. They know the operative secret of this illusion of lack; they bring us face to face with the evidence that such lack is not truly lack but that it is energy without power, the castration of castration, something we can desire and enjoy. Without them we would not ever learn anything we do not already know. They accuse us queers of reducing all homosexuality to our own form of it,

they claim that we are obliterating theirs, that we are a collection of dicks, that we transmit the eternal phallic discourse they find even more toxic in those who have decided to become castrated men rather than women.

Yes, I can only think of homosexuality as a male. Yes, I refuse to speak of feminine homosexuality that I do not understand and of which I could only produce a fatally masculine theory. And all queers can say the same. This is why the FHAR sank beneath the weight of the phallus. This is why the FHAR felt it necessary to vent its bile upon male society, speaking to the authority to which it naturally belonged. This is why the lesbians fled.

I now dream of lesbians who do not copy men, who live without the phallus and without the terror of the phallus. Even if one single lesbian exists, I wish to lie at her side, like someone on the point of fainting, like a future woman. For an instant, for the instant of the sexual revolution, I will think of myself as a lesbian.

Oh! Wanting to be woman, to be fertile, to be cunt-ile, rather than feeling the capitalist desire to impregnate! I know I am ranting. Long live snails! What luck they have to be both male and female without ever copying the other gender. I proclaim the end of ostriches that keep their head in the sand and refuse to see that the revolutionary explosion of sexuality and the means to blow it apart lie in that

difficult articulation of feminine and masculine homosexuality. What is this revolutionary hell where the men and women fighting phallocracy do not have any right to the sensuality they might share among themselves?

I would like to go, stupidly, towards the bodies that my anxiety has kept me from. It makes no difference if I do it, or if it is someone else; as long as a man who thinks he loves men approaches a woman who thinks she loves women. I imagine this move can only come from men. They are the ones guiltier of tyranny, both in feeling and in reality. But it should be a fag. Women, whether they are right about this or not, feel he is less of an oppressor than other men. And it should be a man with a dick, because the question is not to cut it off, but to invent a new way of using it.

Should we wait for society to change, for the male spirit to disappear? The pederast seems to be, among all phallus carriers, the one who is the least suspect of phallocracy. I would like to know if this is true. Can his body show a lesbian the phallus? Can a lesbian accept this approach without being passive or tensing up, if that is where her issue with fags comes up; namely, that they have dissolved in their sexual plumbing what she calls love without fear of ridicule. Like two virgins, can they play together and enact the childhood of bodies? And can this make them come, since resuscitating courtly love is out of the question?

Even if male hypocrisy was to burst forth, and perhaps it is already in these lines, things would at least be clear. We'd know that the male had advanced smooth-tongued, hiding his desire for power. We'd know it is utopian to want love untainted by deceitful relations of power. We'd know it's all a booby-trap. We'd know that what ferments history has accumulated in our desire prohibit anything religious there, by which we mean religion in the epistemological sense, the sense it had before it was tainted by the clerical religions or the political religions that have taken its place. We'd know that an offering, again in the epistemological sense of the word, is a calculated move, the form of a spirit of conquest, a masochistic avatar or God knows what psychoanalysis or dialectics will be happy to discover there.

If, on the contrary, in the embryonic couple formed by a fag and a lesbian, the woman could feel—extravagantly or miraculously, by itself or among other complex movements—the *welcoming* of a male body that is forgetting its gender, and if she persisted in her refusal, then we could no longer attribute a political alibi drawn from the situation of the social body to this retreat.

Suddenly, I feel my attempt to describe this couple has gone too far, that its experience can't escape being theoretical, tinged with Machiavellianism and terribly experimental. And then I laugh and I don't

give a fuck. I know the time will come when the desire to desire shall be stronger than the desire to dissect. In a month, in a year, what difference does it make? Whether it happens to me or to someone else, I know it will happen. I know that hands and mouths arouse penises or clitorises. Must they necessarily belong to the same gender as ours, under the pretense that all policing enforces their belonging to the other?

The ruling classes are the ones who have split and mutilated desire. The bourgeoisie invented the notion of homosexuality and made it into a ghetto. We must not forget this. There are two sexes on earth, but this is only to hide the fact that there are three, four, ten, thousands, once you throw that old hag of the idea of nature overboard. There are two sexes on earth but only one sexual desire.

Sick Woman Theory

johanna hedva

1.

In late 2014, I was sick with a chronic condition that, about every 12 to 18 months, gets bad enough to render me, for about five months each time, unable to walk, drive, do my job, sometimes speak or understand language, take a bath without assistance, and leave the bed. This particular flare coincided with the Black Lives Matter protests, which I would have attended unremittingly, had I been able to. I live one block away from MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, a predominantly Latino neighborhood and one colloquially understood to be the place where many immigrants begin their American lives. The park, then, is not surprisingly one of the most active places of protest in the city.

I listened to the sounds of the marches as they drifted up to my window. Attached to the bed, I rose up my sick woman fist, in solidarity.

I started to think about what modes of protest are afforded to sick people – it seemed to me that many for whom Black Lives Matter is especially in service, might not be able to be present for the marches because they were imprisoned by a job, the threat of being fired from their job if they marched, or literal incarceration, and of course the threat of violence and police brutality – but also because of illness or disability, or because they were caring for someone with an illness or disability.

I thought of all the other invisible bodies, with their fists up, tucked away and out of sight.

If we take Hannah Arendt's definition of the political – which is still one of the most dominant in mainstream discourse – as being any action that is performed in public, we must contend with the implications of what that excludes. If being present in public is what is required to be political, then whole swathes of the population can be deemed *a-political* – simply because they are not physically able to get their bodies into the street.

In my graduate program, Arendt was a kind of god, and so I was trained to think that her definition of the political was radically liberating. Of course, I can see that it was, in its own way, in its time (the late 1950s): in one fell swoop she got rid of the need for infrastructures of law, the democratic process of voting, the reliance on individuals who've accumulated the power to affect policy – she got rid of the need for policy at all. All of these had been required for an action to be considered political and visible as such. No, Arendt said, just get your body into the street, and *bam*: political.

There are two failures here, though. The first is her reliance on a “public” – which requires a private, a binary between visible and invisible space. This meant that whatever takes place in private is *not* political. So, you can beat your wife in private and it doesn't matter, for instance. You can send private emails containing racial slurs, but since they weren't “meant for the public,” you are somehow not racist. Arendt was worried that if everything can be considered political, then nothing will be, which is why she divided the space into one that is political and one that is not. But for the sake of this anxiety, she chose to sacrifice whole groups of people, to continue to banish them

to invisibility and political irrelevance. She chose to keep them out of the public sphere. I'm not the first to take Arendt to task for this. The failure of Arendt's political was immediately exposed in the civil rights activism and feminism of the 1960s and 70s. "The personal is political" can also be read as saying "the private is political." Because of course, *everything* you do in private is political: who you have sex with, how long your showers are, if you have access to clean water for a shower at all, and so on.

There is another problem too. As Judith Butler put it in her 2015 lecture, "Vulnerability and Resistance," Arendt failed to account for who is allowed in to the public space, of *who's in charge* of the public. Or, more specifically, *who's in charge of who gets in*. Butler says that there is always one thing true about a public demonstration: the police are already there, or they are coming. This resonates with frightening force when considering the context of Black Lives Matter. The inevitability of violence at a demonstration – especially a demonstration that emerged to insist upon the importance of bodies who've been violently un-cared for – ensures that a certain amount of people won't, because they can't, show up. Couple this with physical and mental illnesses and disabilities that keep people in bed and at home, and we must contend with the fact that many whom these protests are for, are not able to participate in them – which means they are not able to be visible as political activists. There was a Tumblr post that came across my dash during these weeks of protest, that said something to the effect of: "shout out to all the disabled people, sick people, people with PTSD, anxiety, etc., who can't protest in the streets with us tonight. Your voices are heard and valued, and with us." Heart. Reblog.

So, as I lay there, unable to march, hold up a sign, shout a slogan that would be heard, or be visible in any traditional capacity as a political being, the central question of Sick Woman Theory formed: How do you throw a brick through the window of a bank if you can't get out of bed?

2.

I have chronic illness. For those who don't know what chronic illness means, let me help: the word "chronic" comes from the Latin *chronos*, which means "of time" (think of "chronology"), and it specifically means "a lifetime." So, a chronic illness is an illness that lasts a lifetime. In other words, it does not get better. There is no cure.

And think about the weight of time: yes, that means you feel it every day. On very rare occasions, I get caught in a moment, as if something's plucked me out of the world, where I realize that I haven't thought about my illnesses for a few minutes, maybe a few precious hours. These blissful moments of oblivion are the closest thing to a miracle that I know. When you have chronic illness, life is reduced to a relentless rationing of energy. It costs you to do anything: to get out of bed, to cook for yourself, to get dressed, to answer an email. For those without chronic illness, you can spend and spend without consequence: the cost is not a problem. For those of us with limited funds, we have to ration, we have a limited supply: we often run out before lunch.

I've come to think about chronic illness in other ways.

Ann Cvetkovich writes: "What if depression, in the Americas, at least, could be traced to histories of colonialism, genocide, slavery, legal exclusion, and everyday

segregation and isolation that haunt all of our lives, rather than to be biochemical imbalances?" I'd like to change the word "depression" here to be all mental illnesses. Cvetkovich continues: "Most medical literature tends to presume a white and middle-class subject for whom feeling bad is frequently a mystery because it doesn't fit a life in which privilege and comfort make things seem fine on the surface." In other words, wellness as it is talked about in America today, is a white and wealthy idea.

Let me quote Starhawk, in the preface to the new edition of her 1982 book *Dreaming the Dark*: "Psychologists have constructed a myth – that somewhere there exists some state of health which is the norm, meaning that most people presumably are in that state, and those who are anxious, depressed, neurotic, distressed, or generally unhappy are deviant." I'd here supplant the word "psychologists" with "white supremacy," "doctors," "your boss," "neoliberalism," "heteronormativity," and "America."

There has been a slew of writing in recent years about how "female" pain is treated – or rather, not treated as seriously as men's in emergency rooms and clinics, by doctors, specialists, insurance companies, families, husbands, friends, the culture at large. In a recent article in *The Atlantic*, called "How Doctors Take Women's Pain Less Seriously," a husband writes about the experience of his wife Rachel's long wait in the ER before receiving the medical attention her condition warranted (which was an ovarian torsion, where an ovarian cyst grows so large it falls, twisting the fallopian tube). "Nationwide, men wait an average of 49 minutes before receiving an analgesic for acute abdominal pain. Women wait an average of 65 minutes for the same thing. Rachel waited somewhere between 90 minutes and two hours," he writes. At the end of the ordeal, Rachel had waited nearly fifteen hours before going into the surgery she should have received upon arrival. The article concludes with her physical scars healing, but that "she's still grappling with the psychic toll – what she calls 'the trauma of not being seen.'"

What the article does not mention is race – which leads me to believe that the writer and his wife are white. Whiteness is what allows for such oblivious neutrality: it is the premise of blankness, the presumption of the universal. (Studies have shown that white people will listen to other white people when talking about race, far more openly than they will to a person of color. As someone who is white-passing, let me address white people directly: look at my white face and listen up.)

The *trauma of not being seen*. Again – *who is allowed in* to the public sphere? Who is allowed to be visible? I don't mean to diminish Rachel's horrible experience – I myself once had to wait ten hours in an ER to be diagnosed with a burst ovarian cyst – I only wish to point out the presumptions upon which her horror relies: that our vulnerability should be seen and honored, and that we should all receive care, quickly and in a way that "respects the autonomy of the patient," as the Four Principles of Biomedical Ethics puts it. Of course, these presumptions are what we all should have. But we must ask the question of who is allowed to have them. In whom does society substantiate such beliefs? And in whom does society enforce the opposite?

Compare Rachel's experience at the hands of the medical establishment with that of Kam Brock's. In September 2014, Brock, a 32-year-old black woman, born in Jamaica and living in New York City, was driving a BMW when she was pulled over by

the police. They accused her of driving under the influence of marijuana, and though her behavior and their search of her car yielded nothing to support this, they nevertheless impounded her car. According to a lawsuit brought against the City of New York and Harlem Hospital by Brock, when Brock appeared the next day to retrieve her car she was arrested by the police for behaving in a way that she calls “emotional,” and involuntarily hospitalized in the Harlem Hospital psych ward. (As someone who has also been involuntarily hospitalized for behaving “too” emotionally, this story feels like a rip of recognition through my brain.) The doctors thought she was “delusional” and suffering from bipolar disorder, because she claimed that Obama followed her on twitter – *which was true*, but which the medical staff failed to confirm. She was then held for eight days, forcibly injected with sedatives, made to ingest psychiatric medication, attend group therapy, and stripped. The medical records of the hospital – obtained by her lawyers – bear this out: the “master treatment plan” for Brock’s stay reads, “Objective: Patient will verbalize the importance of education for employment and will state that Obama is not following her on Twitter.” It notes her “inability to test reality.” Upon her release, she was given a bill for \$13,637.10.

The question of why the hospital’s doctors thought Brock “delusional” because of her Obama-follow claim is easily answered: Because, according to this society, a young black woman can’t possibly be that important – and for her to insist that she is must mean she’s “sick.”

3.

Before I can speak of the “sick woman” in all of her many guises, I must first speak as an individual, and address you from my particular location.

I am antagonistic to the notion that the Western medical-insurance industrial complex understands me in my entirety, though they seem to think they do. They have attached many words to me over the years, and though some of these have provided articulation that was useful – after all, no matter how much we are working to change the world, we must still find ways of coping with the reality at hand – first I want to suggest some other ways of understanding my “illness.”

Perhaps it can all be explained by the fact that my Moon’s in Cancer in the 8th House, the House of Death, or that my Mars is in the 12th House, the House of Illness, Secrets, Sorrow, and Self-Undoing. Or, that my father’s mother escaped from North Korea in her childhood and hid this fact from the family until a few years ago, when she accidentally let it slip out, and then swiftly, revealingly, denied it. Or, that my mother suffers from undiagnosed mental illness that was actively denied by her family, and was then exasperated by a 40-year-long drug addiction, sexual trauma, and hepatitis from a dirty needle, and to this day remains untreated, as she makes her way in and out of jails, squats, and homelessness. Or, that I was physically and emotionally abused as a child, raised in an environment of poverty, addiction, and violence, and have been estranged from my parents for 13 years. Perhaps it’s because I’m poor – according to the IRS, in 2014, my adjusted gross income was \$5,730 (a result of not being well enough to work full-time) – which means that my health insurance is provided by the state of California (Medi-Cal), that my “primary care doctor” is a group of physician’s assistants and nurses in a clinic on the second floor of a strip mall, and that I rely on food stamps to eat. Perhaps it can be encapsulated in the word “trauma.” Perhaps I’ve just got thin skin, and have had some bad luck.

It's important that I also share the Western medical terminology that's been attached to me – whether I like it or not, it can provide a common vocabulary: “This is the oppressor’s language,” Adrienne Rich wrote in 1971, “yet I need it to talk to you.” But let me offer another language, too. In the Native American Cree language, the possessive noun and verb of a sentence are structured differently than in English. In Cree, one does not say, “I am sick.” Instead, one says, “The sickness has come to me.” I love that and want to honor it.

So, here is what has come to me:

Endometriosis, which is a disease of the uterus where the uterine lining grows where it shouldn't – in the pelvic area mostly, but also anywhere, the legs, abdomen, even the head. It causes chronic pain; gastrointestinal chaos; epic, monstrous bleeding; in some cases, cancer; and means that I have miscarried, can't have children, and have several surgeries to look forward to. When I explained the disease to a friend who didn't know about it, she exclaimed: “So your whole body is a uterus!” That's one way of looking at it, yes. (Imagine what the Ancient Greek doctors – the fathers of the theory of the “wandering womb” – would say about that.) It means that every month, those rogue uterine cells that have implanted themselves throughout my body, “obey their nature and bleed,” to quote fellow endo warrior Hilary Mantel. This causes cysts, which eventually burst, leaving behind bundles of dead tissue like the debris of little bombs.

Bipolar disorder, panic disorder, and depersonalization disorder have also come to me. This means that I live between this world and another one, one created by my own brain that has ceased to be contained by a discrete concept of “self.” Because of these “disorders,” I have access to incredibly vivid emotions, flights of thought, and dreamscapes, to the feeling that my mind has been obliterated into stars, to the sensation that I have become nothingness, as well as to intense ecstasies, raptures, sorrows, and nightmarish hallucinations. I have been hospitalized, voluntarily and involuntarily, because of it, and one of the medications I was prescribed once nearly killed me – it produces a rare side effect where one's skin falls off. Another cost \$800 a month – I only took it because my doctor slipped me free samples. If I want to be able to hold a job – which this world has decided I ought to be able to do – I must take an anti-psychotic medication daily that causes short-term memory loss and drooling, among other sexy side effects. These visitors have also brought their friends: nervous breakdowns, mental collapses, or whatever you want to call them, three times in my life. I'm certain they will be guests in my house again. They have motivated attempts at suicide (most of them while dissociated) more than a dozen times, the first one when I was nine years old. That first attempt didn't work, only because after taking a mouthful of sleeping pills, I somehow woke up the next day and went to school, like nothing had happened. I told no one about it, until my first psychiatric evaluation in my mid 20s.

Finally, an autoimmune disease that continues to baffle all the doctors I've seen, has come to me and refuses still to be named. As Carolyn Lazard has written about her experiences with autoimmune diseases: “Autoimmune disorders are difficult to diagnose. For ankylosing spondylitis, the average time between the onset of symptoms and diagnosis is eight to twelve years. I was lucky; I only had to wait one

year.” Names like “MS,” “fibromyalgia,” and others that I can’t remember have fallen from the mouths of my doctors – but my insurance won’t cover the tests, nor is there a specialist in my insurance plan within one hundred miles of my home. I don’t have enough space here – will I ever? – to describe what living with an autoimmune disease is like. I can say it brings unimaginable fatigue, pain all over all the time, susceptibility to illnesses, a body that performs its “normal” functions monstrously abnormally. The worst symptom that mine brings is chronic shingles. For ten years I’ve gotten shingles in the same place on my back, so that I now have nerve damage there, which results in a ceaseless, searing pain on the skin and a dull, burning ache in the bones. Despite taking daily medication that is supposed to “suppress” the shingles virus, I still get them – they are my canaries in the coalmine, the harbingers of at least three weeks to be spent in bed.

My acupuncturist described it as a little demon steaming black smoke, frothing around, nestling into my bones.

4.

With all of these visitors, I started writing Sick Woman Theory as a way to survive in a reality that I find unbearable, and as a way to bear witness to a self that does not feel like it can possibly be “mine.”

The early instigation for the project of “Sick Woman Theory,” and how it inherited its name, came from a few sources. One was in response to Audrey Wollen’s “Sad Girl Theory,” which proposes a way of redefining historically feminized pathologies into modes of political protest for girls: I was mainly concerned with the question of what happens to the sad girl when, if, she grows up. Another was incited by reading Kate Zambreno’s fantastic *Heroines*, and feeling an itch to fuck with the concept of “heroism” at all, and so I wanted to propose a figure with traditionally anti-heroic qualities – namely illness, idleness, and inaction – as capable of being the symbol of a grand Theory. Another was from the 1973 feminist book *Complaints and Disorders*, which differentiates between the “sick woman” of the white upper class, and the “sickening women” of the non-white working class.

Sick Woman Theory is for those who are faced with their vulnerability and unbearable fragility, every day, and so have to fight for their experience to be not only honored, but first made visible. For those who, in Audre Lorde’s words, were never meant to survive: because this world was built against their survival. It’s for my fellow spoonies. You know who you are, even if you’ve not been attached to a diagnosis: one of the aims of Sick Woman Theory is to resist the notion that one needs to be legitimated by an institution, so that they can try to fix you. You don’t need to be fixed, my queens – it’s the world that needs the fixing.

I offer this as a call to arms and a testimony of recognition. I hope that my thoughts can provide articulation and resonance, as well as tools of survival and resilience. And for those of you who are not chronically ill or disabled, Sick Woman Theory asks you to stretch your empathy this way. To face us, to listen, to see.

5.

Sick Woman Theory is an insistence that most modes of political protest are internalized, lived, embodied, suffering, and no doubt invisible. Sick Woman Theory

redefines existence in a body as something that is primarily and always vulnerable, following from Judith Butler's work on precarity and resistance. Because the premise insists that a body is defined by its vulnerability, not temporarily affected by it, the implication is that it is continuously reliant on infrastructures of support in order to endure, and so we need to re-shape the world around this fact. Sick Woman Theory maintains that the body and mind are sensitive and reactive to regimes of oppression – particularly our current regime of neoliberal, white-supremacist, imperial-capitalist, cis-hetero-patriarchy. It is that all of our bodies and minds carry the historical trauma of this, that it is *the world itself* that is making and keeping us sick.

To take the term “woman” as the subject-position of this work is a strategic, all-encompassing embrace and dedication to the particular, rather than the universal. Though the identity of “woman” has erased and excluded many (especially women of color and trans and genderfluid people), I choose to use it because it still represents the un-cared for, the secondary, the oppressed, the non-, the un-, the less-than. The problematics of this term will always require critique, and I hope that Sick Woman Theory can help undo those in its own way. But more than anything, I'm inspired to use the word “woman” because I saw this year how it can still be radical to be a woman in the 21st century. I use it to honor a dear friend of mine who came out as genderfluid last year. For her, what mattered the most was to be able to call herself a “woman,” to use the pronouns “she/her.” She didn't want surgery or hormones; she loved her body and her big dick and didn't want to change it – she only wanted the word. That the word itself can be an empowerment is the spirit in which Sick Woman Theory is named.

The Sick Woman is an identity and body that can belong to anyone denied the privileged existence – or the cruelly optimistic *promise* of such an existence – of the white, straight, healthy, neurotypical, upper and middle-class, cis- and able-bodied man who makes his home in a wealthy country, has never not had health insurance, and whose importance to society is everywhere recognized and made explicit by that society; whose importance and care *dominates* that society, at the expense of everyone else.

The Sick Woman is anyone who does not have this guarantee of care.

The Sick Woman is told that, to this society, her care, even her survival, does not matter.

The Sick Woman is all of the “dysfunctional,” “dangerous” and “in danger,” “badly behaved,” “crazy,” “incurable,” “traumatized,” “disordered,” “diseased,” “chronic,” “uninsurable,” “wretched,” “undesirable” and altogether “dysfunctional” bodies belonging to women, people of color, poor, ill, neuro-atypical, differently abled, queer, trans, and genderfluid people, who have been historically pathologized, hospitalized, institutionalized, brutalized, rendered “unmanageable,” and therefore made culturally illegitimate and politically invisible.

The Sick Woman is a black trans woman having panic attacks while using a public restroom, in fear of the violence awaiting her.

The Sick Woman is the child of parents whose indigenous histories have been erased, who suffers from the trauma of generations of colonization and violence.

The Sick Woman is a homeless person, especially one with any kind of disease and no access to treatment, and whose only access to mental-health care is a 72-hour hold in the county hospital.

The Sick Woman is a mentally ill black woman whose family called the police for help because she was suffering an episode, and who was murdered in police custody, and whose story was denied by everyone operating under white supremacy. Her name is Tanesha Anderson.

The Sick Woman is a 50-year-old gay man who was raped as a teenager and has remained silent and shamed, believing that men can't be raped.

The Sick Woman is a disabled person who couldn't go to the lecture on disability rights because it was held in a venue without accessibility.

The Sick Woman is a white woman with chronic illness rooted in sexual trauma who must take painkillers in order to get out of bed.

The Sick Woman is a straight man with depression who's been medicated (managed) since early adolescence and now struggles to work the 60 hours per week that his job demands.

The Sick Woman is someone diagnosed with a chronic illness, whose family and friends continually tell them they should exercise more.

The Sick Woman is a queer woman of color whose activism, intellect, rage, and depression are seen by white society as unlikeable attributes of her personality. The Sick Woman is a black man killed in police custody, and officially said to have severed his own spine. His name is Freddie Gray.

The Sick Woman is a veteran suffering from PTSD on the months-long waiting list to see a doctor at the VA.

The Sick Woman is a single mother, illegally emigrated to the "land of the free," shuffling between three jobs in order to feed her family, and finding it harder and harder to breathe.

The Sick Woman is the refugee.

The Sick Woman is the abused child.

The Sick Woman is the person with autism whom the world is trying to "cure."

The Sick Woman is the starving.

The Sick Woman is the dying.

And, crucially: The Sick Woman is who capitalism needs to perpetuate itself. Why?

Because to stay alive, capitalism cannot be responsible for our care – its logic of exploitation requires that some of us die.

“Sickness” as we speak of it today is a capitalist construct, as is its perceived binary opposite, “wellness.” The “well” person is the person well enough to go to work. The “sick” person is the one who can’t. What is so destructive about conceiving of wellness as the default, as the standard mode of existence, is that it *invents illness as temporary*. When being sick is an abhorrence to the norm, it *allows us to conceive of care and support in the same way*.

Care, in this configuration, is only required sometimes. When sickness is temporary, care is not normal.

Here’s an exercise: go to the mirror, look yourself in the face, and say out loud: “To take care of you is not normal. I can only do it temporarily.”

Saying this to yourself will merely be an echo of what the world repeats all the time.

6.

I used to think that the most anti-capitalist gestures left had to do with love, particularly love poetry: to write a love poem and give it to the one you desired, seemed to me a radical resistance. But now I see I was wrong.

The most anti-capitalist protest is to care for another and to care for yourself. To take on the historically feminized and therefore invisible practice of nursing, nurturing, caring. To take seriously each other’s vulnerability and fragility and precarity, and to support it, honor it, empower it. To protect each other, to enact and practice community. A radical kinship, an interdependent sociality, a politics of care.

Because, once we are all ill and confined to the bed, sharing our stories of therapies and comforts, forming support groups, bearing witness to each other’s tales of trauma, prioritizing the care and love of our sick, pained, expensive, sensitive, fantastic bodies, and there is no one left to go to work, perhaps then, finally, capitalism will screech to its much-needed, long-overdue, and motherfucking glorious halt.

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Post45: Contemporaries***Sex and the City: Andrea, July
24***

Andrea Long Chu / 07.24.18

Ocean Hill, Brooklyn
Ladies,

In the pilot, the girls are out for dinner. It is Miranda's birthday. Red Chinese lanterns hang at eye level. The cocktails have those little miniature parasols in them, like you'd find at a tiki bar. Latin jazz is being piped in overhead. A pair of drag queens have just brought out a cake. This is a weird restaurant. What is the cuisine? But hush. A public relations executive is speaking.

"If you're a successful saleswoman in this city, you have two choices. You can bang your head against the wall and try to find a relationship, or you can say 'Screw it,' and go out and have sex like a man." To her right, a prim brunette grimaces curiously. "You mean with dildos?" "No," says the first, dripping with infinite patience. "I *mean*, without feeling."

It is the Nineties, not the Seventies, so the answer is unsentimentality, not lesbianism. To be fair, it's a confusing time to be alive. Feminists have made a real dent in the equal opportunity fight, at least for the foamy white cap on the American latte. But heterosexuality, instead of being abolished as planned, has only gotten worse. Stocks are up; romance is down. Marriage rates haven't been this low since the Depression. What's a new pair of \$400 suede pumps without someone special to share them with? Women have more power than ever, but they've never had less control. The Spice Girls are on the verge of breaking up. The president just got a blowjob. This is a weird decade. Who is its target audience?



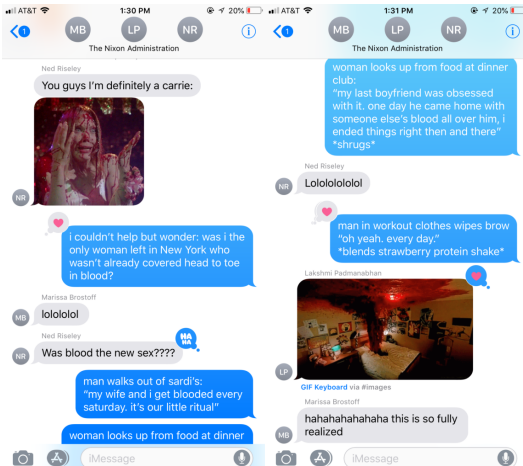
Sex

and the City does not appear to be the work of aliens who, having learned of heterosexuality exclusively through perfume advertisements, decided to make a half-hour romantic comedy-drama series on the topic. *Sex and the City* appears, instead, to be the work of humans who, in the wake of the aforementioned show's wild success on Zolgnar-5, attempted to adapt it for an American audience, *The Office*-style, without speaking a word of Zolg. It's straight people, as imagined by straight people, as imagined by straight people.

I assume this is why the show is frequently as relatable as an abduction fantasy. Brecht's famous alienation effect, in which the audience is reminded that they are watching a play, while functionally useless in a world where audiences never actually forget that they are watching plays (at least if my college's very serious production of *The Laramie Project* is any indication), proves tremendously effective as a refuge for terrible writing.

Of course, writer characters in film and television are universally terrible at writing. ("Cupid has flown the co-op"—you can just *taste* the satisfaction of whoever stuck this in a Carrie Bradshaw column instead of working on their novel.) Like many writer-cum-narrators, Carrie is a blatant plot device, an excuse for the writers' room to leave its narrative string-pulling exposed. It's true, of course, that all decent television shows need an intradiegetic explanation for their extradiegetic episodicity. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's* "monster of the week" model, as well as its endless supply of Central Casting vamps, could be chalked up, often winkingly, to the fact that Buffy's suburban high school happened to sit atop a supernatural transit hub. But Manhattan is not on a Hellmouth, unless it be the infernal portal that is Carrie's brain, extracting weekly themes from the void (modelizers! three-somes! married guys!) for no reason save the banal imperative of a met deadline.

Effectively, then, Carrie becomes a patsy for the show's worst ideas, turning bad plotting into decent characterization through Sarah Jessica Parker's performance. The result is that self-parody gets baked into *Sex and the City's* narrative form, which is honestly about as invested in the serious study of human behavior as a Fifth Avenue Anthropologie. It knows it's just a show, and it knows you know it's a show, and it's fine with that. That's ballsy, like a shellfish that wears its organs on the outside.

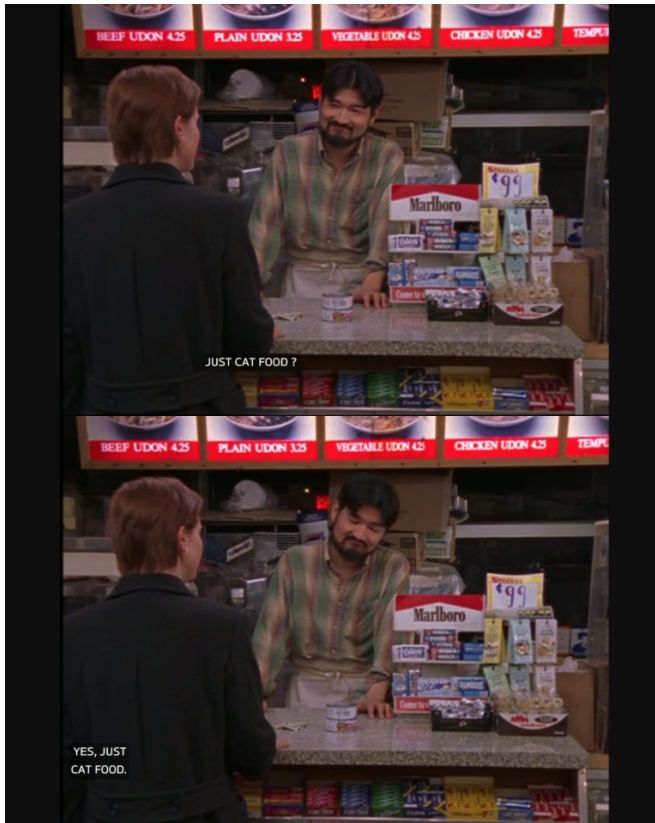


The pacing sprints, as if the writers are trying to outrun their own chainsaw-wielding sanity. It's a strength of the show, then, that it never wastes any of its runtime trying to persuade us that men are desirable, either individually or as a class. The men on this show are not expected to talk, and certainly not to make conversation. They are whisked through montages, like politicians into SUVs, the music and narration huddling around them protectively. Mercifully, we are never put through the agony of having to go on a fully realized date with any of them. They are not people; they are examples. Their job is simply to be there. I am given to believe, though I have no proof of this, that they are supposed to be attractive, or at least were supposed to be, in 1998. I can confirm that they are men. When called upon to speak, they deliver their lines admirably, in near-perfect English.

Even Mr. Big, who has the potential to be a full person, speaks in short, biscuity sentences, his burly eyebrows bench-pressing his forehead into a permanent state of aloofness, as if to say, "What?" This could be because he fears chitchat will damage his plague-grey upper lip, which appears to have died and been reanimated by an untalented witch, or because the halved pomegranate where his mouth should be is so wet that any sentence over four words will slide right out, like a baby giraffe from its mother. This is a man who opens up as easily as a blister pack. He looks like if skin were a person. He smiles like an onion. His eyes are offshore bank accounts. His dick energy is so small it could solve climate change.

Musically, this show takes place entirely in the elevator of a luxury hotel where a Salsa Singles night is currently underway. Nonimprovisational jazz is a fitting metaphor for people who want freedom from freedom. For all the para-feminist bluster about emotionless fucking and promiscuity, what Carrie says in the pilot obtains, with Aunt Lydia-like rigor, in every shot of every episode: "The right guy comes along, and you two right here, this whole thing? *Whish*. Right out the window." Sex doesn't replace love, it just keeps its seat warm, like a reptile in the nest of a migratory bird. One day the show will become *Love and the Hamptons*; it is as inevitable as mold.

This is why actual bursts of deviance are militantly policed. When Charlotte, usually the idealist, drops off the map after purchasing a rabbit vibrator, Carrie and Miranda burst into her apartment FBI-style, the camera tailing them in one long, handheld shot set to electric organ and surf guitar, *and then they take away the sex toy which Charlotte literally just bought for herself with her own money*, Miranda slipping it into her purse like a dirty cop planning to get high later. It's a brief genre spoof, executed as if in acknowledgment that the show's typical zippy tone wouldn't be able to conceal the magnificent cruelty of the act. No greater crime could there be, in this militantly heterosexual Gotham, than to stay home and feed your pussy.



It's the scenes with just the girls, gabbing over brunch or Chinese takeout, where the show really comes alive. The girls are people, even if they're also types, and the show's regard for them—like their affection for each other—is totally involving. That doesn't mean we stray too far from the anthropological banter of Nineties meta-romances like *When Harry Met Sally*, in which we are reminded that at the end of the day, men are still from Mars and women—well, you know where *they're* from. But still, there is something about these scenes of female thinking, as Marissa put it so beautifully, that sets them apart from the rest of the show.

Maybe I spoke too soon when I said lesbianism wasn't the answer. You've all pointed out how the show keeps smuggling queerness into its plots like outside candy into a movie theater—especially with respect to Miranda, whose pantsuits put the gay back in litigation. I would add that what's on display most often in *Sex and the City* is a kind of same-sex eroticism whose job is to perform the sensitive caring labor necessary for keeping the dream of the heterosexual good life intact. The phone calls, the late nights, the affectionate nicknames—they pour themselves into each other's lives. When Charlotte's boyfriend asks her to play seventeenth-century backgammon, the girls hold an impromptu salon on anal sex in the back of a moving taxi. When Carrie's indefatigable neighbors start screwing across the alley, the whole sex-starved gang comes over to watch, sucking on candy. This is lesbianism as heterosexuality's fixer, rushing from one crisis to the next like Michael Clayton or Ray Donovan in Ray Donovan, disappearing evidence and bribing exes with breezy professionalism.



It's a curious thing that heterosexuality, in a show that purports to be taking it into the twenty-first century, doesn't actually work without 24/7 technical support. It is a curiously thing that, thanks in part to *Sex and the City* itself, teams of women across America are convinced to provide this technical support for free. Maybe there's some kind of feedback loop at work here: heterosexuality forbids you from being a dyke, then makes you gay for your girlfriends. I'm hardly convinced that any of our protagonists actually like men; what they do seem to like is *liking* men, because empirically speaking, liking men translates, almost all of the time, into *being with* women: touching their hair, rubbing their shoulders, sharing their feelings. One would be forgiven for assuming that, in a world such as this, the easiest way to be gay is just to be straight, with the confidence that Mr. Right, like Christ, or Godot, is always coming but never comes. I know many women to whom this applies. They, too, are always coming. They, too, never come.

Love,
Sex,
Andrea

The Slow Burn, v. 4: An Introduction

Lakshmi, July 10

Ned, July 18

Marissa, August 16

Ned, August 22

Andrea, August 30

Marissa, September 13

Ivan Ramos (Guest Post), October 1

Lakshmi, October 13

Audrey Wollen (Guest Post), October 22

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The Slow Burn, volume 4, will run in this space all summer. Previous summers can still be found on Post45:

2015: **A Summer of Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan Novels** – Sarah Chihaya, Merve Emre, Katherine Hill, and Jill Richards

2016: **Summer of Knausgaard** – Diana Hamilton, Dan Sinykin, Cecily Swanson, and Omari Weekes

2017: **Welcome (back) to Twin Peaks** – Michaela Bronstein, Len Gutkin, and Benjamin Parker

Post45: Contemporaries

***Sex and the City: Andrea,*
August 30**

Andrea Long Chu / 08.30.18

To whoever finds this:

They do not tell me what day it is. They do not let me read.

Outside my door I hear the clink of champagne flutes and the scrape of four-inch pumps on imported Spanish tile. A laugh, like wind chimes, or a sprinkler. A woman's? I cannot tell. I have started assuming that everything is a woman.

I do not know where they are keeping me. It smells of receipts and orange peel.

On one end of my room, there is an enormous bay window. We are many stories up—too many to count. Every time I try my eye slips like an unfortunate window washer. I know this is Manhattan, but nothing more. From here the city is infinitely self-similar, an urban fractal. It kaleidoscopes around the edges of my vision. Uptown is downtown. The whole island is a sea shell. I am at the center. This means: I am nowhere.

At night (is it night? is it ever night, here?) I hear a couple fucking up against the wall. Or fucking is one thing it sounds like. Fucking, or utterly ignoring each other. I can't be sure which.

All I have are boxed sets of *Sex and the City*, seasons 2, 3, and 4. They say I can leave when I have finished watching them. The DVD player hums like a man trying to perform cunnilingus through a mustache. I am doomed.

*

I eat only the scraps they bring me: leftover hors d'oeuvres, mostly. "Of course Charlotte is a horse girl," I mutter halfway through a salmon puff.

I try to focus on the plots, but I cannot. Each date is like celery: a caloric net loss. There's Premature Ejaculation Guy, S&M Guy, Uncircumcised Guy, Divorced Guy, Married Guy, Widower Guy, Handyman Guy, Angry Guy, Photographer Guy, Wedding Guy, Punching Guy, Short Guy, Risky Sex Guy, Foot Fetish Guy, Too Big Guy, Crabs Guy, Alcohol Guy, Bi Guy. Like a big stiff lighthouse on a sloppy wet sea, there is John Slattery, lending his charm and expressive forehead to Politician Guy, a.k.a. Golden Showers Guy (but not That Guy, who does randomly lend his tawny thatched roof to a brief cameo alongside Old Rich Guy).

And then there is Mr. Big. Oh, Mr. Big. You are the only constant I have in this weary detention, the slightest curve of a season arc, the tiniest morsel of a Purpose! But still you are an old meal, a slice of tilapia, a lonely, tremendous badger, you are a cement truck in the morning, leaves trapped in the gutter in autumn, solid lard in the small of a sauce pan, you are any film about boxing, you are a plain bagel, a meat market, a farm pond, a grease fire, you are socks with sandals, you are a jar of olives, you are a neatly folded used napkin, you are the flu, an old orange, and a pair of sunglasses, you are a casserole, you are dead wood on the beach, you are a rash, a tire, a drought, an eel. You are a haircut with a haircut. You, sir, are a piece of paper.

As a rule, heterosexuality does not make a lick of sense to me. You see, I am a lesbian. (Please do not hold this against me, friend!) Indeed, it is only on television that heterosexuality has ever made any kind of sense. This is a low bar for a TV show, I think: Make heterosexuality plausible. Every show on ABC or the CW or Syfy for crying out loud has figured out how to sell us on the idea that heterosexuality is good for women. Just let the women enjoy themselves! It's easy.

Then why, oh why, I ask myself, gnawing absently on the season 4 DVD case in the return of some infantile distraction, why are they so miserable on *Sex and the City*? Of course being in love with Mr. Big would suck IRL, but this isn't real life—this is fiction. *Just lie*.

The girls flee to Los Angeles for a few episodes. I envy them. I feel I must be going insane.

*

A cheer erupts outside my door, and I am roused from my viewing. I have gleaned through the cunning native to my sex (and a listening device I have been carefully crafting from the remains of an antique lamp) that tonight's celebration marks some kind of electoral event—perhaps the end of a campaign for mayor or senator. Judging by the tune of the assembled guests, their candidate has won easily. This chills me, though I cannot say why.

I look out the bay window. On all sides the buildings shoot into the sky like cigars. There are people in them, thousands. They never look up. They are all too busy having sex, or thinking about having sex, or they are out shopping for shoes, or they are hosting parties no one enjoys. They are the all the same. Sometimes, when I am tired, I gaze out into another apartment, any apartment. I imagine that I am there, instead of here. It makes no difference. I am every woman in every window. I am the world itself, locked in perpetual self-sameness. I am weather. I am steel. I am Sex. I am the City.

Friend, whoever you are, however you came into possession of these memoirs hastily scribbled onto this copy of *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* I discovered wedged behind a removable piece of molding in the corner of the second guest bedroom where they are keeping me, however you unscrambled the clever cipher in which I wrote them, which I invented as a lonely child, however it is that my thoughts reach like ribbons across space and time to you—friend, you must find me. You must free me. Then I shall tell you everything—all of it, down to the darkest cherry pit.

It is almost too late. They are at my door now. I fear the next cosmopolitan shall be my last.

Haste, friend.

x

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[Ivan Ramos \(Guest Post\), October 1](#)

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Post45: Contemporaries

**Sex and the City: Andrea,
October 26**

Andrea Long Chu / 10.26.18

Ocean Hill, Brooklyn
Ladies,
I don't know how to say this, but I think... I like this show?
I know. I know.

About a week ago, to my horror, I realized that in order to have finished the entire series by this writing, I would need to watch over fifty episodes. My girlfriend was out of town. I committed.

And then, bit by bit, the show became bearable. It became agreeable. I started caring, despite myself, about the characters. At some point I found myself looking forward to it: the low hum of it, the familiar rhythms, like a deep cushion I could sink into at the end of the day.



It turns out that *Sex and the City* rewards monogamy. When I first started watching this show, I regarded with scorn what I knew to be the inevitable gravity that coupledness would exert on our leading ladies. On a show whose premise was promiscuity, settling down would mean selling out. But now, living through it—Charlotte has had one marriage and is moving towards another, Miranda has a kid, Carrie has had two great loves, even Samantha got exclusive with that rich prick for a minute there—I fill with gratitude. The truth is, the breezy manthropological shtick gets very old very fast, and for two seasons the only week-to-week continuity to be found is in Mr. Big, who resists commitment as a cat its Halloween costume. But long-term monogamy is a narrative boon: it allows the characters to flesh themselves out by *doing other things*.

I started multitasking while watching: doing research, shopping for clothes, dicking around on Twitter. I was raised to have contempt for people who did this: put shows on in the background, used television as white noise. I think this was a class thing, adumbrating a hierarchy of attention. Yet here I am, right now as I type these words, literally watching it out of the corner of my eye. Carrie just rushed from her apartment to the New York Stock Exchange to some jazzy minor-key bop. The joke was that traffic was so bad that she had to take the subway. Gooseflesh. (In the time it's taken for me to write this down, the girls have gotten together for brunch in the meatpacking district. Samantha just said, "When I moved to this neighborhood, the only thing that cost \$20 was a hand job from a tranny.")

Earlier today, I opened the HBO Go app on my phone, placed my phone in my back pocket, and listened to two episodes of *Sex and the City* on my headphones while cleaning the floor in my apartment—rug and hardwood. I am here to tell you that *Sex and the City*, a mediocre television show, is an excellent radio program. The plots are telegraphed, the dialogue is rapid-fire; Carrie's narration doubles the action, so you never miss a beat. In the season five episode "The Big Journey," Carrie travels by transcontinental railroad to San Francisco to give a reading of her new book, *Sex and the City*. (As a sidebar: Molly Shannon and Amy Sedaris turn in exquisite performances as Carrie's publishers; Sedaris's eye-winking tic is so brilliant and all Sedaris, given that Carrie never mentions it and this is exactly the kind of show where characters only have weird facial tics if they are going to be remarked upon in voiceover.) The train ride is dismal, and Carrie, who has been excited to get laid with Mr. Big (now running a vineyard in Napa), doesn't even bother to phone him. To make things worse, at her reading, Carrie finds that she's opening for a dog who is very famous on the internet. Here's what happens next, as I heard through my earbuds while mopping my bathroom:

CARRIE

So, if there are no other questions about my book...

(Beat.)

Uh, yes? I see a hand, but I can't see the man. Could you shift, sorry...

BIG

Yes, I have a question. Um, this Mr. Big character, does he have a real name?

CARRIE

Yes, but I can't reveal it. I have to protect his privacy.

As pure sound, this scene was delightful. It's already an easy guess by this point in the episode that Mr. Big will show up, unannounced, at Carrie's reading, so the moment Carrie mentioned a manless hand, I knew what was up. When I rewatched this scene to transcribe the above dialogue, I saw—for the first time—that before he speaks, Mr. Big *does* become visible to Carrie; he even stands up to ask the question. In my ear, this had been twice as charming: I assumed that Carrie only discovered Mr. Big when I did, at the moment of his line, her eyes darting over to the source of the voice. And all of this transpired without my having to so much as *glance* at Chris Noth, about whose face I have, as you know, several opinions.

It's not that *Sex and the City* isn't pretty to look at; on the contrary, it's gorgeous, like the fall line sprung to life, with the thinnest of intradiegetic justifications. How, exactly, are we to suppose that these successful career women find the time to hunt down and purchase the *seven or eight unique ensembles* that appear in each episode? We aren't: we merely accept it, like Monica and Rachel's impossibly large apartment, or sound in space. The visuals and the dialogue run in parallel, never intersecting; it's like you synched up a wordless video doc of Fashion Week with an unusually spicy episode of *A Prairie Home Companion*.

"You never look at me anymore," I can imagine *Sex and the City* telling me, pouting over dinner at a Chinese restaurant where we are regulars, not because the food is fantastic, but because the location is convenient and, well, it's our Chinese place. "Sure I do," I might reply, checking Twitter. "You look at me, but you don't see me," she says. "Your food is getting cold," I say.

With my girlfriend out of town, the show began to provide me with that comforting feeling of someone else's being more or less around—chatter in another room, the warmth of a vague twoness. Had my girlfriend been home, we probably would have been watching TV together anyway, bouncing intimacy off the screen like two kids with a racquetball and time to kill. God forbid we be expected to make conversation with each other; that's what friends are for. A true partner is someone you never have to talk to, or even make eye contact with. Pure company.



By its later seasons, *Sex and the City* has become a show primarily about what we could call *postintimacy*: what remains, or would, in the wake of a critical event that should have ended things, but somehow, didn't. Postintimacy is when a character says something like, "I still love you, but that's not the point"—and it isn't. Postintimacy is Steve coming, unasked, to Miranda's mother's funeral; it is Charlotte and Trey, who must separate before the latter can get it up. Taken on its own, it is neither good nor bad. Big is best at his most postintimate. "He's in my life," Carrie tells Aidan, even if she cannot say how or why.

We do not have to say that all intimacy is postintimacy in order to say that all intimacy *includes* postintimacy, even when things are going well. Commitment is a vow that relationality will outlive intimacy. This is why every wedding, as Charlotte learns the hard way, is also a breakup.

Nonbeing clings to every relationship, like a burr in your four-thousand-dollar Prada wool coat. Postintimacy is the bed death at the heart of all sex. "Not having sex was the only thing holding us together," says Miranda after she sleeps with Steve, with whom she is raising a child. The postintimate can be safer than intimacy, more secure. Sometimes all you want is to be the furniture in someone's life, hanging around like the chair Aidan made for Carrie that she can't bring herself to throw out.

This could be a sober, but not unsentimental, definition of love: a thing that's best when you leave it on in the background, like a television show. As I sailed off into the final episodes of season six, I couldn't help but wonder: Do any of us really want to be watched all the time?

Love,
Andrea

The Slow Burn, v. 4: An Introduction

Lakshmi, July 10

Ned, July 18

Andrea, July 24

Marissa, August 16

Ned, August 22

Andrea, August 30

Marissa, September 13

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The meaning of the “feminine”

The two fleshy lips and two delicate folds of skin that surround the entrance to the vagina are called the “major” and “minor” labia (also known as “nymphs”). These folds form the rounded part of the vulva and present an elasticity, form, coloration, length, thickness and aptitude to become congested once excited, that is infinitely variable from one woman to another.

Le Robert, Dictionnaire de la langue française.

If “woman” is understood as both a biologically and culturally determined reality, then we must acknowledge that the “feminine” no longer appears to be linked to “woman.” The development of women’s studies towards the end of the twentieth century, along with the work of Judith Butler in gender studies and queer theory, contributed to putting into question again the masculine/feminine divide and to showing that gender identity is always performative, never given. We now know that to speak of “genders” is no longer to speak of “sexes.” Consequently we must

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accept the idea that feminism can now be understood as a *féminisme sans femme*, a feminism without women. Woman as a predicate is no longer an obvious given, if in fact it ever was. So if the feminine has a "meaning," it is in as much as the permission to question the identity of woman follows from the deconstruction and displacement of this identity.

This situation also impacts the supposed integrity of the concept of "sexual difference," for to say that gender is constructed is to question difference understood as binary. There are not just two genders; there is a multiplicity of genders. Masculine and feminine can refer to several of these gender identities at once, without referring to originary anatomical or social givens.

It is now time to ask if there is any correlation between this pluralizing of gender differences and the pluralizing of ontological difference undertaken in France by a certain Heideggerian critical posterity. The concept of "ontological difference" is also found in the work of Levinas and particularly Derrida, where it is pluralized, delocalized, dislocated from its dual meaning. By reinterpreting difference as alterity and hospitality, Levinas opened the door of difference to a host of strangers to Being within Being; Derrida prolonged and radicalized this dissemination. In one as in the other, the idea of sexual difference played a determinant role in displacing the concept of ontological difference.

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We must shed light on the link between a "cultural" and a post-Heideggerian ontological thought of gender, between American "critical theory" and the thinking of Being revisited by deconstruction, since this investigation has not yet been undertaken thoroughly. Can we say that there are ontological differences as one says that there are genders and that in both instances and in the same way, difference is more than duality?

This question, which points towards the possibility of a shared foundation for ontology and gender theory, immediately brings to mind two further questions. First, when we talk about gender difference and ontological difference, are we speaking about the "same" difference (in that it would be impossible to distinguish one from the other) or should we determine an order of priority or derivation? Second, if masculine and feminine have lost their traditional roles as sexual labels nowadays, opening out onto a plurality of possible identities, how do we explain that, at least among philosophers, the *feminine* enjoys a sort of ontological privilege over the masculine or transgender?

Clearly the "feminine" comes to be inscribed *between* the terms of the alternative opened by the first question about the simultaneity or derivation of the two types of difference, ontological and sexual. If, as Levinas claims, it is true that hospitality is the originary opening to the other, that is, to all differences and if it

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is true that the "feminine" designates not an individual identity but rather this opening or welcome itself, then there is not really any specificity or derivation of sexual difference in regard to ontological difference. The two come together, one for the other, and this play of reciprocity and simultaneity marks the place of the ethical. The ontic-ontological link could thus have the same meaning and speak the same language as the link between "feminine" and either "woman" or "man." "Woman" and "man" would thus have the same relation to the feminine, the same relation of source or origin as beings to Being.

But even if the feminine remains irreducible to any given gender, including the "woman" gender, it is still not a "neuter" word like Being. This is precisely why Levinas chooses it and endows it with ethical dignity. The feminine permits the "deneutering" of Being without bringing it back or reducing it again to the ontic register. To make Being and the feminine coincide is equivalent to "deneutralizing" *Dasein*, the being who is neither man nor woman and whose essence, Heidegger claims, precedes gender difference. The "masculine" could have played the same "deneutralizing" role, but, to answer the second question, by choosing the term "feminine," Levinas also sought to acknowledge a dimension of thought and ethics that had been excluded from Western metaphysics for all too long.

This point caused Derrida some difficulty. Although

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in many ways he supported the move to deneutralize and feminize difference, he asked whether the feminine as thought by Levinas – as a welcome to all others – is really capable of resisting its reduction to this given being that is woman and whether it really could welcome other genders in its name.

In the ontological order, the question presents itself in the following terms: how far can there be a deneutralizing of Being that does not lead to a pure and simple metaphysical identification of being with Being? Can the feminine – and, again, why the feminine? – really be open, extending to all modes of Being? Isn't it always destined to characterize but one gender and to refer to but one type of being, namely "woman"?¹ At the same time, is any coincidence between being and Being metaphysical? Must we avoid this coincidence at all cost?

From the perspective of gender theory, the question presents itself in the following terms: must we really avoid the mark of sex in order to think gender? Is all sexualizing of gender outdated? Do beings and bodies benefit from being deneutralized, or should we think, on the contrary, that a certain transcendental disincarnation does harm to both the flesh and the concept of difference?

These questions always lead to a highly aporetic chain of reflection whose twists and turns I shall follow here – questions to questions – before finally pointing towards a new direction for reflection.

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Admiring the wonders of difference

Let us start with a “woman,” Luce Irigaray, one of the only people to think explicitly together ontology and gender differences. Although Irigaray shares Levinas’ position when she claims that there is no ethics that is not an “ethics of sexual difference,”² she displaces the ways of accessing this opening. Recognizing with Heidegger that all difference is first given as and through affect, that she *touches* before speaking, Irigaray adopts an affective tone that opens up to both Being and gender difference in a single movement – and this tone distinguishes her from Heidegger’s “angst” or Levinas’ “indolence” and “fatigue.”³ Irigaray’s tone is *wonder* (in French *admiration*), understood in the sense that Descartes gives this term in *The Passions of the Soul*.⁴ She writes, “To arrive at the constitution of an ethics of sexual difference, we must at least return to what is for Descartes the first passion: *wonder*. This passion has no opposite or contradiction and exists always as though for the first time.”⁵ To recall Descartes’ definition:

When the first encounter with some object surprises us and we judge it to be new, or very different from what we knew in the past or what we supposed it was going to be, this makes us wonder and be astonished at it. And since this can happen before we

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know in the least whether this object is suitable to us or not, it seems to me that Wonder is the first of all the passions. It has no opposite, because if the object presented has nothing in it that surprises us, we are not in the least moved by it and regard it without passion.⁶

Wonder (*admiration*) should be understood in terms of the etymological meaning, which connects admiration to astonishment in the Latin verb "*mirari*." Wonder is the passion of surprise in the face of the extraordinary and the unfamiliar. Irigaray emphasizes its pre-predicative aspect: we wonder before judging. To wonder is to open oneself up to difference before granting it a value or establishing hierarchies. The anteriority of wonder to judgment prompts Descartes to call it the first of all passions. Wonder is the first of the six fundamental passions, preceding love, hatred, joy, sadness, and even desire. Later in her analysis Irigaray shows that wonder finds its necessary correlative in generosity, the ethical passion *par excellence* for Descartes, since it "causes us not to prefer ourselves to anyone."⁷

Wonder is the passion of difference; this difference is neither undetermined nor asexual. Irigaray's analyses push the Cartesian view further by viewing wonder precisely as the opening to gender difference. Even if we never wonder at anything other than difference and even if wonder is the ontological and

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theoretical passion *par excellence* – Being is the wonder of all beings – in order for this difference to touch us, it must be inscribed within bodies since it is bodies that initially differentiate beings. The inscription of difference in bodies bears a certain mark, namely, gender. The other strikes us first through gender. Or rather, what is other in all others is gender, which is neither determined nor judged, since wonder suspends predication. Gender can only appear through its difference from another gender. Consequently, wonder, “the point of passage,”⁸ allows the sexes to maintain a degree of autonomy grounded in their difference; it thus offers a space of freedom and desire, a possibility of separation or alliance. Considering the other with admiring wonder, in the Cartesian sense, it is impossible to assimilate them: in wonder, the other is “not yet assimilated or disassimilated as known,” he or she is not absorbed, incorporated, or appropriated. “Wonder is a mourning for the self as an autarchic entity; whether this mourning is triumphant or melancholy. Wonder must be the advent or the event of the other. The beginning of a new story?”⁹

Genders cannot substitute for one another nor be assimilated to each other; they keep their secret. Since wonder does not have an opposite, it remains open, as an infinite difference that generosity extends: “Wonder constitutes an *opening* prior to and following that which surrounds, enlaces.”¹⁰ In this

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non-reductive apprehension of the sexes, Irigaray sees a way to clear an ethical space of recognition of the feminine: the feminine as the affective union between Being and sex(es).

The admiration of wonder is in fact structurally linked to the feminine in so far as it reveals the ontological opening as a *maternity*. Because it is the *first* of all passions, it is the *mother* of all desire. Thus Descartes "situates woman in the place of the first and last passion."¹¹ The mother-passion, the first woman and last passion (last because it is the most complete, the most accomplished), conditions all meetings between genders, whether they are different or the same. And so, because all subjects are able to wonder, all subjects are feminine.

Why the "feminine"? Isn't the privilege of the feminine determined by the particular situation of "woman"?

An ethics of sexual difference has no need to determine the share of "man" and "woman" in the social world, or to "define" the feminine; it need only see in the feminine a space of between-genders, a space of amazement and surprise that limits genders to spaces without content, spaces that are empty and hence inviolable. For Irigaray, the feminine does not designate a gender, but rather the free play of genders,

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their distance, their wonderful difference, the cusp of ethics once again.¹²

But we are still left with this word: "feminine." Why "feminine" if in the end it is no more attached to woman than to man? Why is the literalness of "feminine" still necessary? If this term does not designate a sex and can be expanded to transsexuality or to all of the occurrences of transgender, if it no longer refers exclusively to heterosexuality, if, through this reminder of the exclusion to which it is subjected, it can in a way also refer to other modes of being, other sexual practices, then why keep it? In the end, we have to admit that "feminine" does *owe* something to women!

This "debt" must be taken seriously. The choice of the feminine as the place of ethics is itself an ethical choice, which, as we know, seeks to put an end to the long tradition of exclusion and subordination of women and to their rejection from the ethical sphere, from thought, and from ontology. To elect the feminine is obviously to do justice to women, to transgress "phallogocentrism" through the promotion of what has always been trampled. But if we believe that the feminine cannot be understood without woman, then we also counter that "woman" cannot be understood without a certain determination which is that of her "sex." Yet another debt, another justice rendered: the choice of feminine recognizes precisely the *body* of woman, its morphology, the anatomy of

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her sex organs . . . So the link between the feminine, woman, and the woman's sex organs appears to be a reality that cannot be undone.

The vulva's schema

Isn't this contradictory? Didn't we just assert the independence of the feminine in regard to both anatomical and social givens?

In his work *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, Derrida sheds light on this problem. He acknowledges that Luce Irigaray cleared the way to a thought of the feminine through the updating of a certain type of affect, an affect of difference that appears to have escaped the metaphysics of auto-affection, which has determined the relation of the self to the subject in the philosophical tradition. But he recalls that, in some sense, the *morphology* of the woman *incarnates* this other mode of affection that is wonder, this touching without the predicative contact of the subject with him or herself. Why? Here Derrida refers to the passages where Irigaray thinks woman starting from a sort of self touching without self, without mastery or conscience, a space of withdrawal and separation without ego. This space is the space of the *lips*:

Since *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*, Paris, Minuit, 1977 (*This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine

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This may be the most abominable affair in criminal history of all times: at Ciudad Juárez, a border town in the North of Mexico, the twin city of El Paso (Texas), more than 300 women have been murdered, all following the same ritual of kidnap, torture, sexual services, mutilations, strangulation. For ten years on average two bodies have been found every month in the surroundings of the accursed city – the naked, bruised, disfigured bodies of women, adolescents and young girls. Top-level investigators believe it is the work of two psychopathic “serial killers,” but no one can find them . . .

Sergio González Rodríguez,
Le Monde Diplomatique, August 2003.

There has been a lot of talk about Mr. Zapatero's promise to withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq, but in Spain thousands of women are waiting for him to hold firm on another promise: to implement a law against “domestic violence.” Every day in Spain we read about cases of murder or violence

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against women in the newspaper, but these stories do not figure among the minor news items hidden inside the paper, they're on the front page and in the headlines of television news reports. With more than seventy women murdered by their husbands or ex-husbands last year, this is definitely an urgent issue for the Spanish. Last year fifty thousand women reported an attack to the law and in each of these instances the aggressor was a spouse or ex-spouse.

Les femmes en Espagne, France 5
television channel, February 2009.

According to figures published in 2006 by the French Ministry of Labor, women's wages are on average 73 percent of those of men right across different work schedules (*Les écarts de salaire entre les hommes et les femmes en 2006: des disparités persistantes* [Salary gaps between men and women in 2006: persistent disparities]). (1) The total gap: women received 27 percent less. [. . .] (2) The gap for full-time work: women receive 19 percent less. The first explanation for these wage inequalities is different work structures. Women are five times more likely to work part-time than men; consequently, their income for all work schedules is less than the income received by men. Furthermore, men's work time is increased through the overtime they receive more frequently than women. (3) The gap for equivalent

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positions and experience: women receive 10 percent less. If differences in position (manager, employee, worker), experience, qualification (degree level) and activity sector (education or finance) are taken into account, some 10 percent of the gap remains inexplicable. This difference in treatment amounts to a degree of *pure* employer discrimination against women. However, other factors that are not measured can be at work here and may partially explain the phenomenon, starting with family situation, degree subject and career breaks. Pure discrimination probably amounts to 6 or 7 percent. But discrimination also shows in other areas, in part-time work and getting stuck in low-level or low-paid jobs.

Observatoire des inégalités, January 6, 2009.

Still today the professional or personal achievements of a woman cannot be seen as anything other than an act of emancipation. Whether or not this achievement is accompanied by activist demands, it is always political. Clearly, to be a woman still means to belong to a category that is dominated sexually, symbolically, socially, economically, and culturally. Consequently, whenever a woman succeeds in establishing her creations in any field, she is contributing to improving the lot and future of all women. Although a new radicalism has made it necessary to question the ontological, political, and biological meanings of “woman,” the word is still attached – perhaps now more than ever

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– to the historical schema of the march towards liberation, towards a specific liberation that cannot be confounded with other liberations. Even as we question the identity “woman,” it is inconceivable that the tenacity of “feminist” demands be forgotten for a moment. The deconstruction of sexual identities does not imply letting go of the fight for women’s liberation.

I am not being naïve in introducing my topic like this. I speak fully aware of what remains of the feminine after its deconstruction. The word “remains,” echoing the famous “what remains of absolute knowledge?” in *Glas*, does not refer to any sort of debris, be it bones or ashes. It refers not to a residue but to a kernel of resistance, a kernel with the strength of a new beginning, a live instance that still burns – quite the opposite of a broken limb or cadaver. The beginning of a new fire; the prelude to new forms. Although I have questioned the coincidence of woman and the feminine, notably in “The Meaning of the ‘Feminine’,” I did so knowing that there is a secret plasticity in both woman and the feminine as they come into a new era today, an era that opens up to them as a direct result of their post-deconstructive meaning.

I propose a minimal concept for woman, an inef-
faceable “remains” in which “woman” refers to a
subject overexposed to a specific type of violence.
This violence can be defined fundamentally as a dual

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constraint or schizoid pressure: the pressure of work in society and at home. This minimal concept – woman's overexposure to dual exploitation – is the remainder, burning and plastic, with which we must work.

While we know that the constitution of any gender identity involves power play, that it always imposes itself within opposing strengths, we must also acknowledge the specificity of violence to women. Although this violence shares features with other types of oppression, it is nonetheless irreducible. The dual constraint of work inside and outside the home, with all of the inequality, humiliation, conjugal mistreatment, sexual abuse, beating, murder, and its ideological status as a shameful problem, threatens women in a specific way.

Even when a theorist such as Beatriz Preciado asserts the existence of a dissemination of sexual difference, reflecting the emergence of unexpected identities, of "queer multitudes," and claims that "if the queer multitudes are post-feminist, it is in so far as they are the result of a reflexive confrontation of feminism and the differences it erased to the advantage of a hegemonic, heterocentric political subject 'woman'," she recognizes that domestic violence most often affects women or "feminized bodies."¹

And here comes the immediate objection: isn't defending the specificity of this violence simply a fall-back to a form of essentialism that confers a determinate identity on "woman"? To this I respond

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that what I mean by "woman" is not the subject of traditional feminism at war with "male domination." Yes, it is necessary to break with "all essentialist feminism,"² but at the same time let's admit that the fierce battle waged within various feminist movements between "essentialism" and "anti-essentialism" – the label "essentialist" is attached to any discourse that tries to identify anything like a specificity of the feminine – loses its meaning and ultimately turns against feminist efforts. While we must avoid all essentializing of the feminine, we must also critique, with equal vehemence, as Naomi Schor commented in the early 1990s, the "excesses perpetrated in the name of anti-essentialism," when she stated loud and clear "the urgency of rethinking the very terms of a conflict which all parties would agree has ceased to be productive."³

This is why the notion of "essence" must be reexamined, and that is exactly what I intend to do here, not through a process of heavy ontological enquiry, but by asking whether this term is correctly understood by those who malign it. I want to keep hold of the thought of the specificity of the violence to women, even at the risk of taking on a form of acceptance of essence that has nothing to do with what feminist theorists usually understand by this term.

To meet these goals, I must start by identifying the intersection between two explicit gestures to

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de-essentialize "woman": the first is philosophical, undertaken by deconstruction, while the second, which is critical and pragmatic, is undertaken by gender studies and queer theory. These two approaches are far from identical, which is why their meeting point is not always clearly perceived or understood. Consideration of this encounter reveals that a kind of anti-essentialist violence can play into the hands of ordinary violence against women in both the domestic and social realm. As if deconstruction and gender theory on the one hand and the murderous impulse and material violence on the other ultimately share a little something in regard to "woman," a little of her flesh or lips. As if they both, as it were, take their payment in kind and share the spoils.

It is certainly right to state firmly that the deontologizing operation at work in theory and philosophy is irreducible to any kind of terrorism. But even if it is only to reject it, we cannot avoid questioning the complicity between a domestic and social violence that refuses to give women a place and a theoretical violence that refuses to give women an essence.

In gender studies "essence" often refers to a combination of natural, biological, or anatomical determinants (all three are treated as synonymous) – the woman's "sex," her "body" – and a given social construction, feminine identity as it appears

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as a product of the heterosexual ideological matrix. Both natural determination and social construction refer to a supposedly stable and unchanging essence. To speak of the "specificity" of the feminine would be essentialist, since this discourse could only be a reclaiming of the "proper," a preordained anatomical and cultural reality. Few feminist theorists seem to question the crude amalgam that such an understanding of essence conveys, one that reduces biology to nothing more than the science of constituted identities and culture to a movement to re-appropriate these identities for normalizing ends.

The anti-essentialism of "queer multitudes" emphasizes the infinite, unlimited, horizontal mutability and transformability of bodies, behavior, and gender, as if this constant displacement were able to eradicate the supposed stability of essence by itself. As I demonstrated in "The Meaning of the 'Feminine'," anti-essentialism never exactly questions the proximity of the two concepts of "gender," the first of which refers to essence in the philosophical sense (*genre*) and the second of which refers to sexual identity (*gender*). As if, between *genre* and *gender*, the identity of the word and its root were no more than a coincidence.

In deconstruction the concept of essence relates, first, in a far more rigorous manner, to its ontological meaning as the "form" or "idea" of a thing. But essence never transgresses these metaphysical boundaries. For Derrida, form or essence refer to presence,

Changing Difference

the evident, *parousia*, and signify only within the metaphysical tradition, that is, ontology. Form and essence have no post-deconstruction future.

If, as I have just explained, we must clarify the intersection of gender theory and deconstruction, it is in so far as whatever the difference of their approaches, there nonetheless appears to be a consensus regarding a definition of essence as stability, self-presence, and nature, in both the ontological and biological meaning of the term.

How can we elude this kind of alliance? How can we defend the specificity, however unstable, however relative, of a violence done to women if the very notion of "specificity" is subject to the counter-violence of a constant de-appropriation?

That "woman" is now emptied of her essence only serves to emphasize the fact that she does not define herself and cannot define herself except through the violence done to her. Violence alone confers her being. The violence of the deconstruction of this being, on the one hand, and, on the other, the domestic and social violence constantly exerted on this very absence of being. Woman is nothing any more, except this violence through which her "being nothing" continues to exist. She's nothing but an ontological amputation, formed by that which negates her.

This assimilation of "woman" to "being nothing" perhaps opens a new path that goes beyond both essentialism and anti-essentialism. Let us envisage

Woman's possibility, philosophy's impossibility

the possibility that, in the name woman, there is an empty but resistant essence, an essence that is resistant precisely because it is emptied, a *stamp of impossibility*. This could augur a new era in the "feminist" fight, a new stage in the battle against the violence that claims woman is impossible because of her lack of essence.

To answer these questions, I'll start by analyzing my own situation, which has the advantage of being positioned exactly at the articulation of the registers at stake here. Indeed, since I am a philosopher, my work, in the economic and social meaning of the term, and my material position in the community coincide with my intellectual engagements and, in particular, with my interest in gender theory and deconstruction. I confront domestic/social violence as an individual and as a working woman, while I also confront the theoretical violence of the de-ontologizing of woman. Setting aside women and violence in general, I'll start with the individual situation of a "female professional philosopher," who, aside from institutional bullying of all kinds, has had to face in the past and sometimes still faces, the pressures of daily life, the threats of symbolic punishment, the refusal of *jouissance* or freedom, inequality or insidious forms of injustice.

What is the life of a woman philosopher? In line with the project of resistance announced earlier, I'll try to show first what woman – or what's left of her

Distancing, Determining

Contemporary violence is the response societies make to the immediacy of contacts and is exacerbated by the brutality of the flash agents of Communication.¹ It is not all that easy to forego the comfortable expanses of time formerly allowing changes to occur imperceptibly. In cities this speed becomes concentrated, and the response explodes. These same mechanisms are at work both in cultures of intervention and in emerging cultures: New York or Lagos.* In the shantytowns and ghettos of even the smallest cities the same gears engage: the violence of poverty and mud but also an unconscious and desperate rage at not “grasping” [*com-prendre*] the chaos of the world. Those who dominate benefit from the chaos; those who are oppressed are exasperated by it.

This speeding up of relationships has repercussions on how the full-sense of identity is understood. The latter is no longer linked, except in an occasionally anachronistic or more often lethal manner, to the sacred mystery of the root. It depends on how a society participates in global relation, registers its speed, and controls its conveyance or doesn't. Identity is no longer just permanence; it is a capacity for variation, yes, a variable—either under control or wildly fluctuating.

The old idea of identity as root, whenever it proves hard to

*The cultures that I call “emerging” are those that do not have at their disposal the institutionalized—nor, for that matter, improvised—means of speaking up in the planetary flow of Communication.

define or impossible to maintain, leads inexorably to the refuges of generalization provided by the universal as value. This is how the elite populations in southern countries have usually reacted when choosing to renounce their own difficult definition. A generalizing universal reassures them.

Identity as a system of relation, as an aptitude for "giving-on-and-with" [*donner-avec*], is, in contrast, a form of violence that challenges the generalizing universal and necessitates even more stringent demands for specificity. But it is hard to keep in balance.* Why is there this paradox in Relation? Why the necessity to approach the specificities of communities as closely as possible? To cut down on the danger of being bogged down, diluted, or "arrested" in undifferentiated conglomerations.

But, in any case, the speed with which geocultural entities, aggregates formed through encounters and kinships, change in the world is relative. For example, there is a real situational community among the creolizing cultures of the Caribbean and those of the Indian Ocean (in Réunion or Seychelles). However, there is nothing to say that accelerated evolution will not soon entail equally powerful and decisive encounters between the Caribbean region and Brazil, or among the smaller Antillean islands (both French- and English-speaking), that will lead to the formation of new zones of relational community. It would not be possible to base ontological thinking on the existence of entities such as these, whose very nature is to vary tremendously within Relation. This variation is, on the contrary, evidence that ontological thought no longer "functions," no longer provides a founding certainty that is stock-still, once and for all, in a restrictive territory.

In such an evolution we are justified in maintaining the following principle: "Relation exists, especially as the particulars that are its interdependent constituent have first freed themselves from any approximation of dependency."

*There is a growing tendency in Western aesthetic theories, from ethnopoetics to geopoetics to cosmopoetics, to make some claim of going beyond notions or dimensions of identity.

Gradually, premonitions of the interdependence at work in the world today have replaced the ideologies of national independence that drove the struggles for decolonization. But the absolute presupposition of this interdependence is that instances of independence will be defined as closely as possible and actually won or sustained. Because it is only beneficial to all (it only stops being a pretext or ruse) at the point at which it governs the distancings that are determinant.

One of the most dramatic consequences of interdependence concerns the hazards of emigration. When identity is determined by a root, the emigrant is condemned (especially in the second generation) to being split and flattened. Usually an outcast in the place he has newly set anchor, he is forced into impossible attempts to reconcile his former and his present belonging.

Despite their French citizenship, most of the Antilleans who live in France, participating in the widespread movement of emigration into this country (North Africans, Portuguese, Senegalese, etc.), have not been spared this condition. It is through a rather impressive turnabout in history, in Martinique, that its leaders are now speaking up to suggest that it would not, after all, be such a bad thing to participate in a dignified manner in this citizenship.

Summarizing what we know concerning the varieties of identity, we arrive at the following:

Root identity

- is founded in the distant past in a vision, a myth of the creation of the world;
- is sanctified by the hidden violence of a filiation that strictly follows from this founding episode;
- is ratified by a claim to legitimacy that allows a community to proclaim its entitlement to the possession of a land, which thus becomes a territory;
- is preserved by being projected onto other territories,

making their conquest legitimate—and through the project of a discursive knowledge.

Root identity therefore rooted the thought of self and of territory and set in motion the thought of the other and of voyage.

Relation identity

- is linked not to a creation of the world but to the conscious and contradictory experience of contacts among cultures;
- is produced in the chaotic network of Relation and not in the hidden violence of filiation;
- does not devise any legitimacy as its guarantee of entitlement, but circulates, newly extended;
- does not think of a land as a territory from which to project toward other territories but as a place where one gives-on-and-with rather than grasps.

Relation identity exults the thought of errantry and of totality.

The shock of relating, hence, has repercussions on several levels. When secular cultures come into contact through their intolerances, the ensuing violence triggers mutual exclusions that are of a sacred nature and for which any future reconciliation is hard to foresee. When a culture that is expressly composite, such as the culture of Martinique, is touched by another (French) that “entered into” its composition and continues to determine it, not radically but through the erosion of assimilation, the violence of reaction is intermittent and unsure of itself. For the Martinican it has no solid rootstock in any sacred territory or filiation. This, indeed, is a case in which specificity is a strict requirement and must be defined as closely as possible. For this composite culture is fragile in the extreme, wearing down through contact with a masked colonization.

Consequently, wouldn't it be best just to go along with it? Wouldn't it be a viable solution to embellish the alienation,

to endure while comfortably receiving state assistance, with all the obvious guarantees implied in such a decision? This is what the technocratic elite, created for the management of decoy positions, have to talk themselves into before they convince the people of Martinique. Their task is all the less difficult since they use it to give themselves airs of conciliation, of cooperative humanism, of a realism anxious to make concrete improvements in circumstances. Not counting the pleasures of permissive consumption. Not counting the actual advantages of a special position, in which public funds (from France or Europe) serve to satisfy a rather large number of people (to the benefit, however, of French or European companies that are more and more visible in the country or castes of *békés* converted from former planters into a tertiary sector and thus won over to the ideas of this elite) and serve to foster the hopes of an even greater number.*

And it is true that in a context of this sort one spares oneself both the sacred violence, which is boundless, and the violence of absolute destitution, which is spreading with such lightning speed over half the planet. What remains here is only the suppressed and intermittent violence of a community convulsively demonstrating its sense of disquiet. What sense of disquiet? The one that comes from having to consume the world without participating in it, without even the least idea of it, without being able to offer it anything other than a vague homily to a generalizing universal. Privileged disquiet.

Traumatic reaction is not, however, the only form of resistance in Martinique. In a nonatavistic society of this sort three rallying points have grown in strength: relationship with the natural surroundings, the Caribbean; defense of the

*This year (1990) Martinique, which is an underdeveloped country with 40 percent unemployment, consumed 1.3 tons of Iranian caviar (imported from France) and forty million francs' worth of champagne; there are 173,000 cars registered for its 320,000 inhabitants. As the television newscaster, in a felicitous commentary on these figures, said, "We'll do better next year!"

people's language, Creole; protection of the land, by mobilizing everyone. Three modes of existence that challenge the establishment (three cultural reflexes that are not without ambiguity themselves), that do not link, however, the severe demand for specificity to the intolerance of a root but, rather, to an ecological vision of Relation.

Ecology, going above and beyond its concerns with what we call the environment, seems to us to represent mankind's drive to extend to the planet Earth the former sacred thought of Territory. Thus, it has a double orientation: either it can be conceived of as a by-product of this sacred and in this case be experienced as mysticism, or else this extending thought will bear the germ of criticism of territorial thought (of its sacredness and exclusiveness), so that ecology will then act as politics.

The politics of ecology has implications for populations that are decimated or threatened with disappearance as a people. For, far from consenting to sacred intolerance, it is a driving force for the relational interdependence of all lands, of the whole Earth. It is this very interdependence that forms the basis for entitlement. Other factors become null and void.

Concerning the Antilles, for example, there is a lot of discussion concerning the legitimacy of land "possession." According to the mysterious laws of rootedness (of filiation), the only "possessors" of the Archipelago would be the Caribs or their predecessors, who have been exterminated. The restrictive force of the sacred always tends to seek out the first occupants of a territory (those closest to an original "creation"). So, in the Caribbean would this be Caribs and Arawaks or other older and, consequently, more legitimate and "determining" populations? The massacre of the Indians, uprooting the sacred, has already invalidated this futile search. Once that had happened, Antillean soil could not become a territory but, rather, a rhizomed land. Indeed, Martinican soil does not belong as a rooted absolute either to the

descendants of deported Africans or to the *békés* or to the Hindus or to the mulattoes. But the consequences of European expansion (extermination of the Pre-Columbians, importation of new populations) is precisely what forms the basis for a new relationship with the land: not the absolute ontological possession regarded as sacred but the complicity of relation. Those who have endured the land's constraint, who are perhaps mistrustful of it, who have perhaps attempted to escape it to forget their slavery, have also begun to foster these new connections with it, in which the sacred intolerance of the root, with its sectarian exclusiveness, has no longer any share.

Ecological mysticism relies on this intolerance. A reactionary, that is to say infertile, way of thinking about the Earth, it would almost be akin to the "return to the land" championed by Pétain, whose only instinct was to reactivate the forces of tradition and abdication while at the same time appealing to a withdrawal reflex.

In Western countries these two ecological options (political and mystical) come together in action. Still, one cannot ignore the differences that drive them. Not acknowledging these differences in our countries predisposes us in favor of mimetic practices that are either quite simply imported because of the pressures of Western opinion or else the baggage of standardized fashion, such as jogging and hiking.

We end up every time with the following axiom—one not given in advance: Pronouncing one's specificity is not enough if one is to escape the lethal, indistinct confusion of assimilations; this specificity still has to be put into action before consenting to any outcome.

But the axiom, though not *a priori*, is unbending when applied. A perilous equilibrium exists between self-knowledge and another's practice. If we are to renounce intolerances, why hold out against outright consent? And, if we are to follow our freedom to its "logical consequences," why not have the right to confirm it in a radical negation of the Other?

These dilemmas have their own particular areas of application to govern. Such as the need for poor countries to exercise self-sufficiency that is economically and physically sustaining. Such as the definition of how forms of independence are experienced or hoped for. Such as the putting into practice of ethnotechnology as an instrument of self-sufficiency. Never have obligations been so chancy in reality.

To oppose the disturbing affective standardization of peoples, whose affect has been diverted by the processes and products of international exchange, either consented to or imposed, it is necessary to renew the visions and aesthetics of relating to the earth.

But, since sensibilities have already been diverted widely by these processes of exchange, it will not be easy to get anyone to replace products bearing an intense relational charge, such as Coca-Cola, wheat bread, or dairy butter with yams, breadfruit or a revived production of *madou*, *mabi* or any other "local" products. All the more since products of this sort, whose excellence depends on their fragility, do not tend to keep well, which is one of the secrets of large-scale commerce. Standardization of taste is "managed" by the industrial powers.

There are plenty of native Martinicans who will confess that when they were children they used to hate breadfruit (a staple vegetable and, therefore, intimately associated with the idea of poverty and the reality of destitution). Then the reverse has become true with age, especially for those who have lived for a long time away from the island—they have acquired a lasting taste for it. Any survey taken would show the same to be true today for most of the children in Martinique. With a fierce "tchip!" of the lips, children reject even the thought of breadfruit and relish the idea of dried sausage. In countries in which imports reign, childhood is the first deportee.

I made note of someone who, claiming to criticize novelists from Martinique whose vision of reality is expressed in

the poetics of a language irrigated by Creole, spoke disdainfully of “*dachinisme*” (from the word *dachine* [dasheen], or Chinese cabbage, another local vegetable). Thus, the same negativity is used to punish any production that does not consent to international standardization or conform to the generalizing universal.

In rich nations, in which imports are balanced with more or less difficulty by exports and in which, consequently, foreign goods offered for consumption are exchanged more or less indirectly against local production, it is easier to maintain equilibrium between the levels. The international product has a less severe impact on sensibilities; “desire” for it is not so implacable.

In poor countries any appeal for self-sufficiency grounded solely in economics and good sense is doomed to failure. Good sense is of no consequence in the tangle of world Relation. Sensibilities have become so profoundly contaminated, in most cases, and the habit of material comfort is so well established, even in the midst of the greatest poverty, that political dictates or proclamations are inadequate remedies. Here, as elsewhere, one must figure out how much we have to consent to the planetary evolution toward standardization of consumer products (the present course in Martinique, with French products widely imported) and how much we should push for invention and a new sensibility in association with “national” products.

This is where the imagination and expression of an aesthetics of the earth—freed from quaint naïveté, to rhizome instead throughout our cultures’ understanding—become indispensable.

It is certainly true that we do not work the land, are no longer the country people we used to be, with our same old instinctive patience. Too many international parameters come into this relationship. A man involved in agriculture is inevitably a man involved in culture: he can no longer produce innocently.

Daily we hear about how occupations connected with the land are among the sorriest that exist. The farmer's traditional solitude has become exacerbated by the embarrassed thought that his work is anachronistic, in developed countries, or pathetic, in poor countries. In the former he struggles against productivity, taxes, markets, and surplus; in the latter against dust, the lack of tools, epidemics, and shortages. Both here and there the display of technological wealth overwhelms him. It would be obnoxious to indulge in idiotic praise of the peasantry when it is going downhill this way everywhere. Will it die, or will it be transformed into a reserve labor force for advanced techniques?

It is said—a commonplace—that the future of humanity is at stake, unless, before extinction, such techniques make possible the massive production of artificial foods that would take care of the richest. Picture an uncultivated land when the factories producing synthetics have provided enough for the stomachs of the chosen few. It would only be used for leisure, for a kind of Voyage in which seeking and knowledge would have no place at all. It would become scenery. That is what would happen to our countries, since it is entirely possible that the aforesaid factories would never be located in them (unless they are really responsible for producing too much waste). We would inhabit Museums of Natural Non-History. Reactivating an aesthetics of the earth will perhaps help differ this nightmare, air-conditioned or not.

This trend toward international standardization of consumption will not be reversed unless we make drastic changes in the diverse sensibilities of communities by putting forward the prospect—or at least the possibility—of this revived aesthetic connection with the earth.

How can such a poetics be resuscitated, when its mind-set drifts between the obsolete mysticism that we noted and the mockery of production that is emerging everywhere? An aesthetics of the earth seems, as always, anachronistic or naive: reactionary or sterile.

But we must get beyond this seemingly impossible task. If we don't, all the prestige (and denaturation) felt in internationally standardized consumption will triumph permanently over the pleasure of consuming one's own product. The problem is that these denaturations create imbalance and dry things up. Understood in its full-sense, passion for the land where one lives is a start, an action we must endlessly risk.

An aesthetics of the earth? In the half-starved dust of Africas? In the mud of flooded Asias? In epidemics, masked forms of exploitation, flies buzz-bombing the skeleton skins of children? In the frozen silence of the Andes? In the rains uprooting *favelas* and shantytowns? In the scrub and scree of Bantu lands? In flowers encircling necks and ukuleles? In mud huts crowning goldmines? In city sewers? In haggard aboriginal wind? In red-light districts? In drunken indiscriminate consumption? In the noose? The cabin? Night with no candle?

Yes. But an aesthetics of disruption and intrusion. Finding the fever of passion for the ideas of "environment" (which I call surroundings) and "ecology," both apparently such futile notions in these landscapes of desolation. Imagining the idea of love of the earth—so ridiculously inadequate or else frequently the basis for such sectarian intolerance—with all the strength of charcoal fires or sweet syrup.

Aesthetics of rupture and connection.

Because that is the crux of it, and almost everything is said in pointing out that under no circumstances could it ever be a question of transforming land into territory again. Territory is the basis for conquest. Territory requires that filiation be planted and legitimated. Territory is defined by its limits, and they must be expanded. A land henceforth has no limits. That is the reason it is worth defending against every form of alienation.

Aesthetics of a variable continuum, of an invariant discontinuum.

Self-sufficiency can be worked out. With the sole condition that it not end up in the exclusivity of territory. A necessary condition but not enough to incite the radicalities capable of saving us from ambiguity, rallied together within a landscape—reforming our taste, without our having to force ourselves into it.

Thus, within the pitiless panorama of the worldwide commercial market, we debate our problems. No matter where you are or what government brings you together into a community, the forces of this market are going to find you. If there is profit to be made, they will deal with you. These are not vague forces that you might accommodate out of politeness; these are hidden forces of inexorable logic that must be answered with the total logic of your behavior. For example, one could not accept state assistance and at the same time pretend to oppose it. You must choose your bearing. And, to get back to the question raised earlier, simply consenting would not be worth it, in any case. Contradiction would knot the community (which ceases to be one) with impossibilities, profoundly destabilizing it. The entire country would become a Plantation, believing it operates with freedom of decision but, in fact, being outer directed. The exchange of goods (in this case in Martinique: the exchange of imported public money against exported private profit) is the rule. Bustling commerce only confirms the fragmentation and opposition to change. Minds get used up in this superficial comfort, which has cost them an unconscious, enervating braining.

This is the dilemma to be resolved. We have learned that peremptory declarations, grounded in the old Manichaeism of liberation, are of no use here, because they only contribute to reinforcing a stereotypical language with no hold in reality. These are all liabilities whose dialectics must first be either realized or bypassed.

Thinking, for example, that ethnotechnology would save us from excessive importation, protect the vivid physical quality of the country, find an equilibrium for our drive to con-

sume, and cement links among all the individuals concerned with producing and creating amounts to saying that we would return to a pretechnical, artisan level, elevated to the rank of a system, leaving it to others to take care of providing us with the spin-off from their dizzying experiments, making us admire from afar the achievements of their science, and renting us (but under what conditions) the fruits of their industry. Have something to exchange that isn't just sand and coconut trees but, instead, the result of our creative activity. Integrate what we have, even if it is sea and sun, with the adventure of a culture that is ours to share and for which we take responsibility.

There is no value to practicing self-sufficiency, or consenting to interdependence, or mastering ethnotechnology, unless these processes constitute both distancings from and accord with (and in relation to) their referent: the multiform elsewhere always set forth as a monolithic necessity in any country that is dominated.

We struggle against our problems, without knowing that throughout the world they are widespread. There is no place that does not have its elsewhere. No place where this is not an essential dilemma. No place where it is not necessary to come as close as possible to figuring out this dialectic of interdependencies or this difficult necessity for ethnotechniques.

The massive and diffracted confluence of cultures thus makes every distancing (from a suggested or imposed pre-norm) be determinant but also makes every (self-)determination be a generative distancing.

Now let us try to summarize the things we don't yet know, the things we have no current means of knowing, concerning all the singularities, all the trajectories, all the histories, all the forms of denaturation, and all the syntheses that are at work or that have resulted from our confluences. How have cultures—Chinese or Basque, Indian or Inuit, Polynesian or Alpine—made their way to us, and how have we reached them? What remains to us of all the vanished cultures, col-

lapsed or exterminated, and in what form? What is our experience, even now, of the pressure of dominant cultures? Through what fantastic accumulations of how many existences, both individual and collective? Let us try to calculate the result of all that. We will be incapable of doing so. Our experience of this confluence will forever be only one part of its totality.

No matter how many studies and references we accumulate (though it is our profession to carry out such things), we will never reach the end of such a volume; knowing this in advance makes it possible for us to dwell there. Not knowing this totality is not a weakness. Not wanting to know it certainly is. Consequently, we imagine it through a poetics: this imaginary realm provides the full-sense of all these always decisive differentiations. A lack of this poetics, its absence or its negation, would constitute a failing.*

Similarly, thought of the Other is sterile without the other of Thought.

Thought of the Other is the moral generosity disposing me to accept the principle of alterity, to conceive of the world as not simple and straightforward, with only one truth—mine. But thought of the Other can dwell within me without making me alter course, without “prizing me open,” without changing me within myself. An ethical principle, it is enough that I not violate it.

The other of Thought is precisely this altering. Then I have to act. That is the moment I change my thought, without renouncing its contribution. I change, and I exchange.

*I see the extent to which this imaginary appears to me to have a certain form in space: I spoke of circularity (imitating, perhaps, those curvatures of space-time that Einstein invented) and of volume, the spherical nature of concepts, of various poetics and the realities of the *chaos-monde*, all of which reconstitutes (for me) the image of the mother planet, an Earth that would be primordial. But mothering is excluded from this symbolic system—at least, I believe that it is. As well as the idea (so dear to Aristotle and Ptolemy) of a perfection in circularity.

This is an aesthetics of turbulence whose corresponding ethics is not provided in advance.

If, thus, we allow that an aesthetics is an art of conceiving, imagining, and acting, the other of Thought is the aesthetics implemented by me and by you to join the dynamics to which we are to contribute. This is the part fallen to me in an aesthetics of chaos, the work I am to undertake, the road I am to travel. Thought of the Other is occasionally presupposed by dominant populations, but with an utterly sovereign power, or proposed until it hurts by those under them, who set themselves free. The other of Thought is always set in motion by its confluences as a whole, in which each is changed by and changes the other.

Common sense tells us that the world through which we move is so profoundly disturbed (most would call it crazy) and has such direct repercussions on each one of us that some are obliged to exist in absolute misery and others in a sort of generalized suspension. We line one day up after the other, day after day, as if the world did not exist, though daily it seeks us out with such violence. Yes, we act as if. For if we stopped to think about it really we would let everything go. A commonplace—one I have heard so often repeated.

To suspend the suspense we have recourse to this imaginary construct of totality, by means of which we transmute for ourselves this mad state of the world into a chaos that we are able to contemplate. An imaginary rekindled by the other of Thought. A distancing in relation to the predetermined or imposed norm but also perhaps in relation to the norms or beliefs that we have passively inherited. How can we put this distancing into practice if we have not fully mastered beforehand the things that are ours or part of us? Dependencies are infirmities of Relation, obstacles to the hard work of its entanglement. Independencies, for the same reasons, despite being uncomfortable or precarious, are always worth something.

The suffering of human cultures does not confine us permanently within a mute actuality, mere presence grievously closed. Sometimes this suffering authorizes an absence that constitutes release, soaring over: thought rising from the prisms of poverty, unfurling its own opaque violence, that gives-on-and-with every violence of contact between cultures. The most peaceful thought is, thus, in its turn a violence, when it imagines the risky processes of Relation yet nonetheless avoids the always comfortable trap of generalization. This antiviolence violence is no trivial thing; it is opening and creation. It adds a full-sense to the operative violence of those on the margins, the rebels, the deviants, all specialists in distancing.

The marginal and the deviant sense in advance the shock of cultures; they live its future excess. The rebel paves the way for such a shock, or at least its legibility, by refusing to be cramped by any tradition at all, even when the force of his rebellion comes from the defense of a tradition that is ridiculed or oppressed by another tradition that simply has more powerful means of action. The rebel defends his right to do his own surpassing; the lives of marginal and deviant persons take this right to extremes.

We have not yet begun to imagine or figure out the results of all the distancings that are determinant. They have emerged from everywhere, bearing every tradition and the surpassing of them all, in a confluence that does away with trajectories (itineraries), all the while realizing them in the end.

Though the cultural contacts of the moment are terrifyingly "immediate," another vast expanse of time looms before us, nonetheless: it is what will be necessary to counterbalance specific situations, to defuse oppressions, to assemble the poetics. This time to come seems as infinite as galactic spaces.

Meanwhile, contemporary violence is one of the logics—organic—of the turbulence of the *chaos-monde*. This violence

is what instinctively opposes any thought intending to make this chaos monolithic, grasping it to control it.

Distancings are necessary to Relation and depend on it: like the coexistence of sea olive and manchineel.

In the first place, for labor power to be reproduced in the form of children, these children must be coerced into accepting discipline and especially the discipline of working, of being exploited in order to be able to eat. In addition, however, they must be disciplined and trained to perform a certain kind of work. The labor that capital wants done is divided and each category parceled out internationally as the life work, the destiny, the identity of specific sets of workers. The phrase often used to describe this is the international division of labor. We will say more of this later, but for now let the West Indian mother of a seven-year-old sum up her son's education with precision: "They're choosing the street sweepers now."

Those of us in the feminist movement who have torn the final veil away from this international capitalist division of labor to expose women's and children's *class* position, which was hidden by the particularity of their *caste* position, learnt a good deal of this from the Black movement. It is not that it is written down anywhere (though we discovered later it was, in what would seem to some a strange place). A mass movement teaches less by what it says than by the power it exercises which, clearing away the debris of appearances, tells it like it is.

Just as the women's movement being "for" women and the rebellion of children being "for" children, appears at first not to be about class:

The Black movement in the United States (and elsewhere) also began by adopting what appeared to be only a caste position in opposition to the racism of white male-dominated groups. Intellectuals in Harlem and Malcolm X, that great revolutionary, were both nationalists; both appeared to place color above class when the white Left were still chanting variations of "Black and white unite and fight," or "Negroes and Labor must join together." The Black working class were able through this nationalism to *redefine class*: overwhelmingly Black and Labor were synonymous (with no other group was Labor as synonymous—except perhaps with women), the demands of Blacks and the forms of struggle created by Blacks were the most comprehensive *working-class* struggle.

It is not then that the Black movement "wandered off into the class struggle," as Avis says. It *was* the class struggle and this took a while to sink into our consciousness. Why?

One reason is because some of us wore the blinkers of the white male Left, whether we knew it or not. According to them, if the struggle's not in the factory, it's not the *class* struggle. The real bind was that this Left assured us they spoke in the name of Marxism. They threatened that if we broke from them, organizationally or politically, we were breaking with Marx and scientific socialism. What gave us the boldness to break, fearless of the consequences, was the power of the Black movement. We found that redefining class went hand-in-hand with rediscovering a Marx

There were deeper reasons too why caste and class seemed contradictory. It appears often that the interests of Blacks are contradicted by the interests of whites, and it is similar with men and women. To grasp the *class* interest when there seems not one but two, three, four, each contradicting the other, seems to be one of the most difficult tasks that confront us in both theory and practice.

Another source of confusion is that not all women, children or Black men are working class. This is only to say that within the movements which these form are layers whose struggle tends to be aimed at moving up in the capitalist hierarchy rather than at destroying it. And so within each movement there is a struggle about which class interest the movement will serve. But this is the history also of white male workers' movements. There is no class "purity," not even in shop floor organizations. The struggle by workers *against* organizations they formed there and in the society generally—trade unions, labor parties, etc.—is the class struggle.

Let's put the relation of caste to class another way. The word "culture" is often used to show that class concepts are narrow, philistine, inhuman. Exactly the opposite is the case. A national culture that has evolved over decades or centuries may appear to deny that society's relation to international capitalism. It is a subject too wide to go into deeply here but one basic point can be quickly clarified.

The life-style unique to themselves that a people develop once they are enmeshed by capitalism, in response to and in rebellion against it, cannot be understood at all except as the totality of their capitalist lives. To delimit culture is to reduce it to a decoration of daily life.² Culture is plays and poetry about the exploited; ceasing to wear miniskirts and taking to trousers instead; the clash between the soul of Black Baptism and the guilt and sin of white Protestantism. Culture is also the shrill of the alarm clock that rings at 6 a.m. when a Black woman in London wakes her children to get them ready for the baby-minder. Culture is how cold she feels at the bus stop and then how hot in the crowded bus. Culture is how you feel on Monday morning at eight when you clock in, wishing it was Friday, wishing your life away. Culture is the speed of the line or the weight and smell of dirty hospital sheets, and you meanwhile thinking what to make for tea that night. Culture is making the tea while your man watches the news on the telly.

And culture is an "irrational woman" walking out of the kitchen into the sitting room and without a word turning off the telly "for no reason at all."

From where does this culture spring which is so different from a man's if you are a woman and different too from a white woman's if you are a Black woman? Is it auxiliary to the class struggle (as the white Left has it) or is it more fundamental than the class struggle (as Black nationalists and radical feminists have it) because it

2 For the best demystification of culture I know which shows, for example, how West Indian cricket has carried in its heart racial and class conflicts, see CLR James, *Beyond a Boundary* (London: Hutchinson, 1963).

is special to your sex, your race, your age, your nationality, and the moment in time when you are these things?

Our identity, our social roles, the way we are seen, appear to be disconnected from our capitalist functions. To be liberated from them (or through them) appears to be independent of our liberation from capitalist wage slavery. In my view, identity—caste—is the very substance of class.

Here is the “strange place” where we found the key to the relation of class to caste written down most succinctly. Here is where the international division of labor is posed as power relations within the working class. It is Volume 1 of Marx’s *Capital*: “Manufacture...develops a hierarchy of labor powers, to which there corresponds a scale of wages. If, on the one hand, the individual laborers are appropriated and annexed for life by a limited function; on the other hand, the various operations of the hierarchy are parceled out among the laborers according to both their natural and their acquired capabilities” (Moscow 1958, 349).

In two sentences is laid out the deep material connection between racism, sexism, national chauvinism and the chauvinism of the generations who are working for wages against children and pensioners who are wageless, who are “dependents.”

A hierarchy of labor powers and a scale of wages to correspond. Racism and sexism training us to develop and acquire certain capabilities at the expense of all others. Then these acquired capabilities are taken to be our nature, fixing our functions for life, and fixing also the quality of our mutual relations. So planting cane or tea is not a job for white people and changing nappies is not a job for men and beating children is not violence. Race, sex, age, nation, each an indispensable element of the international division of labor. *Our feminism bases itself on a hitherto invisible stratum of the hierarchy of labor powers—the housewife—to which there corresponds no wage at all.*

To proceed on the basis of a hierarchical structure among waged and unwaged slavery is not, as Avis accuses the working class of doing: “concentrating...exclusively on the economic determinants of the class struggle.” The work you do and the wages you receive are not merely “economic” but social determinants, determinants of social power. It is not the working class but organizations which claim to be of and for that class which reduce the continual struggle for social power by that class into “economic determinants”—greater capitalist control for a pittance more a week. Wage rises that unions negotiate often turn out to be wage standstills or even cuts, either through inflation or through more intense exploitation (often in the form of productivity deals) which more than pay the capitalist back for the rise. And so people assume that this was the intention of workers in demanding, for example, more wages, more money, more “universal social power,” in the words of Marx.

The power relations of the sexes, races, nations, and generations are precisely, then, particularized forms of class relations. These power relations within the working class

weaken us in the power struggle between the classes. They are the particularized forms of indirect rule, one section of the class colonizing another and through this capital imposing its will on us all. One of the reasons why these so-called working-class organizations have been able so to mediate the struggle is that we have, internationally, allowed them to isolate “the working class,” which they identify as white, male and over twenty-one, from the rest of us. The unskilled white male worker, an exploited human being who is increasingly disconnected from capital’s perspective for him to work, to vote, to participate in its society, he also, racist and sexist though he may be, recognizes himself as the victim of these organizations. But housewives, Black people, young people, workers from the Third World, excluded from the definition of class, have been told that their confrontation with the white male power structure in the metropolis is an “exotic historical accident.” Divided by the capitalist organization of society into factory, office, school, plantation, home, and street, we are divided too by the very institutions which claim to represent our struggle collectively as a class.

In the metropolis, the Black movement was the first section of the class massively to take its autonomy from these organizations, and to break out of the containment of the struggle only in the factory. When Black workers burn the center of a city, however, white Left eyes, especially if they are trade union eyes, see race, not class.

The women’s movement was the next major movement of the class in the metropolis to find for itself a power base outside the factory as well as in it. Like the Black movement before it, to be organizationally autonomous of capital and its institutions, women and their movement had also to be autonomous of that part of the “hierarchy of labor powers” which capital used specifically against them. For Blacks it was whites. For women it was men. For Black women it is both.

Strange to think that even today, when confronted with the autonomy of the Black movement or the autonomy of the women’s movement, there are those who talk about this “dividing the working class.” Strange indeed when our experience has told us that in order for the working class to unite in spite of the divisions which are inherent in its very structure—factory versus plantation versus home versus school—those at the lowest levels of the hierarchy must themselves find the key to their weakness, must themselves find the strategy which will attack the point and shatter it, must themselves find their own modes of struggle.

The Black movement has not in our view “integrated into capitalism’s plural society” (though many of its “leaders” have); it has not been subsumed to white working-class strategy.” (Here I think Avis is confusing white working-class *struggle* with trade union/Labour Party *strategy*. They are mortal enemies, yet they are often taken as identical.) The Black movement has, on the contrary, in the United States challenged and continues to challenge the most powerful capitalist State in the world. The most powerful at home and abroad. When it burnt down the centers of those cities and

challenged all constituted authority, it made a way for the rest of the working class everywhere to move in its own specific interests. We women moved. This is neither an accident nor the first time events have happened in this sequence.

It is not an accident because when constituted power was confronted, a new possibility opened for all women. For example, the daughters of men to whom was delegated some of this power saw through the noble mask of education, medicine and the law for which their mothers had sacrificed their lives. Oh yes, marriage to a man with a good salary would be rewarded by a fine house to be imprisoned in, and even a Black servant; they would have privilege for as long as they were attached to that salary which was not their own. But power would remain in the hands of the white male power structure. They had to renounce the privilege even to strike out for power. Many did. On the tide of working-class power, which the Black movement had expressed in the streets, and all women expressed in the day-to-day rebellion in the home, the women's movement came into being.

It is not the first time either that a women's movement received its impetus from the exercise of power by Black people. The Black slave who formed the Abolitionist Movement and organized the Underground Railroad for the escape to the North also gave white women—and again the more privileged of them—a chance, an occasion to transcend the limitations in which the female personality was imprisoned. Women, trained always to do for others, left their homes not to free themselves—that would have been outrageous—but to free “the slave.” They were encouraged by Black women, ex-slaves like Sojourner Truth, who suffered as the breeders of labor power on the plantation. But once those white women had taken their first decisive step out of the feminine mould, they confronted more sharply their own situation. They had to defend their right, as women, to speak in public against slavery. They were refused, for example, seating at the Abolitionist conference of 1840 in London because they were women. By 1848 at Seneca Falls, New York, they called their own conference, for women's rights. There was a male speaker. He was a leading Abolitionist. He was Black. He had been a slave. His name was Frederick Douglass.

And when young white women headed South on the Freedom Ride buses in the early 1960s and discovered that their male (white and Black) comrades had a special place for them in the hierarchy of struggle, as capital had in the hierarchy of labor power, history repeated itself—almost. This time it was not for the vote but for a very different goal that they formed a movement. It was a movement for liberation.

The parallels that are drawn between the Black and women's movements can always turn into an *11-plus*—a competition over who is more exploited. Our purpose here is not parallels. We are seeking to describe that complex interweaving of forces which is the working class; we are seeking to break down the power relations among us, on which is based the hierarchical rule of international capital. For men cannot

represent us as women any more than whites can represent the Black experience. Nor do we seek to convince men of our feminism. Ultimately they will be “convinced” by our power. We offer them what we offer the most privileged women: power over their enemies. The price is an end to their power over us.

The strategy of feminist class struggle is, as we have said, based on the unwaged woman in the home. Whether she also works for wages outside the home, her labor of producing and reproducing the working class weighs her down, weakens her capacity to struggle—she doesn’t even have time. Her position in the wage structure is low especially but not only if she is Black. And even if she is relatively well placed in the hierarchy of labor powers (rare enough!), she remains defined as a sexual object of men. Why? Because as long as most women are housewives part of whose function in reproducing labor power is to be the sexual object of men, no woman can escape that identity. We demand wages for the work we do in the home. And that demand for a wage from the State is, first, a demand to be autonomous of men on whom we are now dependent. Secondly, we demand money without working out of the home, and open for the first time the possibility of refusing forced labor both in waged work and in the home itself.

It is here in this strategy that the lines between the revolutionary Black and the revolutionary feminist movements begin to blur. This perspective is founded on the least powerful—the unwaged. Reinforcing capital’s international division of labor is a standing army of unemployed who can be shunted from industry to industry, from country to country. The Third World is the most massive repository of this industrial reserve army. (The second most massive is the kitchen in the metropolis.) Port of Spain, Calcutta, Algiers, the Mexican towns south of the U.S. border are the labor power for shit work in Paris, London, Frankfurt, and the farms of California and Florida. What is their role in the revolution? How can the unwaged struggle without the lever of the wage and the factory? We do not pose the answers—we can’t. But we pose the questions in a way that assumes that the unemployed have not to go to work in order to subvert capitalist society.

Housewives *working* in the home without a pay packet may also have a job outside of their homes. The subordination to the wage of the man in the home and the subordinating nature of that labor weaken the woman wherever else she is working, and regardless of race. Here is the basis for Black and white women to act together, “supported” or “unsupported,” not because the antagonism of race is overcome, but because we both need the autonomy that the wage and *the struggle for the wage* can bring. Black women will know in what organizations (with Black men, with white women, *with both, with neither*) to make that struggle. *No one else can know.*

We don’t agree with Avis that “the Black American struggle failed to fulfill its potential as a revolutionary vanguard,” if by “vanguard” is meant the basic propellant of class struggle at a particular moment in time. It *has* used the “specificity of

its experience—both as a nation and as a class at once—to redefine class and the class struggle itself.” Perhaps the theoreticians have not, but then they must never be confused with the movement. Only as a vanguard could that struggle have begun to clarify the central problem of our age: the organizational unity of the working class internationally as we now perceive and define it.

It has been widely presumed that the Vanguard Party on the Leninist model embodies that organizational unity. Since the Leninist model assumes a vanguard expressing the total class interest, it bears no relation to the reality we have been describing, where no one section of the class can express the experience and interest of, and pursue the struggle for, any other section. The formal organizational expression of a general class strategy does not yet anywhere exist.

Let me quote finally from a letter we wrote against one of the organizations of the Italian extraparlimentary Left which, when we had a feminist symposium in Rome last year and excluded men, called us fascists, and attacked us physically:

The traditional attack on the immigrant worker, especially but not exclusively if he or she is Black (or Southern Italian), is that her presence threatens the gains of the native working class. Exactly the same is said about women in relation to men. The anti-racist (i.e. anti-nationalist and anti-sexist) point of view—the point of view, that is, of struggle—is to discover the organizational weakness which permits the most powerful sections of the class to be divided from the less powerful, thereby allowing capital to play on this division, defeating us. The question is, in fact, one of the basic questions which the class faces today. Where Lenin divided the class between the advanced and the backward, a subjective division, we see the division along the lines of capitalist organization, the more powerful and the less powerful. It is the experience of the less powerful that when workers in a stronger position (that is, men with a wage in relation to women without one, or whites with a higher wage than Blacks) gain a “victory,” it may not be a victory for the weaker and may even represent a *defeat for both*. For in the disparity of power within the class is precisely the strength of capital.³

How the working class will ultimately unite organizationally, we don’t know. We do know that up to now many of us have been told to forget our own needs in some wider interest which was never wide enough to include us. And so we have learnt by bitter experience that *nothing unified and revolutionary will be formed until each section of the exploited will have made its own autonomous power felt*.

Power to the sisters and therefore to the class.

3 Signed by Lotta Femminista and the International Feminist Collective, reprinted in *L’Offensiva* (Turin: Musolini, 1972), 18–19.

Postscript

The first paragraph of *Sex, Race, and Class* promises to “show in barest outline [that]... locked within the contradiction between the discrete entity of sex or race and the totality of class is the greatest deterrent to working-class power and at the same time the creative energy to achieve that power.” But the pamphlet fails to deliver on this promise to show where the “creative energy to achieve [working-class] power” is to come from. This omission has bothered me for years, so I try to address that here.

We are deprived of enormous energy by the divisions among us. We are so used to the disparities of power and antagonisms among us—sex, race, age, occupation, immigration status, disability, sexual orientation, etc.—that we are not aware of how much our focus and energy go into defending ourselves from being attacked or demeaned through these divisions; and protecting ourselves from being pushed further down the hierarchy by competitors from below or the abuse of power from above. As we overcome, by our struggle, the competition, antagonism, and even violence among us, we liberate energy and focus.

We have already experienced, if only briefly, that when sectors which are ordinarily antagonistic surmount the divisions and act together, we feel elated and many times more powerful, because we are doing less of the soul-destroying and exhausting work of defending ourselves from other sectors. Winning even a temporary taste of unity, makes us more hopeful and confident and powerful.

Thus breaking down the divisions creates an individual and collective force that is no longer inhibited by fear and discouragement, and unlocks our creative capacity to see what is possible, identifying and facing what we need and are deprived of; drawing out the connections with the needs of others; and conceiving of the possibility, even certainty, of winning. That is what a revolution is, which many of us have glimpsed during collective confrontations, but which is rarely mentioned let alone seriously discussed.

Marx described the revolution as the “carnival of the masses”—when those of us whose lives are full of pain on many levels begin to fully enjoy ourselves by individually and collectively taking the enemy on.

If the divisions among us keep capital in power, then overcoming the divisions among us is by definition the destruction of capital, and the transformation of us individually but on a mass scale.

Who do we become when we have by our own effort stopped directing our energy against each other and direct it instead to collectively confronting anything or anyone standing in the way of our freely associating with each other to reshape the world? This is what we thirst to find out.

WAGELESS OF THE WORLD (1975)

The *Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* was published in Mexico in 1975 with the following introduction:

The problem of the revolution is the unity of the working class internationally. The working class is divided by the power of those whose work is waged (men) over those whose work is unwaged (women). But the hierarchy within the working class is by no means confined to the power of men, identified with the wage, over women, identified by wageless and therefore invisible work. There is also the power of the waged worker in the metropolis over the unwaged worker in the Third World. Both are fundamental to the capitalist division of labor nationally and internationally.

In other writing, developing a paragraph of Marx, we approached the hierarchy within the working class this way:

A hierarchy of labor powers and a scale of wages to correspond. Racism and sexism training us to acquire and develop certain capabilities at the expense of all others. Then these acquired capabilities are taken to be our nature and fix our functions for life, and fix also the quality of our mutual relations. So planting cane or tea is not a job for white people and changing nappies is not a job for men and beating children is not violence. Race, sex, age, nation, each an indispensable element of the international division of labor. *Our feminism bases itself on a hitherto*

*invisible stratum of the hierarchy of labor powers—the housewife—to which there corresponds no wage at all.*¹

So that beginning with the wageless work of the housewife, we found ourselves redefining the class struggle in international terms, and most particularly redefining the relation between the working class in the metropolis and the working class in areas of technological underdevelopment. Wageless workers on the land, low-waged workers in the industrial interstices, even lower waged workers in the kitchens of the salaried and the wealthy of the Third World, are divided by power—not by class—from the working class in the metropolis.

Let us demystify not only what divides us as women, but what is the material basis of our unification.

First, where there is a wage the domination of the wage of the man over the woman is international. The reproduction of workers for mines, mills or factories is the product of unwaged female labor everywhere. Each situation of course is unique. In some parts of Africa it is often in the extended tribal family where women perform this unwaged labor for capital. In Zambia, the copper mines are magnanimously and increasingly surrounded by company housing of two- and three-room bungalows. The same in industrial Mexico City: the family is nuclearized and deculturized at one architectural stroke. How efficient to have workers used up daily and reproduced on the spot by other workers (of another sex)! And we are expected to be grateful that government or industry provides us with housing—*our* factories, for which we even pay rent. Again, in Caracas, where the technology to which the oil worker must submit is extremely high, oil production is absolutely dependent on female domestic labor. The following book attempts to show why there is this great discrepancy between the technology of extracting and refining oil and that of extracting and refining oil workers. It shows how the wife of the oil worker is as productive as he is because she daily “directly produces, trains, develops, maintains [and] reproduces labor power itself.”² These questions, while not the same, are similar to those about the discrepancy between Third World and metropolitan technology in general, and about *who on an international level is productive*.

Second, in most of the world, side by side with women’s reproduction of others’ labor power when it is daily destroyed on the land, is the use and destruction of women’s own labor power on the land. Often it is not through the wage of the man and the woman’s lack of it that her labor is commanded, but *a patriarchal structure that predates capitalist society*. That structure may not yet have undergone *the capitalist reorganization*

1 See the previous essay, page 96.

2 “Productive labor would therefore be such labor as produces commodities or directly produces, trains, develops, maintains or reproduces labor power itself.” Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1969), 172.

of the patriarchy: the patriarchy of the power of the wage. Nevertheless it is *the wage relation internationally* which is commanding the two forms of labor: the reproduction of labor power for the land and the production of the commodities which that land will produce. *In the same way as the proletarian character of the laborer in the home is hidden by the lack of a wage, so the proletarian character of the laborer on the land, "the peasant," land-owning or landless, is hidden by the wagelessness of that labor.*

The majority of Latin American women are either Indian or of Indian extraction, existing on subsistence agriculture and doing a double load of unwaged labor: both as *jornaleras* (day workers), *minifundistas* (smallholders) or *ejiditarias* (collective farm workers), and as housewives. The unit of production is the family. Women's work in the home, where they transform primary materials into the few consumer goods of food and clothing, is a fundamental aspect of the production of that family unit.

Even where there is payment in the form of a wage (to *los jornaleros*) or in the form of payment for sale of crops, it is the man who probably receives it. Women and children who work alongside him work for capital through his command. But at least the work of women and children is undisguised; it is recognized as work. Which is more than can be said for the urban housewife who is directly dominated by the wage; her housework, being unwaged, is not considered work at all.

So it is that capital has seized on every mode of production, and on the "train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions" which spring from these modes, to exploit all those temporarily trapped in them; and reinforces that exploitation by the prejudices and opinions they generate, from which women suffer most and *in a most specific manner*. To obscure and thus ignore the specific nature of the exploitation of women (and children), and the specific and autonomous nature of the struggles this *must* produce, with the blackmail of universal poverty or universal repression, is to resort to a moralism which in fact is a political attack on the least powerful—and therefore of course on the poorest and most repressed. And when the least powerful are attacked, all the forces of subversion are weakened.

It is impossible to speak of the relation of women to capital *anywhere* without at the same time confronting the question of development versus underdevelopment. It is even more unavoidable when it is women of the Third World of whom we speak, since their situation cannot be wrested from the general context of predominant underdevelopment; rather they are a honed edge with which to approach the Gordian Knot that confronts *all* working-class struggle in the Third World.

Working for Capital

The tendency has been to subsume all those who are not city proletarians under the term "peasant." Once we assume that the basic division within the working class internationally is between the waged and wageless, and that *to be wageless is not necessarily*

to be outside of the capitalist wage relation, every mode of labor which exists today must be reexamined to determine the social relation which it reproduces: whether there is surplus labor, if that surplus labor is stolen (appropriated by someone other than the laborer), and if so, by whom—in other words, whether and where capital has transformed precapitalist modes of labor into modes of its own self-expansion. Even the subsistence farming family of Mexico, for example, which produces no material surplus may be working usefully for capital; *braceras* and *braceros* provide a cheap and intimidated reserve army of labor, particularly for the farms of California and Texas.³ Women on that “unproductive” subsistence farm, with our unending work, have produced that army of labor.

Where our product, labor power, is “overpopulating”—that is, where it is rebellious and refusing quietly to starve—the State in the unarmed form of Rockefeller Foundations or the armed form of native or foreign troops and “expeditions” is seeking to “regulate our productivity.” Women all over the world are repudiating these controls over our reproductive function, controls which range from mass sterilization to mass genocide of those already born, by planned famines and other more scientific techniques.

Increasingly and in every situation internationally we are demanding the right to have children whose birth is not our agony physically, socially, financially; and the right not to have them if we so desire. Birth control campaigns vulgarly reflect the immediate and long-term brutal interests of the State. In its propaganda, by painting us as victims who don’t ourselves know what is good for us, our interests become the excuse to perpetrate its interests against us. The starvation that it organizes or at best allows is blamed on our fertility. We refuse any longer to be reproductive machines to be turned on or off as production plans alter. Having or not having children must be our choice and integral to our individual and social development.

But this is already to demand more than any political parties have ever assumed we in the Third World felt the need to have. We feel many needs because we have learnt many things even when they thought they were teaching us quite different lessons.

In a Mexican village one family may invest in a television. Other families around must pay to see it—must find the money to pay to see it, must find the job or grow the crop or make the struggle for the wage without the work, which will yield the money to

3 The American State’s intimidation of these workers (traditionally with the help of armed vigilantes, official and unofficial) is posed as a protection for native American workers. To its joy, a trade union with membership overwhelmingly of Americans of *bracero* descent has supported the recent clampdown on immigration from Mexico. Which of course only means that the wages of the “illegal” entrant can be even lower. See the *New York Times*, December 2, 1974, “Ruling on Mexican Aliens Stirs Chicanos’ Job Fears.” Working-class organization, which is confined to national borders and to the trade unionist struggle for jobs always results in our scabbing on each other.

pay to see it. Or reappropriate another just like it or bigger—that is, make a struggle for *the wage without the work* in a way which bypasses the money form.

Once we have seen it, or heard the grating sounds of the inexpensive model of transistor radio in the village or in the field, that person, that family, that community, has stepped beyond any definition of itself as “peasant.” When the woman from an area of underdevelopment in the heart of Europe, such as a village in Spain, sees a Hollywood film, the plot is secondary to the technology of the North American kitchen (which, nevertheless, is still the North American *woman’s* place). So we are ready to demand in Mexico, Tanzania, India, and Spain all of the wealth that exists but of which we have been deprived. For on the media they tell us about or even show us all the products of technology which Third World peoples are denied. They have sent the media to give one message, but we have absorbed quite another. For we have come to the media with a mind crammed with the refusal of the bitterness of our experience. That media presents a picture, however distorted, of a whole world which peasants of Lenin’s day or of Zapata’s never knew existed. It pictures a range of goods and therefore a range of possibilities which *nobody* of Lenin’s day or of Zapata’s knew since they didn’t exist *anywhere*. Our experiences as exploited women, urban or rural, Third World or metropolitan, are unique in each case. *Our needs and our desires are increasingly international and universal*: to be free, to be free of the labor that has worn us down over centuries, to be free of domination and dependence on men. We repudiate the assumption that we who are not socialized, collectivized, unionized, are the “backward ones.” The backward technology with which they have burdened us is no measure of our own aspirations. And that is our dilemma.

Many well-meaning North Americans who returned from Cuba, having cut their six weeks of cane in the Venceremos brigades, may glorify cane-cutting as once Communist Party visitors to Russia glorified forced collectivization. But who wants to cut cane all their lives? Who wants to do the cooking, washing, child care, when they get home from a day in the fields? Not those who returned after six weeks. What we need instead of the labor is wages, beginning with wages for the work we women have always done without a wage, whether we cook by charcoal or by gas, whether we wash clothes by the river bank, in tubs or in machines. It is our time, our energy, our lives. It is time to put paid to this work.

Refusing Their Development

In the metropolis when we demand a wage from the State, we are told that we can get a wage in the offices or factories, which are waiting to suck up what little of our lives the washing machine has left free. Millions of us are driven there daily by an inflation which is transforming bringing home a wage—and therefore doing a double shift—into another household duty, another chore, another obligation of the wife. In

Mexico, with a 40 percent rate of unemployment or underemployment, to propose that women who want a wage take a second job in factories, offices, etc. (if they don't already have one on the land), is even more laughable. None of us wants that second job, neither those who have it and the pittance of a wage that may go with it, nor those who desperately need a wage despite the sixteen-hour day of the full-time housewife. More work will never sweeten our bitterness. Yet Third World women (in fact *all* women) are told there is no other solution but to accept this "development," to accept, that is, more rationalized exploitation, if they are lucky enough to get it in that sea of wagelessness. There is only one development today in the world, and that is capitalist development, even greater exploitation than we have suffered up to now. That is the price we have traditionally paid for the wage. We will still bear, train and care for the new generation while we are "benefiting" from the assembly line of their development. Also, because so many of us are wageless, they will get the very few they hire cut-rate. Passively to accept that development is to accept a development of slavery, the opposite of its abolition.

For us in the metropolis to demand a wage from the State for the work we are doing in the home is our only real choice, so that we can massively refuse that job and the second, waged, job we do. As capital's crisis deepens it is not clear what place metropolitan women will have in its plans. One thing, however, is already clear. Though we are surrounded by development, they have begun to plead poverty and austerity and are expecting women to be the prime shock absorbers. When we demand Wages for Housework in whatever form—child care which we control, free birth control and abortion which do not sicken, kill, or sterilize us, the socialization of our work on our terms to liberate time for ourselves, and most important, money we can call our own—they now say here what they have always said in the Third World to every demand by women: "The till is empty."

Our great advantage in the metropolis is that the wealth stolen from all of us is where we are, on the spot, to demand back. For those in the Third World, it is infinitely more difficult to demand the return of the wealth that our combined labor has created. For most of us the dilemma is that this wealth is not where we are. This poses enormous problems of organization and mobilization of power. Yet we have no choice. The State of every Third World country that has tried to impose development in the form of "aid" and/or investment has ultimately had to defend that development with arms against the working class. When it is proposed that the road to the new society passes through our increased productivity, the Chilean firing squads are there to block the exits to our own road.⁴

4 The Chilean housewife was of course part of the working-class resistance to productivity. Yet that was drowned by the din of a carefully constructed mythology of the Chilean reactionary housewife, which served the Right *and* the Left internationally, not only to obscure the revolutionary struggle of Chilean women but to undercut the struggle of women everywhere. It was in particular the Left's

Note:

The lives of women in Mexico confirms yet again that we understand the wage and all the labor it commands only when we begin with the unique—but by no means exotic—experience of each section of the wageless. “The Marxists” are so mesmerized by the factory that they haven’t noticed that Marx (a) states plainly that capital’s birth and development began on the backs of the wageless, and (b) that the wage itself is determined at least as much outside of the factory as in it; so that “Taking them as a whole, the general movements of wages are exclusively regulated by the expansion and contraction of the industrial reserve army”—that is, by workers without access to wages.⁶ Marx was not a feminist but, unlike “the Marxists,” he understood the wage and the lack of it.

6 *Capital* 1:637, Moscow, 1958.

2

Eluding Capture

THE SCIENCE, CULTURE, AND PLEASURE OF
“QUEER” ANIMALS



We're Deer. We're Queer. Get Used to It. A new exhibit in Norway outs the animal kingdom.

—Alisa Opar, “We're Deer. We're Queer.
Get Used to It”

Biological Exuberance is, above all, an affirmation of life's vitality and infinite possibilities: a worldview that is at once primordial and futuristic, in which gender is kaleidoscopic, sexualities are multiple, and the categories of male and female are fluid and transmutable. A world, in short, exactly like the one we inhabit.

—Bruce Bagemihl, *Biological Exuberance:
Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity*

We are acting with the best intentions in the world, we want to add reality to scientific objects, but, inevitably, through a sort of tragic bias, we seem always to be subtracting some bit from it. Like a clumsy waiter setting plates on a slanted table, every nice dish slides down and crashes on the ground. Why can we never discover the same stubbornness, the same solid realism by bringing out the obviously webby, “thingy” qualities of matters of concern?

—Bruno Latour, “Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?
From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern”

Western, Euro-American thought has long waged “nature” and the “natural” against LGBTQ peoples, as well as women, people of color, the colonized, and indigenous peoples. Just as the pernicious histories

of social Darwinism, colonialism, primitivism, and other forms of scientifically infused racism have incited indispensable critiques of the intermingling of “race” and “nature,”¹ much queer theory has bracketed, expelled, or distanced the volatile categories of “nature” and the “natural,” situating queer desire within an entirely social, and very human, habitat. This sort of segregation of “queer” from “nature” is hardly appealing to those who seek queer green places. Discussing the “biopolitical organization of life,” Catriona Sandilands argues that to conceive of “life as queer opens the world to a reading in which generativity is not reduced to reproductivity, in which the future is not limited to a repetition of a heteronormative ideal of the Same, and in which the heterosexual couple and its progeny—or some facsimile thereof—are not the privileged bearers of life for ecocriticism.”² How the sexuality of nonhuman animals is conceptualized—a curious subset of “nature,” “the natural,” or “life,” perhaps—may open up similar readings of the world. The existence of queer animals contests the Western foundation of heteronormativity as that which came straight from Nature. The fact that science, cultural theory, and common sense have reacted to the sexual diversity of nonhuman life by denying, dismissing, closeting, segregating, and otherwise explaining it away, could entice us to add to rather than subtract from the reality, as Latour puts it, of queer animals. Queer animals also provoke questions within interdisciplinary theory regarding the relations between discourse and materiality, culture and nature, mechanistic sex drives and refined desires, scientific explanation and cultural criticism. As queer animals are both disclosed by various human knowledge systems and elude capture within those systems, that oscillation serves up pleasurable and delightful “realities,” as well as heaping portions of epistemological humility, awe, and wonder—essential ingredients for a less arrogantly anthropocentric anthropocene. Queer animals, as emergent, agential, and elusive, may provoke an ethical-epistemology of wonder, as well as a new materialist reckoning with animal pleasure that releases it from the narrow modernist scripts of genetic determinism, instinctual drives, and, on the flip side, social machinations. Wonder may be aroused by that which cannot be understood through simplistic explanations, and pleasure may be inflamed by the sense of being overcome by the staggering variation and the sheer exuberance of more-than-human sexualities and genders. Pleasure, impossible to confine within dichotomies of nature and culture, body and mind,

pulses through an imaginative materiality. As Karen Barad contends, matter “is promiscuous and inventive in its agential wanderings: one might even dare say, imaginative.”³

Popular science books, such as Bruce Bagemihl’s monumental *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity* and Joan Roughgarden’s *Evolution’s Rainbow: Diversity, Gender, and Sexuality in Nature and People*, as well as the work of Myra J. Hird, present possibilities for rethinking nature as “queer,” by documenting the many non-human species that engage in or display same-sex sex acts, same-sex child-rearing pairs, intersexuality, multiple “genders,” “transvestism,” and transsexuality. Bagemihl’s 750-page volume, two-thirds of which is “A Wondrous Bestiary” of “Portraits of Homosexual, Bisexual, and Transgendered Wildlife,” astounds with its vast compilation of species “in which same sex activities have been scientifically documented.”⁴ Bagemihl restricts himself to mammals and birds, but even so, he discusses nearly three hundred species and “more than two centuries of scientific research.”⁵ Rich not only with scientific data, but also with photos, illustrations, and charts, Bagemihl’s exhaustively researched volume renders any sense of normative heterosexuality within nature an absurdity. Joan Roughgarden’s book, *Evolution’s Rainbow: Diversity, Gender, and Sexuality in Nature and People*—which consists of three sections, “Animal Rainbows,” “Human Rainbows,” and “Cultural Rainbows”—paints an expanse of sexual diversity across both animal and human worlds.⁶ The Naturhistorisk museum in Oslo, Norway, opened “the first-ever museum exhibition dedicated to gay animals.” “Against Nature?” seeks to “reject the all too well known argument that homosexual behavior is a crime against nature” by displaying species known to engage in homosexual acts. The exhibit “outs” these animals by telling a “fascinating story of the animals’ secret life . . . by means of models, photos, texts, and specimens.”⁷ Ironically, the patriarchal diorama of the early twentieth century that served, as Donna Haraway argues, as a “prophylactic” against “decadence”⁸ is followed by an exhibition that unveils sexual diversity in the world of animals. Queer animals have also gained notoriety with the controversy over a German zoo’s plan “to test the sexual orientation of six male penguins which have displayed homosexual traits” and set them up with female penguins because they want “the rare Humboldt penguins to breed.”⁹ After the public outcry, zoo director Heike Kueke reassured people that they would not forcibly break up the homosexual penguin

couples, saying, “Everyone can live here as they please.”¹⁰ *Dr. Tatiana’s Sex Advice to All Creation: The Definitive Guide to the Evolutionary Biology of Sex* includes a letter from a manatee, worried that their son “keeps kissing other males,” signed, “Don’t Want No Homo in the Florida Keys,” responding, “It’s not your son who needs straightening out. It’s you. Some Homosexual activity is common for animals of all kinds.”¹¹ The television sex show host Dr. Susan Block, with her explicit website, replete with porn videos and sex toys, promotes a peaceful philosophy of “ethical hedonism,” based on “the Bonobo Way.” (Bonobos, one of two species of chimpanzee in the genus *Pan*, are known for their lavish sexual activity.) Block’s “Bonobo Way,” which includes a great deal of “lesbian” sex, “supports the repression of violence and the free, exuberant, erotic, raunchy, loving, peaceful, adventurous, consensual expression of pleasure.”¹²

According to the website for the “Against Nature?” exhibit, “Homosexuality has been observed in most vertebrate groups, and also from insects, spiders, crustaceans, octopi and parasitic worms. The phenomenon has been reported from more than 1,500 animal species, and is well documented for 500 of them, but the real extent is probably much higher.”¹³ Notwithstanding the sheer delight of dwelling within a queer bestiary that supplants the dusty, heteronormative Book of Nature, the recognition of the sexual diversity of animals has several significant benefits, starting with a more accurate understanding of nonhuman life. Scientific accounts of queer animals suggest that heteronormativity has damaged and diminished knowledge in biology, anthropology, and other fields. Roughgarden charges that “the scientific silence on homosexuality in animals amounts to a cover-up, deliberate or not,” and thus scientists “are professionally responsible for refuting claims that homosexuality is unnatural.”¹⁴ Bruce Bagemihl and Myra J. Hird document how the majority of scientists have ignored, closeted, or explained away their observations of same-sex behavior in animals, for fear of risking their reputations, scholarly credibility, academic positions, or straight identities. Most notably, Bagemihl includes a candid reflection of the biologist Valerius Geist, who “still cringe[s] at the memory of seeing old D-ram mount S-ram repeatedly”: “I called these actions of the rams *aggrosexual* behavior, for to state that the males had evolved a homosexual society was emotionally beyond me. To conceive of those magnificent beasts as ‘queers’—Oh God!”¹⁵ A queer science studies stance parallel to that of feminist empiricism,

would insist that the critique and eradication of heteronormative bias will result in a better, more accurate account of the world—simply getting the facts (not so) straight. Although Margaret Cuonzo warns of the possibility for homophobic, anthropocentric, “or even egocentric” bias in accounts of queer animals,¹⁶ these possibilities seem highly unlikely given the pervasive heteronormativity not only in science, but in the wider culture as well.¹⁷ Moreover, as Catriona Sandilands argues, citing the case in which ecologists assumed that the lesbian behavior of seagulls “must be evidence of some major environmental catastrophe” (it wasn’t), “the assumption that heterosexuality is the only natural sexual form is clearly not an appropriate benchmark for ecological research.”¹⁸ In short, environmental sciences require better accounts of the sexual diversity of natural creatures; otherwise, heteronormative bias may render it even more difficult to understand the effects of various toxicants. Giovanna Di Chiro demonstrates the vital need for environmental sciences and environmental politics that are not propelled by homophobia or misogyny.¹⁹ Endocrine disruptors alone demand an extraordinarily complex and nuanced understanding of the “mangling” (in Andrew Pickering’s terms)²⁰ of environmental science, health, and politics with misogyny, homophobia, and other cultural forces.

From a cultural studies perspective that focuses on discursive contestation, queer animals counter the pernicious and persistent articulation of homosexuality with what is “unnatural.” The multitude of examples, given by Bagemihl and Roughgarden, not to mention the explicit photos and illustrations, strongly articulate “queer” with “animal,” making sexual diversity part of a larger biodiversity. This cultural studies model of political–discursive contestation, however, may, by definition, bracket all that is not purely discursive—ironically, of course, the animals themselves—and thus limit the possibilities for imagining a queer ethics and politics that is also environmentalist. This difficulty is part of a larger problem within cultural theory of finding ways of allowing matter to matter. But even within the paradigm of discursive contestation, trouble arises, since the normative meanings of “nature” and the “natural” have long coexisted with their inverse: nature as blank, dumb, or even debased materiality. In other words, people bent on damning homosexuals will, no doubt, see all this queer animal sex as shocking depravity, consigning queers

sweet-looking illustrations of, say, female hedgehog “courtship” and cunnilingus included in Bagemihl’s book, which would delight many a gay-affirmative viewer, would disgust others (Figure 3).²¹

Rather than simply toss queer animals into the ring of public opinion to battle the still pervasive sense that homosexuality is “unnatural,” we could, instead, clear space for something less rigid and overdetermined than the opposing territories of “nature” and “culture.” For cultural critics, who fear that any substantive engagement with nature, science, or materiality is too perilous to pursue, queer animals are segregated into a universe of irrelevance. But it is possible to look to queer animals, not as a moral model or embodiment of some static universal law, but in order to find, in this astounding “biological exuberance,” a sense of vast diversity, deviance (in the way that Ladelle McWhorter recasts the term),²² and a proliferation of astonishing differences that make nonsense of biological reductionism. The sexual activities of nonhuman animals need not be reduced to instinctual drives, but can be understood in more capacious terms, as creative, pleasurable, and sometimes strategic acts within particular animal lifeworlds or “naturecultures.”²³

Epistemology of the Zoological Closet

Eve Sedgwick’s paradigm of the “open secret” captures the way in which nonhuman animals have been put in a zoological closet: many have witnessed some sort of same-sex activities between animals and yet still imagine the natural world as unrelentingly straight. Such determined ignorance emerges from a heteronormative epistemology. As Sedgwick explains, ignorance—as well as knowledge—has power: “These ignorances . . . are produced by and correspond to particular knowledges and circulate as part of particular regimes of truth.”²⁴ Decades ago, when my brother was young, my mother bought him a pair of hamsters, choosing two females in order to avoid being overrun by hamster offspring. As it turns out, they engaged, constantly, in oral sex. Despite this memory, I must admit that I was rather astonished by Hird, Roughgarden, and Bagemihl’s accounts of the enormous variety of sexual diversity throughout the nonhuman world. Who knew? This sense of astonishment, as I will discuss, below, can rouse a queer green, ethical/epistemological/aesthetic response, even as it may be implicated in regimes of closeted knowledges.

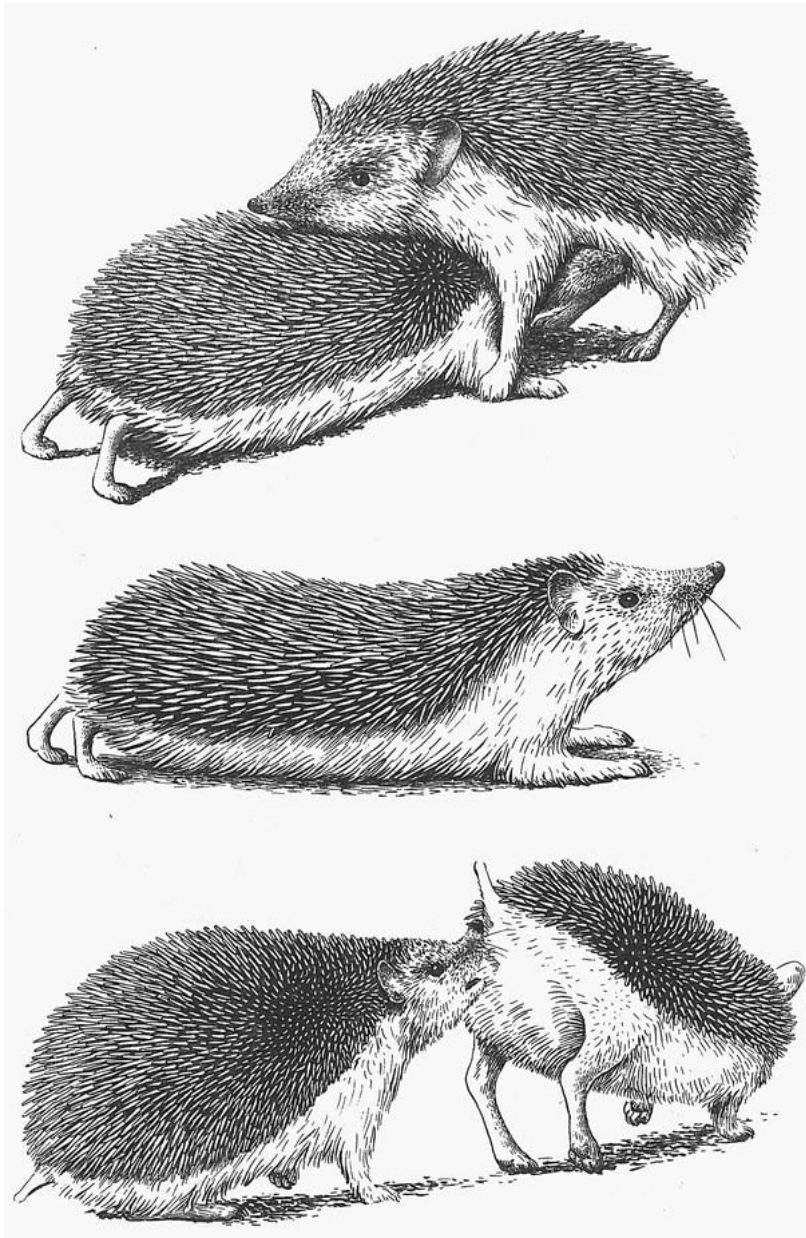


Figure 3. Illustration by John Megahan, which originally appeared in Bruce Bagemihl, *Biological Exuberance*. Courtesy of John Megahan.

The sexual diversity of animals, I would contend, matters. Predominant modes of social theory, however, which still assume a radical separation of nature and culture, tend to minimize the significance of queer animals. Just as much feminist theory has engaged in a “flight from nature,”²⁵ many cultural critics have cast out queer animals from the field of cultural relevance. Jonathan Marks, for example, in *What It Means to Be 98% Chimpanzee: Apes, People, and Their Genes* takes his place in a long line of people who have attempted to clearly demarcate human from animal by seizing on some key difference: “One of the outstanding hallmarks of human evolution is the extent to which our species has divorced sexuality from reproduction. Most sexuality in other primates is directly associated with reproduction.”²⁶ Just as language, tool use, and other human achievements have been usurped by evidence of similar accomplishments across a range of species, the deluge of evidence of same-sex sex among animals collapses this claim. Marks, however, contends that the female “same-sex genital stimulation” of the bonobo is exceptional, arguing that “virtually all primates are sexually active principally as a reproductive activity.”²⁷ Paul Vasey’s extensive studies of Japanese macaques, discussed below, as well as the accounts of hundreds of other species that engage in same-sex pleasures, counter Marks’s assertion. More generally, however, Marks criticizes the way we, as humans, look to other primates, especially chimps, as the key to understanding our “true” selves: “They are us, minus something. They are supposed to be our pure biology, unfettered by the trappings of civilization and its discontents. They are humans without humanity. They are nature without culture.”²⁸ On this point, Marks offers a demystifying critique, especially of the way the cultural framework of the scientists may be mistaken as “a contribution of the chimps, rather than for our own input.”²⁹ Notwithstanding Marks’s revealing analysis of the epistemological problems that animal ethology poses, the overall effect of his debunking—when unaccompanied by any attempt to formulate productive ways of engaging with scientific accounts of animals—is to banish animals to a wilderness of irrelevance, where they serve as the backdrop for the erection of human sophistication.

Jennifer Terry undertakes a discursive critique of “the scientific fascination with queer animals,” in which “animals provide models for scientists seeking to determine a biological substrate of sexual orientation.”³⁰ She exposes how “reproductive sexuality provides the mas-

ter narrative in studies of animal sexuality and tethers queer animal behavior to the aim of defining reproduction as the ultimate goal of sexual encounters.”³¹ Drawing on Haraway’s work, Terry begins her essay by stating that “animals help us tell stories about ourselves, especially when it comes to matters of sexuality.”³² She concludes by arguing that the “creatures that populate the narrative space called ‘nature’ are key characters in scientific tales about the past, present, and future. Various tellings of these tales are possible, but they are always shaped by historical, disciplinary, and larger cultural contexts.”³³ Terry illuminates such contexts in a useful way throughout the essay. This mode of critique, however, framed as it is by the emphasis on “narrative space,” confines animal sexual practices within human stories. Although she serves an important source for Terry, Haraway, especially in her most recent work, seems wary of modes of cultural critique that bracket the materiality and the significance of nonhuman animals. She emphasizes that the concept of the companion species, for example, is not an abstract idea, but emerges from living, historical interactions: “Dogs, in their historical complexity, matter here. Dogs are not an alibi for other themes; dogs are fleshly material-semiotic presences in the body of technoscience. Dogs are not surrogates for theory; they are not here just to think with. They are here to live with.”³⁴ Even as Haraway executed one of the most dazzlingly complex and multidimensional scientific/cultural critiques in her 1989 masterpiece *Primate Visions*, she insisted that the “primates themselves—monkeys, apes, and people—all have some kind of ‘authorship.’”³⁵ Her work on primates and dogs, especially, demonstrates this sort of commitment to them—to the world—even as she admits “how science ‘gets at’ the world remains far from resolved.”³⁶ It remains challenging to cobble together methodologies that allow for both cultural critique and a commitment to uncovering material realities and agencies.³⁷ Indeed, such projects must straddle the disciplinary divide between the humanities and the natural sciences.

Cynthia Chris, in *Watching Wildlife*, exposes the heteronormativity of wildlife films, explaining that most “wildlife films posit heterosexual mate selection as not only typical but inevitable and without exception.”³⁸ Even the show *Wild and Weird: Wild Sex* “downplays—even avoids—same-sex behaviors in the cavalcade of animal sexualities it frames as varied.”³⁹ Despite her analysis of the heteronormativity of the wildlife genre, however, Chris ultimately warns against celebrating

queer animals: “Evidence of same-sex behaviors among animals and genetic influences on homosexuality among humans is used as ammunition in battles waged over gay rights for which advocates might be better off relying on other discourses through which civil rights are claimed. Such evidence remains inconclusive, uneasily generalizable across species, subject to wildly divergent interpretations, and likely to fail the endeavor of understanding animal behavior on its own terms.”⁴⁰

Chris’s conflation here of animal sexual behavior with “genetic influences on homosexuality among humans” is disturbing, in that it assumes that if animals do something, they do it because of genetic “programming.” The extent to which any sexual orientation could possibly be influenced by genetic factors is a question that is entirely separate from the sexual diversity of animals. Rather than assuming that the “genetic human” is the thing that is equivalent to animality, it would be more accurate to think of animal sex as both cultural and material, and genetics as much more of a dynamic process, inextricably interwoven with organism and environment.⁴¹ While Chris would rather have us “rely on other discourses,” in part because the evidence for queer animals is “uneasily generalizable across species and subject to wildly divergent interpretations,” I will argue below that this very sense of being “not generalizable” is what makes accounts of animal sexual diversity so potent. They highlight a staggering expanse of sexual diversity in nonhuman creatures that is the very stuff of a vaster biodiversity. Environmentalists and LGBTQ peoples can engage with accounts of the sexual diversity of animals, allowing them to complicate, challenge, enrich, and transform our conceptions of nature, culture, sex, gender, and other fundamental categories.

Roger N. Lancaster in *The Trouble with Nature: Sex in Science and Popular Culture* wades through “a toxic waste dump of ideas,” hoping to “discover sophisticated new biological perspectives on sex and sexuality,” but encountering instead “the same old reductivism warmed over.”⁴² He argues that the “attempts at supposedly ‘queering’ science . . . consolidate an astonishingly *heteronormative* conception of human nature.”⁴³ While he exposes heteronormativity and scientific reductivism, he often does so within the framework of a nature/culture opposition. Such an opposition, of course, underwrites the very reductivism that he condemns.⁴⁴ For example, he argues that “society, bonding, hierarchy, slavery, rape, and harem” are “concepts, rela-

tions, and activities characteristic of humans” and implies that “facts of nature” and “facts of culture” should remain utterly separate.⁴⁵ While “slavery, rape, and harem” may seem too loaded, more neutral terms such as “society, bonding, [and] hierarchy” refer to common characteristics of animal groups. Of course, any human terminology would, to some degree, be a distortion of the practices as they exist within animal culture, and yet to emphasize the problematic transfer of linguistic categories to such an extent that one denies any such characteristics or behaviors to nonhumans would be a mistake.⁴⁶ After all, despite the impossibility of perfect translation across human languages and cultures, poetry and slang are still translated. The term “rape,” for example, could be replaced by a less-loaded term such as “forced copulation.” But to banish the concept altogether would be to imply that nonhuman animals such as dolphins do not have the capacity to consent and thus only engage in instinctual, not intentional or social, sex acts. Lancaster advocates that we “reject the naturalized regime of heteronormativity in its totality” in order to be “finished with the idea of normal bodies once and for all.”⁴⁷ Ironically, even though Lancaster’s book casts scientific accounts of nature as nothing but “trouble,” the surprising range of sexual diversity within nonhuman animals could actually foster his utopian dream of abolishing heteronormativity. Lancaster himself becomes momentarily seduced by Bagemihl’s book, which he warns is “anthropomorphic,” and “fetishistic,” but conjures up “charms and talismans of a coming science that would at least be progressive once again.”⁴⁸

When nature and culture are segregated within different disciplinary universes, animal sex is reduced to a mechanistic and reproductive function and human sexuality—in its opulent range of manifestations—becomes, implicitly at least, another achievement that elevates humans above the brute mating behaviors of nonhuman creatures. Rather than closeting queer animals and their cultures within “nature,” we can recognize that sex for most species is a *mélange* of the material and the social, and that queer desire of all sorts is part of an emergent universe of a multitude of naturecultures.⁴⁹

Pursuing Pleasures, Creating Cultures

In contrast to the examples above, which expel queer animals from the social and political, Kim TallBear notes that “indigenous peoples have

never forgotten that nonhumans are agential beings engaged in social relations that profoundly shape human lives.” Challenging the Western conceptions of nature entails for TallBear an analysis of sexuality, because of their parallel treatment: “Nature and sex have both been defined according to a nature–culture divide. With the rise of scientific authority and management approaches, both sex and nature were rendered as discrete, coherent, troublesome, yet manageable objects.”⁵⁰ I agree with TallBear’s overall assessment here and look forward to her project on “how indigenous stories . . . speak of social relations with nonhumans, and how such relations, although they sometimes approach what we in the West would call ‘sex,’ do not cohere into ‘sexuality’ as we know it in Western modernity.”⁵¹ It is rather remarkable, however, given the way Western science has generally rendered sex and nature as “manageable objects,” that same-sex animal sex seems to provoke a different sort of scientific trajectory in which such activities are not reduced to mechanistic forces or genetically determined instinct, but instead are hyper-culturalized so as to transform them into something that is not at all sexual—or more appropriately, not at all homosexual.

Sex, in nonhumans as well as humans, is partly a learned, social behavior, embedded within, and contributing to, particular material–social environments. Kristin Field and Thomas Waite, for example, begin their study of male guppies with the following premise: “On a longer timescale, social environment and ‘learned sexuality’ can have dramatic effects on the expression of species-typical sexual behavior.”⁵² Animals are cultural beings, enmeshed in social organizations, acting, interacting, and communicating. Animal cultures, agencies, and significations animate and overcome the convenient view of “nature” as resource, blank slate for cultural inscription, or brute, mechanistic force. Lest we imagine that the view of animal-as-machine without feelings, sentience, or value vanished with Descartes, Werner Herzog’s comments in the documentary *Grizzly Man*, which tag a particular bear as Treadwell’s “murderer” at the same time they condemn the “blank stare” of that bear, remind us that the demonization and mechanization of animals persists, even when contradictory.⁵³ Although sex has been categorized as a biological drive, the recognition of the sheer astonishing diversity of animal “sex-gender” systems⁵⁴ provokes us to understand nonhuman animals as “cultural” beings. Bagemihl argues that

it is “meaningful to speak of the ‘culture’ of homosexuality in animals, since the extent and range of variation that is found (between individuals or populations or species) exceeds that provided by genetic programming and begins to enter the realm of individual habits, learned behaviors, and even community-wide ‘traditions.’”⁵⁵

The pursuit of pleasure may itself be a dynamic force within some animal cultures. Two of the most prominent markers of “culture,” in fact—tool use and language—have arisen, for some animals, as modes of sexual pleasuring. Drawing on the research of Susan Savage-Rumbaugh, which began in the 1970s, Bagemihl describes the “‘lexicon’ of about a dozen hand and arm gestures[,] each with a specific meaning,” that bonobos use to “initiate sexual activity and negotiate various body positions with a partner (of the same or opposite sex).”⁵⁶ He includes a chart illustrating these hand movements and translating them into commands such as “Approach” or “Move Your Genitals Around.”⁵⁷ Bagemihl argues that among primates, humans included, “as sexual interactions become more variable, sexual communication systems become more sophisticated.” He concludes that “it is possible, therefore, that sexuality—particularly the fluidity associated with nonreproductive sexual practices—played a significant role in the origin and development of human language.”⁵⁸

Bagemihl’s claim for the influence of sexuality on the development of tools is equally bold. Citing examples of how many primates not only use, but also manufacture, objects to aid with masturbation, Bagemihl claims that “the pursuit of sexual pleasure may have contributed, in some measure, to our own heritage as creatures whose tool-using practices are among the most polymorphous of any primate.”⁵⁹ Bagemihl’s arguments are compelling, and certainly subvert the grand narratives of the “origins of man,” which lay claim to tool-making and language as exclusively human. His claim, however, may still be problematic, in that nonhuman sexual practices become more significant because of their role within linear narratives that culminate in the development of the human. But only a slight shift here is needed to read these examples of tool use and language development as part of particular animal naturecultures in which the pursuit of sexual pleasure is one of the most quintessentially “cultural” sorts of activities. Indeed, it is difficult not to be impressed with the creativity, skill, tenacity, and resourcefulness of a female bonnet macaque who

“invented some relatively sophisticated techniques of tool manufacture, regularly employing five specific methods to create or modify natural objects for insertion into her vagina”:

For example, she stripped dry eucalyptus leaves of their foliage with her fingers or teeth and then broke the midrib into a piece less than half an inch long. She also slit dry acacia leaves in half lengthwise (using only a single half) and fashioned short sticks by breaking longer ones into several pieces or detaching portions of a branch. Implements were also vigorously rubbed with her fingers or between her palms prior to being inserted into her vagina, and twigs, leaves, or grass blades were occasionally used unmodified.⁶⁰

An artist at work. It is tempting to read this account through and against Roger N. Lancaster’s notion of desire: “This desire is on the side of poetry, in the original and literal sense of the word: *poiesis*, ‘production,’ as in the making of things and the world. Not an object at all, desire is what makes objects possible.”⁶¹ Even though Lancaster places desire “squarely within a social purview,”⁶² elaborating an ultrahuman sort of sexuality that is all culture and no nature, the toolmaking, language-creating, culturally embedded, pleasurable practices of nonhuman animals penetrate this ostensibly human terrain.

Whereas many cultural critics cast animal sex into the separate sphere of nature, many scientific accounts of queer animal sex have rendered them as entirely “cultural,” and thus not sexual. Indeed, Dr. Susan Block’s philosophy of the “ethical hedonism” of the bonobo is indicative of a general understanding that the “reason” bonobos have so much sex, including same-sex sex, is to reduce social conflicts. Such explanations make all that mounting seem like just another chore. Whereas Block celebrates the eroticism of the bonobos, many scientific accounts of same-sex genital activities emphasize their social functions in such a way as to define them as anything other than sex. As Vasey explains, much same-sex sexual behavior has been interpreted as “sociosexual,” meaning “sexual in terms of their external form, but . . . enacted to mediate some sort of adaptive social goal or breeding strategy.”⁶³ Take, for example, the 1998 textbook *Primate Sexuality* by Alan F. Dixon. The chapter “Sociosexual Behavior and

Homosexuality” begins by making it clear that what might look like same-sex sex among nonhuman primates is merely “motor patterns”: “The form and functions of sociosexual patterns vary between species, but the important point is that motor patterns normally associated with sex are sometimes incorporated into the non-sexual sphere of social communications.”⁶⁴ In order to claim that these “motor patterns” are not sex, he places “sex” in a sphere entirely separate from “social communications,” a strange segregation for either hetero- or homosexual relations.⁶⁵ Obviously, as Vasey explains, “sexual motivation and social function are not mutually exclusive.”⁶⁶ “Social function,” then, often closets same-sex animal sex, by black-boxing pleasure and elevating the “social” into an abstract and disembodied calculus. The gleeful erotic illustrations appearing in Dixon’s textbook, however, counter the reduction of these activities to mechanistic “motor patterns,” by depicting several entirely different same-sex primate mounts that, to a less mechanistically constrained eye, suggest such things as desire, effort, playfulness, creativity, pleasure—and sex.

Within this landscape of Byzantine heteronormativity, scientists who do suggest that same-sex genital activity may be something like “sex” often do so tentatively. Meagan K. Shearer and Larry S. Katz state that female goats “may mount other females to obtain sexual stimulation. To the observer, there appears to be a hedonistic component associated with the body pressure and motions involved while mounting.”⁶⁷ Vasey must put forth a strong case to even begin to claim that the sexual behavior between female Japanese macaques is, in fact, sexual:

Despite over forty years of intensive research in populations in which females engage in same-sex mounting and courtship . . . there is not a single study in existence demonstrating any sort of sociosexual function for these behaviors. Rather, all the available evidence indicates that female–female mounting and courtship are not sociosexual behaviors. Female Japanese macaques do not use same-sex mounting and courtship to attract male sexual partners, impede reproduction by same-sex competitors . . . , form alliances, foster social relationships outside consortships . . . , communicate about dominance relationships . . . , obtain alloparental

care . . . , reduce social tension associated with incipient aggression . . . , practice for heterosexual activity (i.e., female–male mounting), or reconcile conflicts.⁶⁸

Clearly, same-sex activity between animals is considered “not sex” until proven otherwise. All possibilities for its existence—other than pleasure—must be ruled out before it can be understood as sex.⁶⁹ The predominant scientific framework, oddly, parallels the mainstream environmentalist conception of nature that Sandilands critiques as “both actively de-eroticized and monolithically heterosexual.”⁷⁰ As Sandilands explains, drawing on the work of Greta Gaard, “Erotophobia is clearly linked to the regulation of sexual diversity; normative heterosexuality, especially in its links to science and nature, has the effect of regulating and instrumentalizing sexuality, linking it to truth and evolutionary health rather than to pleasure and fulfillment.”⁷¹ Queer animals may play a part, then, in helping us question “eco-sexual normativity” through asserting “polymorphous sexualities and multiple natures.”⁷² Queer animals may also foster an ontology in which pleasure and eroticism are neither the result of genetically determined biological drives nor tools in cultural machinations, but are creative forces simultaneously emergent within and affecting a multitude of naturecultures. Pleasure, in this sense, may be understood within Karen Barad’s notion of performativity as “materialist, naturalist, and posthumanist,” “that allows matter its due as an active participant in the world’s becoming, its ongoing ‘intra-activity.’”⁷³

Eluding Capture

The multitude of utterly different models of courtship, sexual activity, child-rearing arrangements, “gender,” “transsexualism,” and “transvestism” that Bagemihl and Roughgarden document portray animal lifeworlds that cannot be understood in reductionist ways. Myra J. Hird in “Naturally Queer” argues that biology “provides a wealth of evidence to confound static notions of sexual difference.”⁷⁴ Her exuberant essay encourages us to imagine “*The Joy of Sex* for plants, fungi, and bacteria”: “Schizophyllum, for instance, has more than 28,000 sexes. And sex among these promiscuous mushrooms is literally a ‘touch-and-go’ event, leading [science writer Jenni] Laidman to

Hird poses queer natures as the quintessential boundary transgressors, rather than assuming that “living and non-living matter” is “the stubborn, inert ‘outside’ to transgressive potential.”⁷⁶

Queer animal sex may de-sediment intransigent cultural categories. For example, Paul L. Vasey and his colleagues, in an investigation of female–female mounting behavior in Japanese macaques, conclude that “female mounting in Japanese macaques is not a defective counterpart to male mounting. There is no evidence that females were attempting to execute male mounts, but failing to do so.”⁷⁷ Rather, the female mounting was “female-typical,” exhibiting a strikingly different repertoire of movements.⁷⁸ The macaques may remind us of Judith Butler’s contention that homosexuality is not an imitation of heterosexuality, or of J. Halberstam’s contention that females have their own versions of “masculinity.”⁷⁹ Vasey himself argues that his study “raises the much broader issue of what constitutes male or female behavior,” since it makes little sense to characterize mounting as “male” when “females, in certain populations, engage in this behavior so frequently, and do so in a female-typical manner.”⁸⁰ The sex/gender distinction in feminist theory posits gender as a cultural, and thus solely human, construct. Joan Roughgarden, however, sees gender in nonhuman animals, defining it as “the appearance, behavior, and lived history of a sexed body.”⁸¹ She notes that “many species have three or more genders,” such as the white-throated sparrow, which has “four genders, two male, and two female.”⁸² These “genders” are distinguished by either a white stripe or a tan stripe, which correspond to aggressive and territorial versus accommodating behaviors. As far as sex goes, 90 percent of the breeding involves a tan-striped bird (of either sex) with a white-striped bird (of either sex).⁸³ Haraway’s call to see animals as other worlds, replete with “significant otherness,”⁸⁴ resounds when trying to make sense of the multitude of animal cultures that disrupt human—even feminist, even queer—models.

Just as animal sex (and gender) may complicate the foundations of feminist theory, animal practices may also denaturalize familiar categories and assumptions in queer theory and gay cultures. For one thing, nearly all the animal species, as well as individual animals, that have been documented as engaging in same-sex relations also engage in heterosexual sex, meaning that “universalizing” models of sexuality work better for most nonhuman animals than do “minoritizing”

shorthand, are “queer” in a multitude of ways, but rarely do any of them correspond to early twenty-first-century categories of “gay” or “lesbian.” Roughgarden explains that most male bighorn sheep live in “homosexual societies,” courting and copulating with other males, via anal penetration. It is the nonhomosexual males that are considered “aberrant”: “The few males who do not participate in homosexual activity have been labeled ‘effeminate’ males . . . They differ from ‘normal males’ by living with the ewes rather than joining all-male groups. These males do not dominate females, are less aggressive overall, and adopt a crouched, female urination posture. These males refuse mounting by other males.”⁸⁵ As Roughgarden contends, these sheep challenge gay/straight categories: “The ‘normal’ macho bighorn sheep has full-fledged anal sex with other males. The ‘aberrant’ ram is the one who is straight—the lack of interest in homosexuality is considered pathological.”⁸⁶ Inevitably, in an attempt to understand the remarkable differences in animal cultures, most accounts draw on human categories and terms. While she critiques the “biased vocabulary” of scientists, Roughgarden uses many terms lifted too unproblematically from twentieth-century American culture, such as “domestic violence” and “divorce,” which flattens and distorts the “significant otherness” of animal cultures.

Interestingly, both Roughgarden and Bagemihl argue that many non-Western cultures have more knowledge of and appreciation for the sexual diversity of the nonhuman world. Roughgarden, for example, notes that in the South Sea islands of Vanuatu, pigs have “been bred for their intersex expressions”: “Among the people of Sakao, seven distinct genders are named, ranging from those with the most egg-related external genitalia to those with the most sperm-related external genitalia.”⁸⁷ Similarly, Bagemihl contends that contemporary theoretical accounts of sexual diversity pale next to both the scientific accounts of animal sexuality and the knowledge systems of particular indigenous groups who recognize animal sexual diversity:

The animal world—right now, here on earth—is brimming with countless gender variations and shimmering sexual possibilities: entire lizard species that consist only of females who reproduce by virgin birth and also have sex with each other; or some multigendered society of the Ruff, with four distinct categories of male birds,

some of whom court and mate with one another; or female Spotted Hyenas and Bears who copulate and give birth through their “penile” clitorides, and male Greater Rheas who possess “vaginal” phalluses (like the females of their species) and raise young in two-father families; or the vibrant transsexualities of coral reef fish, and the dazzling intersexualities of gyandromorphs and chimeras. In their quest for “postmodern” patterns of gender and sexuality, human beings are simply catching up with the species that have preceded us in evolving sexual and gender diversity—and aboriginal cultures have long recognized this.⁸⁸

The rigid heteronormativity of Western culture forecloses such motley, kaleidoscopic bestiaries, whereas more complex sexual and gender manifestations have been recognized, even esteemed, by some indigenous cultures. Focusing on plants rather than animals, Ana Maria Bacigalupo’s anthropological study *Shamans of the Foye Tree: Gender, Power, and Healing among the Chilean Mapuche* notes how the Mapuche valued the exceptional gender fluidity of particular trees and humans, explaining that during colonial times, “the hermaphroditic *foye* tree legitimated male *machi*’s co-gendered status as sacred, powerful, and meaningful.” Today the *foye* tree “has become a symbol of office for both male and female *machi*,” or shamans, representing “the *machi*’s ability to move between worlds, generations, and genders.”⁸⁹ Rigid categories, on the other hand, have been the norm for Western scientific reason, as they stroll hand in hand with predilections for domestication, management, and straightforward use. As the above quotation from Kim TallBear noted, “the rise of scientific authority and management approaches” rendered “both sex and nature” ultimately “manageable objects.”⁹⁰ While she does not discuss sexual diversity, Celia Lowe, in *Wild Profusion: Biodiversity Conservation in an Indonesian Archipelago*, warns of the disenchantment of Western knowledge systems: “Max Weber’s famous dictum that instrumental reason disenchant the world, creating therein an ‘iron cage’ (what Foucault has called a ‘*monstre froid*’), is equally applicable in Indonesia where reason’s (imagined) triumph over enchantment has meant that the spirit world itself has become inhabited by the cold monster of governmental rationality. Compulsory de-magification haunts the postcolonial nation and

the stories it can tell about itself.”⁹¹ Disenchantment flattens human encounters with the more-than-human world, limiting knowledge to what is useful. Lowe argues that within the conservation project she studied, “enchantment and disenchantment existed in supplementary relationship; new forms of ‘unreason’ revealed the limitations of, and aporia in, practices of conservation calculation and management.”⁹² The fluctuation between enchantment and disenchantment, in Lowe’s formulation, yielded more, not less knowledge.

Enchantment and wonder may encourage environmental inclinations. Heather Houser in *Ecosickness in Contemporary U.S. Fiction: Environment and Affect* argues that the task of wonder in the twenty-first century is large: “Wonder must not only shake apathy toward the more-than-human world and move us to curiosity without false idealization; it must also promote concern to curb the destruction of wildlife, of undeveloped space, and of human health and livelihood.”⁹³ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen in *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman* writes, “Enchantment is estrangement and secular enmeshment, sudden sighting of the world’s dynamism and autonomy, the advent of queered relation.”⁹⁴ Despite the scientific aim to make sense of the world, to categorize, to map, to find causal relations, many who write about sexual diversity in nonhuman animals are struck with the sense that the remarkable variance regarding sex, “gender,” reproduction, and child rearing among animals defies domesticating modes of categorization. These epiphanic moments of wonder ignite an epistemological–ethical sense in which, suddenly, the world is not only more queer than one could have imagined,⁹⁵ but more surprisingly itself, meaning that it confounds our categories and systems of understanding.⁹⁶ In other words, queer animals elude perfect modes of capture. In Pickering’s model, science is “an evolving field of human and material agencies reciprocally engaged in a play of resistance and accommodation in which the former seeks to capture the latter.”⁹⁷ Paradoxically, this model allows us to value scientific accounts of sexual diversity in nonhuman animals, in the sense that these accounts are accounting for something—something more than a (human) social construction—and yet it also encourages an epistemological–ethical stance that recognizes the inadequacy of human knowledge systems to ever fully account for the natural world.⁹⁸

By eluding perfect modes of capture, queer animals dramatize emergent worlds of desire, action, agency, and interactivity that can

never be reduced to a background or resource against which the human defines himself. Donna Haraway, defining “companion species,”⁹⁹ explains: “There are no pre-constituted subjects and objects, and no single sources, unitary actors, or final ends. . . . A bestiary of agencies, kinds of relating, and scores of time trump the imaginings of even the most baroque cosmologists.”¹⁰⁰ Such responses emanate from a queer, green place, in which pleasure, desire, and the proliferation of differing lifeworlds and interactions provoke intense, ethical reactions. As Brian Massumi argues, “Intensity is the unassimilable,” because, “structure is the place where nothing ever happens, that explanatory heaven in which all eventual permutations are prefigured in a self consistent set of invariant generative rules.”¹⁰¹ Many responses to sexual diversity in nonhuman creatures emanate this sort of intensity of the unassimilable. Volker Sommer, for example, concludes his epilogue to *Homosexual Behavior in Animals: An Evolutionary Perspective* by asking, “Is the diversity of sexual behavior that we can observe in nature anything other than mindbogglingly beautiful?”¹⁰² In a review of Bagemihl’s book, Duane Jeffery comments that “nature’s inventiveness far outruns our meager ability to categorize her productions,” adding that “the sheer inventiveness—exuberance—of nature overwhelms.”¹⁰³ Joan Roughgarden, herself a transgender woman and ecologist, notes that in writing her book she “found more diversity than [she] had ever dreamed existed,” calling her book the “gee-whiz of vertebrate diversity,”¹⁰⁴ an expression that captures the reader’s response as much as the book’s content. Bagemihl carefully wraps up his “labor of love” with layers of wonderment. We first encounter the poem “Snow” by Louis MacNeice (which includes the line “World is crazier and more of it than we think”), then two lines from e. e. cummings—“hugest whole creation may be less / incalculable than a single kiss”—both of which stand as epigraphs to the entire volume, then an epigraph to the introduction by Einstein: “The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead: his eyes are closed.”¹⁰⁵ A grand, two-page map of “The World of Animal Homosexuality” on the second and third page of the introduction invites us to see the earth as an entirely different place, one populated with a multitude of queer sexualities. Unlike Latour’s clumsy waiter whose “nice dishes” crash to the ground,¹⁰⁶ Bagemihl wishes to deliver

“‘the facts’ about animal behavior” as well as “captur[ing] some of their ‘poetry’”: “In addition to being interesting from a purely scientific standpoint, these phenomena are also capable of inspiring our deepest feelings of wonder, and our most profound sense of awe.”¹⁰⁷ The wonder, awe, and pleasure of contemplating the countless modes of nonhuman sexual diversity, which pulse with desire and erotic ingenuity, may generate environmentalisms that are, of course, already fabulously queer.

URSULA K. LE GUIN

The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction



In the temperate and tropical regions where it appears that hominids evolved into human beings, the principal food of the species was vegetable. Sixty-five to eighty percent of what human beings ate in those regions in Paleolithic, Neolithic, and prehistoric times was gathered; only in the extreme Arctic was meat the staple food. The mammoth hunters spectacularly occupy the cave wall and the mind, but what we actually did to stay alive and fat was gather seeds, roots, sprouts, shoots, leaves, nuts, berries, fruits, and grains, adding bugs and mollusks and netting or snaring birds, fish, rats, rabbits, and other tuskless small fry to up the protein. And we didn't even work hard at it—much less hard than peasants slaving in somebody else's field after agriculture was invented, much less hard than paid workers since civilization was invented. The average prehistoric person could make a nice living in about a fifteen-hour work week.

Fifteen hours a week for subsistence leaves a lot of time for other things. So much time that maybe the restless ones who didn't have a baby around to enliven their life, or skill in making or cooking or singing, or very interesting thoughts to think, decided to slope off and hunt mammoths. The skillful hunters then would come staggering back with a load of meat, a lot of ivory, and a story. It wasn't the meat that made the difference. It was the story.

It is hard to tell a really gripping tale of how I wrested a wild-oat seed from its husk, and then another, and then another, and then another, and then another, and then I scratched my gnat bites, and Ool said something funny, and we went to the creek and got a drink and watched newts for a while, and then I found another patch of oats. . . . No, it does not compare, it cannot compete with how I thrust my spear deep into the titanic hairy flank while Oob, impaled on one huge sweeping tusk, writhed screaming,

and blood spouted everywhere in crimson torrents, and Boob was crushed to jelly when the mammoth fell on him as I shot my unerring arrow straight through eye to brain.

That story not only has Action, it has a Hero. Heroes are powerful. Before you know it, the men and women in the wild-oat patch and their kids and the skills of the makers and the thoughts of the thoughtful and the songs of the singers are all part of it, have all been pressed into service in the tale of the Hero. But it isn't their story. It's his.

When she was planning the book that ended up as *Three Guineas*, Virginia Woolf wrote a heading in her notebook, "Glossary"; she had thought of reinventing English according to a new plan, in order to tell a different story. One of the entries in this glossary is *heroism*, defined as "botulism." And *hero*, in Woolf's dictionary, is "bottle." The hero as bottle, a stringent reevaluation. I now propose the bottle as hero.

Not just the bottle of gin or wine, but bottle in its older sense of container in general, a thing that holds something else.

If you haven't got something to put it in, food will escape you—even something as uncombative and unresourceful as an oat. You put as many as you can into your stomach while they are handy, that being the primary container; but what about tomorrow morning when you wake up and it's cold and raining and wouldn't it be good to have just a few handfuls of oats to chew on and give little Oom to make her shut up, but how do you get more than one stomachful and one handful home? So you get up and go to the damned soggy oat patch in the rain, and wouldn't it be a good thing if you had something to put Baby Oo Oo in so that you could pick the oats with both hands? A leaf a gourd a shell a net a bag a sling a sack a bottle a pot a box a container. A holder. A recipient.

The first cultural device was probably a recipient. . . . Many theorists feel that the earliest cultural inventions must have been a container to hold gathered products and some kind of sling or net carrier.

So says Elizabeth Fisher in *Women's Creation* (McGraw-Hill, 1975). But no, this cannot be. Where is that wonderful, big, long, hard thing, a bone, I believe, that the Ape Man first bashed somebody with in the movie and then, grunting with ecstasy at having achieved the first proper murder, flung up into the sky, and whirling there it became a space ship thrusting its way into the cosmos to fertilize it and produce at the end of the movie a lovely fetus, a boy of course, drifting around the Milky Way without (oddly

enough) any womb, any matrix at all? I don't know. I don't even care. I'm not telling that story. We've heard it, we've all heard all about all the sticks and spears and swords, the things to bash and poke and hit with, the long, hard things, but we have not heard about the thing to put things in, the container for the thing contained. That is a new story. That is news.

And yet old. Before—once you think about it, surely long before—the weapon, a late, luxurious, superfluous tool; long before the useful knife and ax; right along with the indispensable whacker, grinder, and digger—for what's the use of digging up a lot of potatoes if you have nothing to lug the ones you can't eat home in—with or before the tool that forces energy outward, we made the tool that brings energy home. It makes sense to me. I am an adherent of what Fisher calls the Carrier Bag Theory of human evolution.

This theory not only explains large areas of theoretical obscurity and avoids large areas of theoretical nonsense (inhabited largely by tigers, foxes, and other highly territorial mammals); it also grounds me, personally, in human culture in a way I never felt grounded before. So long as culture was explained as originating from and elaborating upon the use of long, hard objects for sticking, bashing, and killing, I never thought that I had, or wanted, any particular share in it. ("What Freud mistook for her lack of civilization is woman's lack of *loyalty* to civilization," Lillian Smith observed.) The society, the civilization they were talking about, these theoreticians, was evidently theirs; they owned it, they liked it; they were human, fully human, bashing, sticking, thrusting, killing. Wanting to be human too, I sought for evidence that I was; but if that's what it took, to make a weapon and kill with it, then evidently I was either extremely defective as a human being, or not human at all.

That's right, they said. What you are is a woman. Possibly not human at all, certainly defective. Now be quiet while we go on telling the Story of the Ascent of Man the Hero.

Go on, say I, wandering off towards the wild oats, with *Oo Oo* in the sling and little *Oom* carrying the basket. You just go on telling how the mammoth fell on Boob and how Cain fell on Abel and how the bomb fell on Nagasaki and how the burning jelly fell on the villagers and how the missiles will fall on the Evil Empire, and all the other steps in the Ascent of Man.

If it is a human thing to do to put something you want, because it's useful, edible, or beautiful, into a bag, or a basket, or a bit of rolled bark

or leaf, or a net woven of your own hair, or what have you, and then take it home with you, home being another, larger kind of pouch or bag, a container for people, and then later on you take it out and eat it or share it or store it up for winter in a solider container or put it in the medicine bundle or the shrine or the museum, the holy place, the area that contains what is sacred, and then next day you probably do much the same again—if to do that is human, if that's what it takes, then I am a human being after all. Fully, freely, gladly, for the first time.

Not, let it be said at once, an unaggressive or uncombative human being. I am an aging, angry woman laying mightily about me with my handbag, fighting hoodlums off. However I don't, nor does anybody else, consider myself heroic for doing so. It's just one of those damned things you have to do in order to be able to go on gathering wild oats and telling stories.

It is the story that makes the difference. It is the story that hid my humanity from me, the story the mammoth hunters told about bashing, thrusting, raping, killing, about the Hero. The wonderful, poisonous story of Botulism. The killer story.

It sometimes seems that that story is approaching its end. Lest there be no more telling of stories at all, some of us out here in the wild oats, amid the alien corn, think we'd better start telling another one, which maybe people can go on with when the old one's finished. Maybe. The trouble is, we've all let ourselves become part of the killer story, and so we may get finished along with it. Hence it is with a certain feeling of urgency that I seek the nature, subject, words of the other story, the untold one, the life story.

It's unfamiliar, it doesn't come easily, thoughtlessly to the lips as the killer story does; but still, "untold" was an exaggeration. People have been telling the life story for ages, in all sorts of words and ways. Myths of creation and transformation, trickster stories, folktales, jokes, novels. . . .

The novel is a fundamentally unheroic kind of story. Of course the Hero has frequently taken it over, that being his imperial nature and uncontrollable impulse, to take everything over and run it while making stern decrees and laws to control his uncontrollable impulse to kill it. So the Hero has decreed through his mouthpieces the Lawgivers, first, that the proper shape of the narrative is that of the arrow or spear, starting *here* and going straight *there* and THOK! hitting its mark (which drops dead); second, that the central concern of narrative, including the novel, is conflict; and third, that the story isn't any good if he isn't in it.

I differ with all of this. I would go so far as to say that the natural,

proper, fitting shape of the novel might be that of a sack, a bag. A book holds words. Words hold things. They bear meanings. A novel is a medicine bundle, holding things in a particular, powerful relation to one another and to us.

One relationship among elements in the novel may well be that of conflict, but the reduction of narrative to conflict is absurd. (I have read a how-to-write manual that said, "A story should be seen as a battle," and went on about strategies, attacks, victory, etc.) Conflict, competition, stress, struggle, etc., within the narrative conceived as carrier bag/belly/box/house/medicine bundle, may be seen as necessary elements of a whole which itself cannot be characterized either as conflict or as harmony, since its purpose is neither resolution nor stasis but continuing process.

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Finally, it's clear that the Hero does not look well in this bag. He needs a stage or a pedestal or a pinnacle. You put him in a bag and he looks like a rabbit, like a potato.

That is why I like novels: instead of heroes they have people in them.

So, when I came to write science-fiction novels, I came lugging this great heavy sack of stuff, my carrier bag full of wimps and klutzes, and tiny grains of things smaller than a mustard seed, and intricately woven nets which when laboriously unknotted are seen to contain one blue pebble, an imperturbably functioning chronometer telling the time on another world, and a mouse's skull; full of beginnings without ends, of initiations, of losses, of transformations and translations, and far more tricks than conflicts, far fewer triumphs than snares and delusions; full of space ships that get stuck, missions that fail, and people who don't understand. I said it was hard to make a gripping tale of how we wrested the wild oats from their husks, I didn't say it was impossible. Who ever said writing a novel was easy?

If science fiction is the mythology of modern technology, then its myth is tragic. "Technology," or "modern science" (using the words as they are usually used, in an unexamined shorthand standing for the "hard" sciences and high technology founded upon continuous economic growth), is a heroic undertaking, Herculean, Promethean, conceived as triumph, hence ultimately as tragedy. The fiction embodying this myth will be, and has been, triumphant (Man conquers earth, space, aliens, death, the future, etc.) and tragic (apocalypse, holocaust, then or now).

If, however, one avoids the linear, progressive, Time's-(killing)-arrow mode of the Techno-Heroic, and redefines technology and science as pri-

marily cultural carrier bag rather than weapon of domination, one pleasant side effect is that science fiction can be seen as a far less rigid, narrow field, not necessarily Promethean or apocalyptic at all, and in fact less a mythological genre than a realistic one.

It is a strange realism, but it is a strange reality.

Science fiction properly conceived, like all serious fiction, however funny, is a way of trying to describe what is in fact going on, what people actually do and feel, how people relate to everything else in this vast sack, this belly of the universe, this womb of things to be and tomb of things that were, this unending story. In it, as in all fiction, there is room enough to keep even Man where he belongs, in his place in the scheme of things; there is time enough to gather plenty of wild oats and sow them too, and sing to little Oom, and listen to Ool's joke, and watch newts, and still the story isn't over. Still there are seeds to be gathered, and room in the bag of stars.

Kant, Capital, and the Prohibition of Incest

A Polemical Introduction to the Configuration of Philosophy and Modernity

Nick Land

But intuition and the concept differentiate themselves from each other specifically; because they do not inter-mix with each other.¹

Immanuel Kant

1 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, Oxford 1982. The English translation omits the section in which this note is to be found (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Wiesbaden 1974, *Anmerkung* to section VIII of the Introduction to Kant's first edition, p. 40).

2 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Boston 1969, p. 10.

3 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, New York 1969, p. 339.

Significantly ... incest proper, and its metaphorical form as the violation of a minor (by someone 'old enough to be her father', as the expression goes), even combines in some countries with its direct opposite, inter-racial sexual relations, an extreme form of exogamy, as the two most powerful inducements to horror and collective vengeance.²

Claude Lévi-Strauss

No, we do not love humanity; but on the other hand we are not nearly 'German' enough, in the sense in which the word 'German' is constantly being used nowadays, to advocate nationalism and race hatred and to be able to take pleasure in the national scabies of the heart and blood-poisoning that now leads the nations of Europe to delimit and barricade themselves against each other as if it were a matter of quarantine.³

Friedrich Nietzsche

For the purposes of understanding the complex network of race, gender, and class oppressions that constitute our global modernity it is very rewarding to attend to the evolution of the apartheid policies

of the South African regime, since apartheid is directed towards the construction of a microcosm of the neo-colonial order; a recapitulation of the world in miniature. The most basic aspiration of the Boer state is the dissociation of politics from economic relations, so that by means of 'bantustans' or 'homelands' the black African population can be suspended in a condition of simultaneous political distance and economic proximity *vis-a-vis* the white metropolis. This policy seeks to recast the currently existing political exteriority of the black population in its relation to the society that utilizes its labour into a system of geographical relations modelled on national sovereignty. The direct dis-enfranchisement of the subject peoples would then be re-expressed within the dominant international code of ethno-geographical (national) autonomy.

World opinion discriminates between the relation South African whites have to the blacks they employ, and the relation North American whites, for instance, have to the Third World labour force they employ (directly or indirectly), because it acknowledges an indissoluble claim upon the entire South African land-mass by a population sharing an internationally recognized national identity. My contention in this paper is that the Third World as a whole is the product of a successful—although piecemeal and largely unconscious—'bantustan' policy on the part of the global *Capital metropolis*. Any attempt by political forces in the Third World to resolve the problems of their neo-colonial integration into the world trading system on the basis of national sovereignty is as naïve as the attempt of black South Africans *would* be if they opted for a 'bantustan' solution to their particular politico-economic dilemma.

The displacement of the political consequences of wage labour relations away from the metropolis is not an incidental feature of capital accumulation, as the economic purists aligned to both the bourgeoisie and the workerist left assert. It is rather the fundamental condition of capital as nothing other than an explicit aggression against the masses. Despite inadequacies in Marx's grasp of the nation state in its colonial and neo-colonial functioning his account of "so-called primitive accumulation"⁴ clearly demonstrates that the origin of wage labour relations is not itself economic, but lies in an overt war against the people, or their forced removal from previous conditions of subsistence. It is the outward shock-wave of this violent process of coercion, whereby the subsistence producer is driven into the market place, that determines the character of the imperialist project and its offspring. Capital has always sought to distance itself in reality—i.e. geographically—from this brutal political infrastructure. After all, the ideal of bourgeois politics is the absence of politics, since capital is nothing other than the consistent displacement of social decision-making into the market place. But this ideal of total de-politicization, or the absolute annihilation of resistance to market relations, is an impossible megalomaniac fantasy, and Marx's contention that labour trading at its natural price in an undistorted market (equal to the cost of its reproduction) will tend strongly to express an equally 'natural' political refusal of the market, continues to haunt the global bourgeoisie.

⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital*
Volume One, London
1977, from p. 667.

The only practical option available to the rulers of capitalist societies has lain in the global dis-aggregation of the political system, accompanied by a regional distortion of the world labour trading system in favour of the working classes in the metropolitan regions ('welfare capitalism'). This is why a deep complicity has continued to exist between the form of the 'nation state' as international political agent and an economic order based upon the commodification of labour. Since it is of systematic necessity that the economic conditions of an undistorted labour market is accompanied by political crisis, the world order functions as an integrated process based upon the flow of market-priced labour into the metropolis from the Third World (on the basis of the economic form of capital production), and the export of political instability to the Third World from the metropolis (on the basis of the political form of autonomous national sovereignty). The global labour market is easily interpreted, therefore, as a sustained demographic disaster that is systematically displaced away from the political institutions of the metropolis.

This process of displacement, which is the ultimate 'base' or 'infrastructure' of capital accumulation, is dependent upon those issues of 'kinships' or 'marriage organization' (the sexual economy of gender and race) which Marxists have often tended to consider as surface features of an underlying mode of production. In this paper I shall argue that with the philosophy of Immanuel Kant Western cultural history culminates in a self-reflecting bourgeois civilization, because his thought of synthesis (or relation to alterity), and also the strangulation of this thought within his system, captures modernity as a problem. But the modernity thus symptomized by its philosophical exposition is not primarily the penultimate phase of a dialectic of society and production, it is rather the necessity that historicity itself—expansionary social and economic development, or 'synthesis'—compromises with a profound continuity whose basic aspects are on the one hand patrilineal descent, and on the other a formal logic of identity that was already concluded in its essentials by Aristotle. These two aspects, the genealogical and the logical, are functions of a position of abstract masculine subjectivity coincident with the patronymic. This position is the proto-cultural fundament of everything that is able to count as the same. The tradition is thus rooted in a communication between culture and population, whose medium is the stability ('identity') of the male line. Modernity is not merely a compromise between novel forms of commercially driven social organization and this archaic cultural pattern of patrilineal exogamy, but more fundamentally, a deepening of the compromise already integral to any exogamy that is able to remain patrilineal. It is only by understanding the inhibitive function of patriarchies in relation to exogamic dissipation (an inhibition that is supremely logical in that it conserves identity, and which is for this reason violently xenophobic) that we can make sense of capital production and its tendency towards the peculiar cultural mutation that was baptised by Mussolini as 'fascism'. This is because the restriction of cultural synthesis, based upon a strenuous

endogamy at the level of the national community, is the ultimate outcome of the concerted 'liberalization' of kinship organizations within (metropolitan) industrial societies.

A capitalist trading empire is a developed form of exogamic patriarchy, and inherits its tensions. Domination of the other is inhibited in principle from developing into full absorption, because it is the residual alterity of the other that conditions the generation of surplus. The parallel difference between a labour market and a slave market is based on the fact that one cannot do business with a slave (but only with a slave-owner), and similarly, one cannot base a kinship system upon a harem. The prevalence of slave-labour within the Hitlerite new order in Eastern Europe is thus a clear indication that the Nazi conquests were in an important sense 'post-imperialist'. In contrast to the fascist 'mixed economy' of slavery and extermination, colonial wage-labour exploitation, even to the point of murder through impoverishment, leaves open the possibility of a radical de-stabilization of the metropolis. But what is crucial to the demarcation of a colonial from a neo-colonial system is a transnational diffusion of ethnicity. As soon as a metropolitan society disengages its organization of kinship and citizenship from its international economic syntheses it already reveals proto-fascist traits, and on this basis it is easy to see that the radical aspect to the colonial project—the explosion of national identity and the dissipation of metropolitan transcendence—was strangled at birth within Western history (with the emergence of Judaeo-Christian race theories).

The disaster of world history is that capitalism was never the progressive unwinding of patrilineage through a series of generalized exploitative relations associated with a trans-cultural exogamy, leading to an uncontrollable eruption of feminine (i.e. migrant) alterity into the father's heartland, and thus to the emergence of a radical—or ethnically disruptive and post-patriarchal—synthesis. Instead, kinship and trade were systematically isolated from each other, so that the internationalization of the economy was coupled with an entrenchment of xenophobic (nationalistic) kinship practices, maintaining a concentration of political and economic power within an isolated and geographically sedentary ethnic stock. Thus, when we discuss capital in its historical concreteness, we are simultaneously discussing a frustration of the cultural tendency of human societies towards expansive exogamy. Capital is the point at which a culture refuses the possibility—which it has itself engendered—of pushing the prohibition of incest towards its limit.

I want to touch upon this condition of modernity—which can be awkwardly described as patriarchal neo-colonial capital accumulation, but which I shall come to name 'inhibited synthesis'—not as a historian or a political theorist, but as a philosopher. The philosophical task in relation to modernity is that of delineating and challenging the *type of thinking* which characterizes it. But what we are to understand as 'thinking' is not at all clear in advance, indeed, the very thought of the 'in advance' (which Kant called the *a priori*) is itself the predominant

trait of our contemporary reason. Western societies departed from the stagnant theocracies of the Middle Ages through a series of more or less violent convulsions that have engendered an explosive possibility of novelty on earth. But these same societies simultaneously shackled this new history by systematically compromising it. This ambiguous movement of 'enlightenment', which characterizes the emergence of industrial societies trading in commodities, is intellectually stimulated by its own paradoxical nature. An enlightenment society wants both to learn and to legislate for all time, to open itself to the other and to consolidate itself from within, to expand indefinitely whilst reproducing itself as the same. Its ultimate dream is to grow whilst remaining identical to what it was, to touch the other without vulnerability. Where the European *ancien régime* was parochial and insular, modernity is *appropriative*. It lives in a profound but uneasy relation to an outside that both attracts and repels it, a relation that it precariously resolves within itself on the basis of *exploitation*, or interaction from a position of unilateral mastery. I think it is likely that the volatile mixture of hatred and desire that typifies an exploitative culture bears comparison with the psychology of rape.

The paradox of enlightenment, then, is an attempt to fix a stable relation with what is radically other, since insofar as the other is rigidly positioned within a relation it is no longer fully other. If before encountering otherness we already know what its relation to us will be, we have obliterated it in advance. And this brutal denial is the effective implication of the thought of the *a priori*, since if our certainties come to us without reference to otherness we have *always already* torn out the tongue of alterity before entering into relation with it. This aggressive logical absurdity (the absurdity of *logic itself*) reaches its zenith in the philosophy of Kant, whose basic problem was to find an account for the possibility of what he termed "*synthetic a priori knowledge*"; which is knowledge that is both given in advance by ourselves, and yet adds to what we know. As we have seen, this problem is the same as that of accounting for the possibility of *modernity or enlightenment*, which is to say, of the inhibited encounter with alterity.

Modern philosophy between René Descartes (1596-1650) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) is usually retrospectively understood in terms of the two basic tendencies which we refer to as 'empiricism' and 'rationalism'. No philosopher was a perfect and consistent exemplar of either of these tendencies, but the exponents of each tended to become increasingly radical in one direction or the other. By the time Kant wrote his first great critique, *The Critique of Pure Reason*⁵, he was able to take the writings of David Hume (1711-76) as definitive for empirical thought, and those of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) as definitive for rationalism. He took the basic argument of the empiricists to be that knowledge is *synthetic* and *a posteriori*, meaning that it takes the form of an *addition* to what is inherent to reason, and thus follows from experience (or an encounter with what is outside ourselves). In contrast to this, he saw the rationalists to be

5 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, London 1964.

arguing that knowledge is characteristically *analytic* and *a priori*, meaning that it is derived from what is already inherent to reason, and thus anticipates experience by constructing systems of logical deduction from basic axioms. Knowledge is analytic or synthetic depending on whether its source is intrinsic or extrinsic to the faculty of reason, and *a priori* or *a posteriori* depending on whether it precedes or succeeds the contact with sensation, or with what is outside reason. It is with these pairs of concepts, the analytic/synthetic couple and the *a priori/a posteriori* couple, that Kant determines the structure of his own thinking in relation to that of his recent predecessors.

Kant thought that both empiricist and rationalist philosophers had accepted the simple alignment of the synthetic with the *a posteriori* and of the analytic with the *a priori*. This is to say, the relation between these couples had seemed to be itself analytic, so that to speak of analytic *a priori* judgements would add nothing to the concept of the analytic, or in other words, an analysis of the concept 'analytic' would yield the concept of the '*a priori*' as already implicit within it. This assumption was not accepted by Kant, who re-aligned the two pairs of concepts in a perpendicular fashion to form a grid, thus yielding four permutations. He granted the elimination of any analytic *a posteriori* knowledge, but clung doggedly to the possibility of knowledge that would be both synthetic and *a priori*. This new conception of knowledge was relevant to an 'object' that had not previously been formulated: the conditions of experience. Kant described his 'Copernican revolution' in philosophy as a shift from the question 'what must the mind be like in order to know?' to the question 'what must objects be like in order to be known?' The answers to this latter question would provide a body of synthetic *a priori* knowledge, telling us about experience without being derived from experience. It would justify the emergence of knowledge that was both new and timelessly certain, grounding the enlightenment culture of a civilization confronting an ambiguous dependence upon novelty.

Because a developed knowledge of the conditions of experience presupposes a relation to the outside it is synthetic and not analytic, but because it concerns the pure form of the relation as such and not the sensory material involved in the relation it is *a priori* and not *a posteriori*. It is solely concerned with the forms of appearance, or the unchanging manner in which things must be if they are to be for us. Kant calls this pure form of synthesis 'transcendental', and opposes it to the inconstant content of synthesis, with which the empiricists had been concerned, and which he calls 'empirical'. Kant's 'object' is thus the universal form of the relation to alterity; that which must of necessity be the same in the other in order for it to appear to us. This universal form is that which is necessary for anything to be 'on offer' for experience, it is the 'exchange value' that first allows a thing to be marketed to the enlightenment mind. Between medieval scholasticism and Kant Western reason moves from a parochial economy to a system in which, abandoning the project of repressing the traffic with alterity, one resolves instead to control the system of

trade. With the overthrow of the *ancien régime* it became impossible to simply exclude novelty, it could only be appropriated, stamped with a constant form, and integrated into an immutable formal system.

In *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* Claude Lévi-Strauss notes the frequent distinction made by various societies between normal and 'rich food'. Normal food is consumed by its producers as a means to their subsistence, whilst rich food is given to another to consume, and received from another. This is not primarily based upon a differentiation of social classes within a system of production, but rather, upon a differentiation between tribes, or separate systems of production. The difference between rich food and normal food maps onto the difference between filiation (relation by blood) and alliance (relation by marriage). This is because rich food occupies the position of women within a marriage system regulated by patrilineal exogamy, with its producer renouncing it for himself, and thus echoing the prohibition of incest. What is of particular philosophical interest, however, is that it also marks a distinction between the 'rational' (analytic) and the 'empirical' (synthetic), and thus defines a terrain upon which we can sketch an economy of knowledge. Rich food comes from outside the system, and the contortions undergone by structural anthropology in its project to recapture it within an expanded system of relations replays Kant's efforts to reduce synthesis to an expanded horizon of unchanging forms. If 'rich food' is the primordial element of trade its metamorphosis into the modern 'commodity' can be seen as a suppression of radical synthesis, the problematic process which provides enlightenment reason with its object of thought.

The cultural inhibition of synthesis takes a form that Lévi-Strauss calls 'dual organization'.⁶ A dual organization arises when two groups form a closed system of reciprocal exchange, in which each consumes the rich food, and marries the women, of the other. Such organizations reproduce themselves culturally through shared myths articulated around basic dualities (day/night, sun/moon, up-river/down-river etc.). The function of these myths is to capture alterity within a system of rules, to provide it with an identity, and to exclude the possibility of the radically different. It should not surprise us, therefore, that Kant inherited a philosophical tradition whose decisive concepts were organized into basic couples (spirit/matter, form/content, abstract/concrete, universal/particular, etc.). He delineates some basic structure of this tradition in the section of the *Critique of Pure Reason* called the 'Transcendental Dialectic'. In this section he interprets this dichotomous heritage as a *problem* (to which Kant gives the name 'antinomy') and initiates a new phase of Western philosophy, now characterized as the critique of metaphysics. Kant argues that the tendency of previous metaphysics to conceive coherent, but unpersuasive and antagonistic, intellectual systems resulted from the application of pure (transcendental) concepts to arguments concerning the nature of things in themselves (noumena). The critical philosophy therefore restricts the jurisdiction of all concepts to the realm of possible appearance (intuition), suggesting (as we have seen) that the *a priori*

6 *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, pp. 69-83.

forms of knowledge have no purchase on any reality transcending the phenomenon. Oppositional terms are no longer accepted as descriptions capturing reality, but are interpreted as pure forms of reason that can only be meaningfully deployed theoretically when applied to objects of possible appearance, which fall within the legislative domain of the 'faculty' which Kant calls 'the understanding' (*Verstand*).

Since 'reality' is itself a transcendental concept, Kant's usage of a distinction between appearance and reality to restrict the deployment of pure concepts already suggests a crucial difficulty with his project, since every attempt to formulate a relation or distinction between the phenomenal and noumenal realms (the world as it appears to us or is understood, and the world as it is in itself) must itself relapse into the pre-critical and illegitimate deployment of conceptual thought. One crucial symptom of this is that the structure of Kantian critique itself perpetuates the oppositional form of metaphysical thought, since its resolution of the antinomies depends upon the mobilization of further dichotomies, in particular those of transcendental/empirical, phenomenon/noumenon, concept/intuition, and analysis/synthesis. In other words, Kant still wants to say something about radical alterity, even if it is only that it has no relevance to us, yet he has deprived himself of the right to all speculation about the nature of what is beyond appearance. The vocabulary that would describe the other of metaphysics is itself inscribed within metaphysics, since the inside and the outside are both conceptually determined from the inside, within a binary myth or cultural symptom of dual organization. It is thus the inhibition of synthesis—the delimitation of alterity in advance—that sets up the modern form of the ontological question: 'how do we know that matter exists?' That the very existence of materiality is problematic for enlightenment thought is symptomatic of the colonial trading systems that correspond to it. Alterity cannot be registered unless it can be inscribed within the system, according to the interconnected axes of exchange value (price) and the patronymic, or, in other words, as a commodity with an owner.

What falls outside this recognized form is everything that resists commodification, the primordial independence that antedates the constitution of the destituted proletariat. As I have suggested, this inchoate mass of more or less explicit resistance to capital is isolated outside the metropolis by a combination of automatic economic processes (the concentration of poverty) and restrictive kinship practices. Modern capital has therefore brought about a fundamental dislocation between filiation and alliance by simultaneously deregulating alliance and abstracting it from all kinship implications. The primordial anthropological bond between marriage and trade is dissolved, in order that capital can ethnically and geographically quarantine its consequences from itself. The question of racism, which arises under patriarchal capital as the default of a global trade in women (a parochialism in the system of misogynistic violence; the non-emergence of a trans-cultural exogamy), is thus more complex than

it might seem, and is bound in profound but often paradoxical ways to the functioning of patriarchy and capital. Systematic racism is a sign that class positions within the general (trans-national) economy are being distributed on a racial basis, which implies an effective, if not a juridical, apartheid.

Kant was able to remain bourgeois without overtly promoting racism only because he also remained an idealist, or in other words a Christian (a 'cunning Christian' as Nietzsche calls him?), and identified universality with ideality rather than with power. Kant's economy of the concept, which is the assimilation of experience into a system of exchange values, is irresistible in principle, and thus does not recognize a problem of rebellion. It is only with the implicit recognition of the need for a systematic evacuation of rebellion from the metropolis by means of a geographically distorted labour market that racism arises in its contemporary form, which is ultimately that of a restricted franchise (on a national basis) over the political management of the global means of production. It is no longer a question of 'taxation without representation' (except by means of interest payments), but rather of a metropolitan capital seeking to abstract itself from all political reference, becoming 'off-shore', although not to the extent that it loses its geo-political condition of existence (the U.S. war-machine). The increasingly rigorous differentiation of marriage from trade, or politics from economics, finds its ultimate conceptual definition in the thought of a moral agency which is utterly impervious to learning, communication, or exchange.

It is in his second critique, *The Critique of Practical Reason*⁸, that Kant capitalizes upon the ethno-ethical consequences of the first: that justice must be prosecuted without negotiation. Kant's moral theory is an ethics of appropriative modernity, and breaks with the parochial or scriptural morality of the *ancien régime*. Where Judaic, Christian, and Islamic moral codes served as legitimations of imperial projects in their periods of ascendancy, Kantian morality is, inversely, legitimated by the position of imperial or universal jurisdiction. Only that is moral which can be demanded of every rational being unconditionally, in the name of an ultra-empire that Kant names the 'empire of ends' (*Reich der Zwecke*). The law of this empire is called the 'categorical imperative', which means a law stemming solely from the purity of the concept, and thus dictated by the absolute monologue of colonial reason. In the purity of categorical morality the incestuous blood-line of the pharaohs is still detectable, but sublimated into an impersonal administration. The law is that which cannot be legitimately discussed, and which is therefore an unresponsive or unilateral imposition. It is not difficult to see that the second critique distills the xenophobic violence of the first and elevates it to the most extreme possible fanaticism. Where theoretical knowledge is open to a limited negotiation with alterity, practical or moral certainty is forbidden from entering into relation with anything outside itself, except to issue commands. Kant's practical subject already pre-figures a deaf *führer*, barking impossible orders that seem to come from another world.

7 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, Harmondsworth 1982, p. 39.

8 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, London 1889.

9 *Critique of Judgement*,
op. cit.

Kant makes a further strenuous effort to push forward the horizon of *a priori* synthesis in his third critique, *The critique of Judgement*.⁹ If the first critique corresponds to appropriative economy or commodification, and the second critique corresponds to imperial jurisdiction, the third critique corresponds to the exercise of war at those margins of the global system that continue to resist both the market and the administration. It is concerned with the type of pleasure that is experienced when an object demonstrates an extra-judicial submission or abasement before the faculty of judgement; an experience which Kant associates with the contemplation of beauty. The first critique already exhibits a conception of excess or *a priori* synthesis that generalizes the principles of the labour market to all objects of theoretical cognition and transforms the understanding into a form of intellectual capital. In the third critique there is a far more aggressive conception of excess, which generates a feeling of delight, because it is essentially *extortionate*. This excess is not a surplus of certainty stemming from dimensions of objectivity possessed in advance of intuition, and thus by right, but rather a surplus of purchase upon the object. Kant argues that we have no transcendental right to expect natural laws to be sufficiently homogeneous for us to grasp. When confronting the heterogeneity of intuition, reason must engage in a kind of Pascalian wager; assuming an intelligible system of nature because it has nothing to lose by not doing so. The submission of the outside in general to the inside in general, or of nature to the idea, i.e. conquest, is not guaranteed by any principle. The capitalist feels a neutral satisfaction in the production of 'normal profits', but the conqueror feels *exultation* in the attainment of victory, precisely because *there was no reason to expect it*. Kant's advice to the imperial war-machine in his third critique can be summarized as this: "treat all resistance as if it were less than you might justifiably fear". The *Critique of Judgement* thus projects the global victory of capitalized reason as pure and exuberant ambition.

The only possible politics of purity is fascism, or a militant activism rooted in the inhibitory and exclusive dimensions of a metropolitanism. Racism, as a regulated, automatic, and indefinitely suspended process of genocide (as opposed to the hysterical and unsustainable genocide of the Nazis) is the real condition of persistence for a global economic system that is dependent upon an aggregate price of labour approximating to the cost of its bare subsistence, and therefore upon an expanding pool of labour power which must be constantly 'stimulated' into this market by an annihilating poverty. If fascism is evaded in metropolitan societies it is only because a chronic passive genocide trails in the wake of capital and commodity markets as they displace themselves around the Third World, 'disciplining' the labour market, and ensuring that basic commodity prices are not high enough to distribute capital back into primary producer societies.

The forces most unambiguously antagonistic to this grotesque process are 'exogamic' (or, less humanistically, 'exotropic'); the synthetic energies that condition all surplus value, and yet co-exist with capital

only under repression. A radical international socialism would not be a socialist ideology generalized beyond its culture of origin, but a programme of collectivity or unrestrained synthesis that springs from the theoretical and libidinal dissolution of national totality. To get to a world without nations would in itself guarantee the achievement of all immediately post-capitalist social and economic goals. It is this revolutionary requirement for a spontaneously *homeless* subversion that gives an urgency to certain possibilities of feminist politics, since the erasure of matrilineal genealogy within the patriarchal machine means that fascisizing valorizations of ancestry have no final purchase on the feminine 'subject'. The patronymic has irrecoverably divested all the women who fall under it of any recourse to an ethno-geographical identity; only the twin powers of father and husband suppress the nomadism of the anonymous female fluxes that patriarchy oppressively manipulates, violates, and psychiatrizes. By allowing women some access to wealth and social prestige the liberalization of patriarchy has sought to defuse the explosive force of this anonymity, just as capital has tended to reduce the voluptuous excess of exogamic conjugation to the stability of nationally segmented trading circuits. The increasingly incestual character of economic order—reaching its zenith in racist xenophobia—is easily masked as a series of 'feminist' reforms of patriarchy; as a de-commodification of woman, a diminution of the obliterating effects of the patronymic, and a return to the mother. This is the sentimental 'feminism' that Nietzsche despised, and whose petit-bourgeois nationalist implications he clearly saw. The only resolutely revolutionary politics is feminist in orientation, but only if the synthetic forces mobilized under patriarchy are extrapolated beyond the possibility of assimilation, rather than being criticized from the perspective of mutilated genealogies. Genealogy as the dissipation of recuperative origins (Nietzsche), not as sentimental nostalgia.

The women of the earth are segmented only by their fathers and husbands. Their praxial fusion is indistinguishable from the struggle against the micro-powers that suppress them most immediately. That is why the proto-fascism of nationality laws and immigration controls tends to have a sexist character as well as a racist one. It is because women are the historical realization of the potentially euphoric synthetic or communicative function which patriarchy both exploits and inhibits that they are invested with a revolutionary destiny, and it is only through their struggle that politics will be able to escape from all fatherlands. In her meticulous studies of patriarchy Luce Irigaray has amply demonstrated the peculiar urgency of the feminist question,¹⁰ although the political solutions she suggests are often feebly nostalgic, sentimental, and pacifistic. Perhaps only Monique Wittig has adequately grasped the inescapably *military* task faced by any serious revolutionary feminism,¹¹ and it is difficult not to be dispirited by the enormous reluctance women have shown historically to prosecute their struggle with sufficient ruthlessness and aggression. The left tends to be evasive about the numbing violence intrinsic to revolutionary war, and feminism is often particularly fastidious in this

10 Amongst the growing body of Luce Irigaray's work available in English the most powerful arguments are to be found, perhaps, in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, and in essays amongst those compiled in *This Sex which is not One*, especially 'Women on the market' (*Le marché des femmes*) and 'When the goods get together' (*Des marchandises entre elles*).

11 See especially: Monique Wittig, *Les Guérillères*, Paris 1969.

respect, even reverting to absurd mystical and Ghandian ideologies. If feminist struggles have been constantly de-prioritized in theory and practice it is surely because of their idealistic recoil from the currency of violence, which is to say, from the only definitive 'matter' of politics.

The state apparatus of an advanced industrial society can certainly not be defeated without a willingness to escalate the cycle of violence without limit. It is a terrible fact that atrocity is not the perversion, but the very motor of such struggles: the language of inexorable political will. A revolutionary war against a modern metropolitan state can only be fought in hell. It is this harsh truth that has deflected Western politics into an increasingly servile reformism, whilst transforming nationalist struggles into the sole arena of vigorous contention against particular configurations of capital. But, as I hope I have demonstrated, such nationalist struggles are relevant only to the geographical modulation of capital, and not to the radical jeopardizing of neo-colonialism (inhibited synthesis) as such. Victorious Third World struggles, so long as they have been successfully localized, do not lead to realistic post-capitalist achievements, and certainly not to post-patriarchal ones, since the conservation of the form of the nation state is itself enough to guarantee the reinsertion of a society into the system of inhibited synthesis. For as long as the dynamic of guerilla war just leads to new men at the top—with all that this entails in terms of the communication between individuated sovereignties—history will continue to look bleak. For it is only when the pervasive historical bond between masculinity and war is broken by effective feminist violence that it will become possible to envisage the uprooting of the patriarchal endogamies that orchestrate the contemporary world order. With the abolition of the inhibition of synthesis—of Kantian thought—a sordid cowardice will be washed away, and cowardice is the engine of greed. But the only conceivable end of Kantianism is the end of modernity, and to reach this we must foster new Amazons in our midst.

THE TRAGEDY OF WOMAN'S EMANCIPATION

Emma Goldman

From the 1917 edition of Anarchism and Other Essays

I BEGIN WITH AN ADMISSION: REGARDLESS OF ALL POLITICAL and economic theories, treating of the fundamental differences between various groups within the human race, regardless of class and race distinctions, regardless of all artificial boundary lines between woman's rights and man's rights, I hold that there is a point where these differentiations may meet and grow into one perfect whole.

With this I do not mean to propose a peace treaty. The general social antagonism which has taken hold of our entire public life today, brought about through the force of opposing and contradictory interests, will crumble to pieces when the reorganisation of our social life, based upon the principles of economic justice, shall have become a reality.

Peace or harmony between the sexes and individuals does not necessarily depend on a superficial equalization of human beings; nor does it call for the elimination of individual traits and peculiarities. The problem that confronts us today, and which the nearest future is to solve, is how to be one's self and yet in oneness with others, to feel deeply with all human beings and still retain one's own characteristic qualities. This seems to me to be the basis upon which the mass and the individual, the true democrat and the true individuality, man and woman, can meet without antagonism and opposition. The motto should not be: Forgive one

another; rather, Understand one another. The oft-quoted sentence of Madame de Stael: "To understand everything means to forgive everything," has never particularly appealed to me; it has the odor of the confessional; to forgive one's fellow-being conveys the idea of pharisaical superiority. To understand one's fellow-being suffices. The admission partly represents the fundamental aspect of my views on the emancipation of woman and its effect upon the entire sex.

Emancipation should make it possible for woman to be human in the truest sense. Everything within her that craves assertion and activity should reach its fullest expression; all artificial barriers should be broken, and the road towards greater freedom cleared of every trace of centuries of submission and slavery.

This was the original aim of the movement for woman's emancipation. But the results so far achieved have isolated woman and have robbed her of the fountain springs of that happiness which is so essential to her. Merely external emancipation has made of the modern woman an artificial being, who reminds one of the products of French arboriculture with its arabesque trees and shrubs, pyramids, wheels, and wreaths; anything, except the forms which would be reached by the expression of her own inner qualities. Such artificially grown plants of the female sex are to be found in large numbers, especially in the so-called intellectual sphere of our life.

Liberty and equality for woman! What hopes and aspirations these words awakened when they were first uttered by some of the noblest and bravest souls of those days. The sun in all his light and glory was to rise upon a new world; in this world woman was to be free to direct her own destiny—an aim certainly worthy of the great enthusiasm, courage, perseverance, and ceaseless effort of the tremendous host of pioneer men and women, who staked everything against a world of prejudice and ignorance.

My hopes also move towards that goal, but I hold that the emancipation of woman, as interpreted and practically applied today, has failed to reach that great end. Now, woman is confronted with the necessity of emancipating herself from emancipation, if she really desires to be free. This may sound paradoxical, but is, nevertheless, only too true.

What has she achieved through her emancipation? Equal suffrage in a few States. Has that purified our political life, as many well-meaning advocates predicted? Certainly not. Incidentally, it is really time that persons with plain, sound judgment should cease to talk about corruption in politics in a boarding-school tone. Corruption of politics has nothing to do with the morals, or the laxity of morals, of various political personalities. Its cause is altogether a material one. Politics is the reflex of the business and industrial world, the mottos of which are: "To take is more blessed than to give"; "buy cheap and sell dear"; "one soiled hand washes the other." There is no hope even that woman, with her right to vote, will ever purify politics.

Emancipation has brought woman economic equality with man; that is, she can choose her own profession and trade; but as her past and present physical training has not equipped her with the necessary strength to compete with man, she is often compelled to exhaust all her energy, use up her vitality, and strain every nerve in order to reach the market value. Very few ever succeed, for it is a fact that women teachers, doctors, lawyers, architects, and engineers are neither met with the same confidence as their male colleagues, nor receive equal remuneration. And those that do reach that enticing equality, generally do so at the expense of their physical and psychical well-being. As to the great mass of working girls and women, how much independence is gained if the narrowness and lack of freedom of the home is exchanged for the narrowness and lack of freedom of the factory, sweat-shop, department store, or office? In addition is the burden which is laid on many women of looking after a "home, sweet home"—cold, dreary, disorderly, uninviting—after a day's hard work. Glorious independence! No wonder that hundreds of girls are willing to accept the first offer of marriage, sick and tired of

their "independence" behind the counter, at the sewing or type-writing machine. They are just as ready to marry as girls of the middle class, who long to throw off the yoke of parental supremacy. A so-called independence which leads only to earning the merest subsistence is not so enticing, not so ideal, that one could expect woman to sacrifice everything for it. Our highly praised independence is, after all, but a slow process of dulling and stifling woman's nature, her love instinct, and her mother instinct.

Nevertheless, the position of the working girl is far more natural and human than that of her seemingly more fortunate sister in the more cultured professional walks of life—teachers, physicians, lawyers, engineers, etc., who have to make a dignified, proper appearance, while the inner life is growing empty and dead.

The narrowness of the existing conception of woman's independence and emancipation; the dread of love for a man who is not her social equal; the fear that love will rob her of her freedom and independence; the horror that love or the joy of motherhood will only hinder her in the full exercise of her profession—all these together make of the emancipated modern woman a compulsory vestal, before whom life, with its great clarifying sorrows and its deep, entrancing joys, rolls on without touching or gripping her soul.

Emancipation, as understood by the majority of its adherents and exponents, is of too narrow a scope to permit the boundless love and ecstasy contained in the deep emotion of the true woman, sweetheart, mother, in freedom.

The tragedy of the self-supporting or economically free woman does not lie in too many but in too few experiences. True, she surpasses her sister of past generations in knowledge of the world and human nature; it is just because of this that she feels deeply the lack of life's essence, which alone can enrich the human soul, and without which the majority of women have become mere professional automatons.

That such a state of affairs was bound to come was foreseen by those who realized that, in the domain of ethics, there still remained many decaying ruins of the time of the undisputed superiority of man; ruins that are still considered useful. And, what is more important, a goodly number of the emancipated are unable to get along without them. Every movement that aims at the destruction of existing institutions and the replacement thereof with something more advanced, more perfect, has followers who in theory stand for the most radical ideas, but who, nevertheless, in their every-day practice, are like the average Philistine, feigning respectability and clamoring for the good

opinion of their opponents. There are, for example, socialists, and even anarchists, who stand for the idea that property is robbery, yet who will grow indignant if anyone owe them the value of a half-dozen pins.

The same Philistine can be found in the movement for woman's emancipation. Yellow journalists and milk-and-water literateurs have painted pictures of the emancipated woman that make the hair of the good citizen and his dull companion stand up on end. Every member of the woman's rights movement was pictured as a George Sand in her absolute disregard of morality. Nothing was sacred to her. She had no respect for the ideal relation between man and woman. In short, emancipation stood only for a reckless life of lust and sin; regardless of society, religion, and morality. The exponents of woman's rights were highly indignant at such representation, and, lacking humor, they exerted all their energy to prove that they were not at all as bad as they were painted, but the very reverse. Of course, as long as woman was the slave of man, she could not be good and pure, but now that she was free and independent she would prove how good she could be and that her influence would have a purifying effect on all institutions in society. True, the movement for woman's rights has broken many old fetters, but it has also forged new ones. The great movement of TRUE emancipation has not met with a great race of women who could look liberty in the face. Their narrow, Puritanical vision banished man, as a disturber and doubtful character, out of their emotional life. Man was not to be tolerated at any price, except perhaps as the father of a child, since a child could not very well come to life without a father. Fortunately, the most rigid Puritans never will be strong enough to kill the innate craving for motherhood. But woman's freedom is closely allied with man's freedom, and many of my so-called emancipated sisters seem to overlook the fact that a child born in freedom needs the love and devotion of each human being about him, man as well as woman. Unfortunately, it is this narrow conception of human relations that has brought about a great tragedy in the lives of the modern man and woman.

About fifteen years ago appeared a work from the pen of the brilliant Norwegian, Laura Marholm, called *Woman, A Character Study*. She was one of the first to call attention to the emptiness and narrowness of the existing conception of woman's emancipation, and its tragic effect upon the inner life of woman. In her work Laura Marholm speaks of the fate of several gifted women of international fame: the genius, Eleonora Duse; the great mathematician and writer, Sonya Kovalevskaia; the artist and poet-nature, Marie Bashkirtzeff, who died so young. Through each

description of the lives of these women of such extraordinary mentality runs a marked trail of unsatisfied craving for a full, rounded, complete, and beautiful life, and the unrest and loneliness resulting from the lack of it. Through these masterly psychological sketches, one cannot help but see that the higher the mental development of woman, the less possible it is for her to meet a congenial mate who will see in her, not only sex, but also the human being, the friend, the comrade and strong individuality, who cannot and ought not lose a single trait of her character.

The average man with his self-sufficiency, his ridiculously superior airs of patronage towards the female sex, is an impossibility for woman as depicted in the *Character Study* by Laura Marholm. Equally impossible for her is the man who can see in her nothing more than her mentality and her genius, and who fails to awaken her woman nature.

A rich intellect and a fine soul are usually considered necessary attributes of a deep and beautiful personality. In the case of the modern woman, these attributes serve as a hindrance to the complete assertion of her being. For over a hundred years the old form of marriage, based on the Bible, "till death doth part," has been denounced as an institution that stands for the sovereignty of the man over the woman, of her complete submission to his whims and commands, and absolute dependence on his name and support. Time and again it has been conclusively proved that the old matrimonial relation restricted woman to the function of a man's servant and the bearer of his children. And yet we find many emancipated women who prefer marriage, with all its deficiencies, to the narrowness of an unmarried life; narrow and unendurable because of the chains of moral and social prejudice that cramp and bind her nature.

The explanation of such inconsistency on the part of many advanced women is to be found in the fact that they never truly understood the meaning of emancipation. They thought that all that was needed was independence from external tyrannies; the internal tyrants, far more harmful to life and growth—ethical and social conventions—were left to take care of themselves; and they have taken care of themselves. They seem to get along as beautifully in the heads and hearts of the most active exponents of woman's emancipation, as in the heads and hearts of our grandmothers.

These internal tyrants, whether they be in the form of public opinion or what will mother say, or brother, father, aunt, or relative of any sort; what will Mrs. Grundy, Mr. Comstock, the employer, the Board of Education say? All these busybodies, moral detectives, jailers of the human spirit, what will they say? Until

woman has learned to defy them all, to stand firmly on her own ground and to insist upon her own unrestricted freedom, to listen to the voice of her nature, whether it call for life's greatest treasure, love for a man, or her most glorious privilege, the right to give birth to a child, she cannot call herself emancipated. How many emancipated women are brave enough to acknowledge that the voice of love is calling, wildly beating against their breasts, demanding to be heard, to be satisfied.

The French writer, Jean Reibrach, in one of his novels, *New Beauty*, attempts to picture the ideal, beautiful, emancipated woman. This ideal is embodied in a young girl, a physician. She talks very cleverly and wisely of how to feed infants; she is kind, and administers medicines free to poor mothers. She converses with a young man of her acquaintance about the sanitary conditions of the future, and how various bacilli and germs shall be exterminated by the use of stone walls and floors, and by the doing away with rugs and hangings. She is, of course, very plainly and practically dressed, mostly in black. The young man, who, at their first meeting, was overawed by the wisdom of his emancipated friend, gradually learns to understand her, and recognises one fine day that he loves her. They are young, and she is kind and beautiful, and though always in rigid attire, her appearance is softened by a spotlessly clean white collar and cuffs. One would expect that he would tell her of his love, but he is not one to commit romantic absurdities. Poetry and the enthusiasm of love cover their blushing faces before the pure beauty of the lady. He silences the voice of his nature, and remains correct. She, too, is always exact, always rational, always well behaved. I fear if they had formed a union, the young man would have risked freezing to death. I must confess that I can see nothing beautiful in this new beauty, who is as cold as the stone walls and floors she dreams of. Rather would I have the love songs of romantic ages, rather Don Juan and Madame Venus, rather an elopement by ladder and rope on a moonlight night, followed by the father's curse, mother's moans, and the moral comments of neighbors, than correctness and propriety measured by yardsticks. If love does not know how to give and take without restrictions, it is not love, but a transaction that never fails to lay stress on a plus and a minus.

The greatest shortcoming of the emancipation of the present day lies in its artificial stiffness and its narrow respectabilities, which produce an emptiness in woman's soul that will not let her drink from the fountain of life. I once remarked that there seemed to be a deeper relationship between the old-fashioned mother and hostess, ever on the alert for the happiness of her little ones and the comfort of those she loved, and the truly new

woman, than between the latter and her average emancipated sister. The disciples of emancipation pure and simple declared me a heathen, fit only for the stake. Their blind zeal did not let them see that my comparison between the old and the new was merely to prove that a goodly number of our grandmothers had more blood in their veins, far more humor and wit, and certainly a greater amount of naturalness, kind-heartedness, and simplicity, than the majority of our emancipated professional women who fill the colleges, halls of learning, and various offices. This does not mean a wish to return to the past, nor does it condemn woman to her old sphere, the kitchen and the nursery.

Salvation lies in an energetic march onward towards a brighter and clearer future. We are in need of unhampered growth out of old traditions and habits. The movement for woman's emancipation has so far made but the first step in that direction. It is to be hoped that it will gather strength to make another. The right to vote, or equal civil rights, may be good demands, but true emancipation begins neither at the polls nor in courts. It begins in woman's soul. History tells us that every oppressed class gained true liberation from its masters through its own efforts. It is necessary that woman learn that lesson, that she realize that her freedom will reach as far as her power to achieve her freedom reaches. It is, therefore, far more important for her to begin with her inner regeneration, to cut loose from the weight of prejudices, traditions, and customs. The demand for equal rights in every vocation of life is just and fair; but, after all, the most vital right is the right to love and be loved. Indeed, if partial emancipation is to become a complete and true emancipation of woman, it will have to do away with the ridiculous notion that to be loved, to be sweetheart and mother, is synonymous with being slave or subordinate. It will have to do away with the absurd notion of the dualism of the sexes, or that man and woman represent two antagonistic worlds.

Pettiness separates; breadth unites. Let us be broad and big. Let us not overlook vital things because of the bulk of trifles confronting us. A true conception of the relation of the sexes will not admit of conqueror and conquered; it knows of but one great thing: to give of one's self boundlessly, in order to find one's self richer, deeper, better. That alone can fill the emptiness, and transform the tragedy of woman's emancipation into joy, limitless joy.

ROTE ZORA

THE REVOLUTIONARY CELLS (RZ) FIRST APPEARED ON November 16, 1973 with an attack against ITT in West Berlin to point out the participation of this multinational corporation in Pinochet's military putsch in Chile. In 1974, the first high-explosive attack was undertaken by the wimmin of the RZ against the *Bundesverfassungsgericht* (Federal Constitutional Court) in Karlsruhe, the day after it supported the abortion law, Par. 218; a paragraph against free choice on abortion, allowing abortion only in certain cases. The wimmin naturally demanded the total right for every womyn to have an abortion, as a right to self-determination over their own bodies. In the first issue of *Revolutionärer Zorn* (*Revolutionary Rage*) the RZ subdivided their actions into three main categories: 1) anti-imperialist actions, 2) actions against the branches, establishments, and accomplices of Zionism in the FRG, and 3) actions supporting the struggles of workers, wimmin and youth, and attacking and punishing their enemies. This thematic spectrum was used in the following years.

One Revolutionary Cell became several Revolutionary Cells. Later on, in the late 70's, the militant actions by the RZ became also a part of the anti-nuclear movement (at that time people marched in thousands against nuclear power and reprocessing plants in Kalkar, Wyhl, Gorleben, and Brokdorf) and the Anti-Runway 18 West movement (Anti-Startbahn 18 West-Bewegung) in the Rhein-Main area. In this context, only one

attack with deadly consequence was carried out: the Minister of Economy and Transportation, Herbert Karry, was assassinated on May 11, 1981 by the RZ.

From 1977 onwards, the militant feminist anti-patriarchal wimmin's urban guerrilla group Rote Zora (Red Zora) acted autonomously and independently, though some wimmin still participated in the Revolutionary Cells.

"Wimmin were always a part of the armed groups. Their portion was mostly held back. But the times are changing ... subversive wimmin's groups like Red Zora do exist, indeed still too few, but even that will be changing."

Red Zora

Red Zora attacks predominantly patriarchal institutes, companies, and persons representing and building up a male sexist society, which is oppressing and exploiting wimmin worldwide. They are conducting campaigns against porntraders, sex shops, international traders of wimmin (those who profit from importing Asian wimmin as "brides" for West German men), doctors who are carrying out forced sterilizations, the Doctor's Guild ("We see the Federal Doctor's Guild as exponents of rape in white trench-coats"), drug companies (notably Schering who produced the birth defect causing drug Duogynon), as well as computer com-

panies such as Nixdorf and the multinational Siemens. Very popular as well was the illegal reprinting of bus and streetcar fares. In individual cases, Red Zora and the Revolutionary Cells have worked together such as in the writing of a critique of the peace movement in 1984. In this paper they criticised the peace movement as a bourgeois movement with an apocalyptic vision. The RZ and Red Zora said that the major mistake of the peace movement was to concentrate their political goal only on the preservation of peace in the metropolises instead of discussing the imperialist, context between armament and crisis; Third World misery and social cutbacks; sexism and racism.

Anti-Imperialism Today

In the last three years the RZ have concentrated their actions on the issue of West German foreigner and refugee policies. "We want to contribute to the recovery of a concrete anti-imperialism in the FPG ... Anti-imperialism doesn't mean only attacks on the military industrial complex and it is more than just solidarity with liberation movements worldwide." (Quote from *Revolutionary Rage*, October 1986).

Attacks such as the one on the Centre for the Central Register of Foreigners in Cologne on the one hand, or the Kneecapping of Hollenburg (Chief of Immigration Police in West Berlin) show the wide field of these militant politics. While those who are attacked are responsible for the racist refugee policies in the FRG and West Berlin, the intention of the attacks on institutions, whose documents, files, and data are being destroyed, is to procure a space which isn't controlled and regulated by the state. "But our actions will fizzle out ineffectually, if they don't contribute to a development of a new beginning of anti-imperialism within the radical left" (Quote by the RZ).

Since the early 70's, the RZ and Red Zora have launched over 200 attacks. Red Zora's most comprehensive and successful attack campaign so far has been the deposit of incendiary bombs in ten branches of the Adler Corporation, one of West Germany's largest clothing manufacturers selling discount clothing in the FRG, produced by low paid wimmin in South Korean and Sri Lankan factories. "The wimmin at Adler in South Korea struggle against the exploitation of their capacity for work and are putting up a fight against the daily sexism. They call for support from the FRG for their struggle. As a result, the shitty living and working conditions of wimmin in the vacuous production centres of the three continents and especially those of Adler in South Korea and Sri Lanka are becoming more widely known here through leaflets,

events, and actions in front of Adler's retail centres. In these actions, anti-imperialism can be practical." (Quote from Red Zora, in their Adler statement.)

In a later released statement from Red Zora, the consideration was again concretized that the attacks were the correct strategy: "Consciousness had already been raised through leaflet actions organised by human rights groups (Terre des Femmes) and independent church groups. So preparatory work had been done. The wimmin in South Korea have taken control of and defended their own situation." They went on strike to protest low minimum wages, lay offs, deplorable work conditions, and rampant sexism from West German foremen. "So it was possible that the struggle there (by the wimmin in South Korea) and the struggle here (by Red Zora) are compatible. We aren't fighting for the wimmin in the Third World," they said, "we're fighting alongside them." This defines Red Zora's struggle against imperialism.

In 1987, when Red Zora and their sister group in West Berlin, the Amazonen, fire bombed ten Adler outlets throughout West Germany, they caused millions of dollars in damages. Because of this, Adler was forced to meet the demands of the textile workers. Red Zora and the Amazonen clearly proved that militant resistance can be very effective.

Both the Revolutionary Cells and Red Zora have anti-authoritarian structures and a decentralised decision-making process for choosing targets. As well, they point out that militant direct actions are just one part of the revolutionary movement. Although they participate in extensive and far-reaching legal work campaigns and social movements through their militant actions, these actions aren't of any more importance than handing out flyers or leaflets, going to demonstrations, having sit-ins, publishing newspapers, educating people, squatting houses, or organising strikes at work. "We don't have a hierarchical system for choosing actions. Thinking in hierarchical divisions puts actions in a perspective of privilege and is prone to a patriarchal way of thinking." (Quote by members of the RZ in an interview that appeared in *Autonomie*, 1980.)

Besides the RZ and Red Zora, there exist several other militant autonomous groups who are all integral components of the revolutionary movement in West Germany and West Berlin. Most of these groups originate from the mass social movements of the 80's. They all work independently of each other and issue political statements of their actions, much like the RZ and Red Zora. But unlike them, many of these groups haven't been around very long.

In 1986, at the peak of resistance against the nuclear power plant in Brokdorf and the nuclear reprocessing plant in

Wackersdorf, thousands of people participated in demonstrations as a part of the anti-nuclear movement. During this time, several hundred attacks were made by militant autonomous cells against certain companies and corporations to protest their involvement in the nuclear industry. The most popular activity at this time was sawing down electric power lines that were directly connected to the nuclear power plants. Around 2–300 attacks were made. Some of the militant autonomous groups from this period have survived into the present. Others have disbanded and have gone on to influence and form other groups. Following is a list of a few of these groups. It would be impossible to name all of them.

- **Revolutionäre Handwerker:** involved in direct actions against nuclear plants by sawing down electric power lines. No longer active.
- **Amazonen:** sister group of Red Zora, but independent of them. Two people are currently in jail for being members of the Amazonen.
- **Zornige Viren:** on January 2, 1989, attacked the Gen-Institut (Gene Institute) at the University of Darmstadt causing DM2,000,000 in damages.
- **Autonome Zellen Alois Sonnenleitner (AS):** autonomous anti-nuclear cell. Destroyed excavators, trucks, and building site of Hofmeister AG (an NPP company) by setting fire to them. Alois Sonnenleitner was an elderly man who was killed in Wackersdorf by the cops in 1986. Still active.
- **Revolutionäre Viren:** fighting gene technology, human genetics, and biotechnology.
- **Anti-rassistische Zellen:** carrying out actions against Shell.
- **Kämpfende Einheiten:** "Fighting Units." Anti-imperialist cells attacking military industrial complexes. One cell, Kämpfende Einheit Crespo Cepa Galende, named itself after an ETA (Basque guerrilla organisation) fighter who was killed by the Spanish authorities. Made an attack on a border police security building.

The militant direct action groups in West Germany and West Berlin have received widespread support from the larger movements there, including from some of the more liberal organisations. This is partially because the underground cells are depen-

dent on the larger movements and, as well, are active in them. Their actions address issues that many people are already educated on and sympathetic to. For example, Red Zora has gained wide popular support because their actions appeal to the massive feminist movement already existing in West Germany, where the leftist and radical media has been doing much work for some time now to educate the public on issues involving sexism, wimmin's oppression and exploitation, and wimmin's rights to the control of their own bodies. While the RZ doesn't claim as much support as Red Zora, in 1987, supporters of the Revolutionary Cells published the book *Der Weg zum Erfolg (The Way to Success)*, explaining their strategies, politics, and actions. Less than a week after the book hit the shelves of radical bookstores, the entire, printing (around 3000) was sold out.

The high degree of effectiveness of many RZ and Red Zora actions wouldn't be possible without popular support. By themselves, their actions would only serve to alienate them from the struggle. Moreover, with the support of the mass movements, members of the RZ and Red Zora are able to work among the numbers of people active in the struggle without exposing their underground identities. In their herstory, only one womyn has been arrested for membership in Red Zora. But due to a lack of evidence against her, the charges were dropped. The RZ, however, has had a few convictions over the past 16 years. Ingrid Strobl most recently was sentenced to five years in prison on the 9th of June 1989 for being a member of the RZ. Her sentence is the longest issued to any of the convicted RZ members. While prisoner support is an important task that consumes a great amount of time, most of the work is done by the larger movement, and the RZ and Red Zora can continue organising actions against oppressive, imperialist companies and corporations.

Other revolutionaries sentenced to prison:

- **Erik Prauss and Andrea Sievering:** accused of membership in the "terrorist" organisation, Red Army Faction (RAF), and a bombing of Dornier, a war corporation, which caused 1.3 million DM in damages. Each was sentenced to 9 years in prison on January 18, 1989.
- **Norbert Hofmeier, Barbara Perau, Thomas Thoene, and Thomas Richter:** accused of membership in the RAF and a bombing. Sentenced all together to 32 years on January 20, 1989. Sentencing judge (Arend) also sentenced Ingrid

Strobl, Hofmeier: 10 years., Perau: 9, Thoene: 9.
Richter: 4.

In both of the trials involving the mentioned people. The BAW (Federal State Prosecutors) and the judges were alleging that the accused people were members of the RAF. But this was the false claim of the court to get these people stiffer sentences. Both attacks (the one at Dornier, and the other at the border police security building) were claimed by Kämpfende Einheiten. This group works independently from the RAF. But since the RAF is defined as a “terrorist” organisation by the state, conviction as a member can carry a longer sentence. Kämpfende Einheiten isn’t defined as such and would not be subject to as heavy a sentence. So the BAW and the judges set up the construct of the Whole-RAF (Gesamt-RAF) and claimed that Kämpfende Einheiten is a part of the RAF.

At the trial of Erik and Andrea, Eva-Haule Frimpong, an imprisoned member of the RAF, stated on the witness stand that “in 4 years, no one but myself has been caught from the RAF. The twelve comrades of the resistance who were supposedly arrested since then (the six from Kiefernstrasse nor the people from Stuttgart) were not organised in the RAF.” (Quote by Eva on November 29, 1988).

Fritz Storim: sentenced to one year in prison. A teacher, accused of supporting the RAF. Supposedly a member of the autonomous newsjournal SABOT which published articles in solidarity with the RAF.

INTERVIEW WITH ROTE ZORA

THE FOLLOWING INTERVIEW WAS SENT TO THE GERMAN women's magazine *Emma*, and although it wasn't an interview by *Emma*, it was published in June '84. In 1974 'women of the RZs' bombed the Supreme Court which had decided one day earlier to withdraw the reform of the abortion law. In '77 women of 'Rote Zora' bombed the Federal Doctor's Guild in Cologne stating: "We see the Federal Doctor's Guild as exponents of rape in white trenchcoats." This was followed by the attacks on pornography stores, women traders, and the Schering company which was put on trial for producing the birth defect-inducing Duogynon pill. In August 1983 they blew up the bus of Gunther Menger in front of his villa. He is a trader (buys and sells) of 'Thai-girls'. These women traders serve German men exotic women under 'terms of delivery' with a list of 'types' and possible 'testing'. Provision: \$500(Can), but costs "will soon be compensated because girls from the Far East don't smoke and drink." The courts and police cannot see a legal way to stop these modern slave traders. *Die Spieqel* wrote at that time "These women traders only have to fear the 'Red Zora'." This interview, originally entitled *Resistance Is Possible*, is the first one where they explain why they struggle autonomously inside the RZs and the nature of their relationship to the women's movement.

Let's start with who you are.

Zora 1: If this is a personal question then we are women between the ages of 20 and 51. Some of us sell our labour. Some of us take what we need, and others are 'parasites' on the welfare state. Some have children, some don't. Some women are lesbians, others love men. We buy in disgusting supermarkets, we live in ugly houses, we like going for walks or to the cinema, the theatre, or the disco. We have parties and cultivate idleness. And of course we live with the contradiction that many things we want to do can't be done spontaneously. But after successful actions we have great fun.

What does your name mean?

Zora 2: 'The Red Zora and her Gang' (a children's book)—that is the wild street kid who steals from the rich to give to the poor. Until today it seems to be a male privilege to build gangs or to act outside the law. Yet particularly because girls and women are strangled by thousands of personal and political chains this should make us masses of 'bandits' fighting for our freedom, our dignity, and our humanity. Law and order are fundamentally against us, even if we have hardly achieved any rights and have to fight for them daily. Radical women's struggles and loyalty to

the law—there is no way they go together!

Yet it is no coincidence that your name has the same first letters as the Revolutionary Cells (RZ).

Zora 1: No; of course not. Rote Zora expresses the fact that we have the same principles as the RZs, the same concept of building illegal structures and a network which is not controlled by the state apparatus. This is so we can carry our subversive direct actions—in connection with the open legal struggles of various movements. “We strike back”—this slogan of the women of May 1968 is no longer as controversial today regarding individual violence against women. But it is still very controversial, and most of the time taboo as an answer to the power conditions that steadily produce this violence.

What actions have you carried out and what was the background?

Zora 2: The women of RZ started in 1974 with the bombing of the Supreme Court in Kariaruhe because we all wanted the total abolishment of §218 (the abortion law). In the Walpurgisnight (last day of April, ‘Women Take Back the Night’) 1977 we bombed the Federal Doctor’s Guild because they undermined even this reduced abortion reform. Then followed the bombing against Schering during its Duogynon trial, and constant attacks against sex-shops. Actually one of these porno stores should burn or be devastated every day! Therefore we think it absolutely necessary to tear the oppression of women as sexual objects and producers of children out of the ‘private domain’ and to show our anger and hate with fire and flames.

Zora 1: We don’t limit ourselves to direct or obvious women’s oppression. As women we are also concerned about social power conditions, whether it be urban or environmental destruction, or capitalist ways of production; the same conditions men are confronted with. We don’t like the left ‘division of labour’ under the motto: the women for the women’s question, the men for the general political themes. Nobody can take away from us the responsibility for changing our everyday life. Therefore, for example, we have set fire to the fancy cars of the lawyers of ‘slumlord’ Kanssen, who were responsible for a series of brutal evictions. Together with the RZs we printed pirate public transportation

tickets and distributed them in the Rulo area to introduce a little bit of zero-tariff.

Zora 2: Our latest bombings were directed against Siemens and the computer company Nixdorf. They promote the development of new domination technology for more sophisticated possibilities of war production and counter-revolution. They also have the function of remodeling labour, especially on the backs of women world-wide. Women here will be exploited with the technology of these companies by working isolated from each other in part-time jobs, without social security. The women of the so-called Third World will be worn out by producing these technologies. At the age of 25 they are totally ruined.

How important is the connection to the Third World, the exploitation of women there, for you?

Zora 1: In all our attacks we’ve declared this context, also when we attacked the women traders and the Philippine Embassy last year. We don’t struggle for women in the Third World—we instead struggle with them—for example against the exploitation of women as a commodity. This modern slave trade has its equivalent in the conjugal possession condition here. The forms of oppression are different but they all have the same roots. Nobody can play cards with us any longer. The separation between men and women has its equivalent internationally in the separation between people of the First and Third World. We ourselves profit from the international division of labour. We want to break with our involvement with this system and understand our common interests with women from other countries.

You explained how you understand your practice, but you didn’t explain why you organise yourself in the context of the RZs.

Zora 2: First of all the main reason is that these politics were developed by the RZs and we still think they are correct. During our development we determined our own content—therefore we organised autonomously as women—but we fall back on the experiences of the RZs. We also think that the cooperation of radical groups can strengthen the militant resistance. There were productive forms of cooperation such as the actions against the Reagan visit or the discussion paper about the peace movement.

But there are also stressful discussions. Sometimes men who otherwise transform their radical breaking with this system into a consequent practice are alarmingly far away from realizing what anti-sexist struggle means and what meaning it has for social-revolutionary perspective. Between its women it is also controversial where the limits are, when a cooperation strengthens or paralyses our women's struggle. But we think our feminist identity unites us with some women of the RZs.

Does that mean you define yourself as feminists?

Zora 1: Yes, of course, we think the personal is political. Therefore, we believe that all things social, economic and political which structure and reinforce the so-called personal are an invitation for struggle, especially for us women. These are the chains we want to tear apart. But it is incomplete to make the oppression of women here in West Germany the only turning point of politics and not to see other oppressive conditions such as class oppression, racism, or the annihilation of whole peoples through imperialism. This attitude never understands the base of misery: that the oppression of women and sexual division of labour are presuppositions which are fundamental for oppression of any kind—against other races, minorities, the old and the sick, and especially against those who revolt.

Zora 2: For us difficulties start when feminist demands are used to demand 'equal rights' and recognition in this society. We don't want women in men's positions and reject women who make their career inside the patriarchal structure under the guise of women's struggles. Such careers remain an individual act from which only some privileged women can profit. Women are only allowed to design and manage power in this society if they advocate the interests of men.

The women's movement was quite strong in the '70s. It achieved some things in a legal way. For example: the struggle against the abortion law, publicity about violence against women in the family, and rape as an act of power and violence, the building of autonomous counter structures. Why do you then maintain the necessity of armed struggle?

Zora 1: Of course, the women's movement achieved a lot and for

me the most important is the development of a broad consciousness about women's oppression in this society. Also women no longer experience their oppression as an individual case or think they themselves are responsible for it, instead women come together and experience their common strength. The things that were organised by the women's movement like women's book-stores, women's centres, women's newspapers, and meetings or congresses—this has been part of the political reality for some time and is a strong part of the development of the struggle.

Zora 2: Some successes were rather an expression of the situation in a society which can allow women some leeway. Of course when they wanted women in the factories and offices they created more places in kindergartens, but this didn't lead to a basic change in the lifestyle of a woman. It requires a continuous movement whose aims cannot be integrated, whose uncompromising section cannot be forced into legal forms, whose anger and dedication to non-parliamentary struggles and anti-institutional forms is expressed without limit.

Zora 1: The legal route is not sufficient because the usual repression and structures of violence are legal. It is legal if husbands beat and rape their wives. It is legal if women traders buy our Third World sisters; and sell them to German men. It is legal when women ruin their health and do the monotonous work for subsistence wages. These are all violent conditions which we are no longer willing to accept and tolerate and which can't be changed solely by criticism. It was an important step to create a public consciousness about violence against women, but it didn't lead to its prevention. It is a phenomenon that the screaming unfairness which women suffer is met with an incredible proportion of ignorance. It is a tolerance which exposes male parasitism. This 'typical situation' is connected to the fact that there is not much resistance. Oppression is only recognised through resistance. Therefore we sabotage, boycott, damage, and take revenge for experienced violence and humiliation by attacking those who are responsible.

What do you think about the contemporary women's movement?

Zora 2: We think it wrong to talk about the women's movement. On the one hand the women's movement is understood as a result of long existing structures, of projects, encounter centres

and of mysticism. There are many currents which do not reinforce each other very fruitfully, but instead partly exclude or fight each other. On the other hand new political impulses stem from different contexts where women are becoming aware of their oppression and are radically questioning patriarchal structures and developing politics in the interests of women—for example women in Latin American solidarity groups, in anti-imperialist groups, in the squatter movement. Therefore the saying “The women’s movement is dead, long live the women’s movement” is accurate. The women’s movement is not a one issue like the anti-nuke or squatter movements, which will not survive if no more nuclear power plants are built, or no more property is available for speculation. The women’s movement relates to the totality of patriarchal structures, their technology, their organisation of labour, their relationship to nature, and it is therefore a phenomenon which won’t disappear with the removal of some cancerous growths, but instead in the long process of social revolution.

Zora 1: The women’s movement has never really analysed its defeat around the abortion law and around the state financing of projects like shelters for battered women. It lacks a rejection of state politics. Also, it anticipated the turning point in family politics through the wave of the new motherhood in the women’s movement. Also, the class question never existed; social differences were denied by the universalization of sexist oppression. This makes it difficult to find an answer to the worsening of labour conditions, increasing oppression, and reactionary family politics in the present crisis. The lack of a perspective for action in order to react appropriately to the attack leads to the dilemma of either going offensively against reactionary politics or solely preserving the unfolding of leeway for women. We can’t solve this problem in theory, but we don’t think the building of women’s committees (in the Green Party) is an appropriate solution. The experience is that women do not come to power by ways which exist directly to exclude women and to stabilize and conserve patriarchal domination. Therefore we consider women’s committees which want to organise greater influence in parties and institutions the wrong way.

Zora 2: But in the meantime other important discussions and analyses by women which consider the future development of society have begun to develop. The increasing oppression, with the help of new technologies, is investigated from the point of view of the lowest echelons of our society, new wages and work

structures for women are analysed, the indirect structures of women are understood. Many women understand and reject the everyday war against women—the wave of hard core porn and propaganda contemptuous of women—and the call of the society for increased motherhood and more femininity. They also understand that the setbacks in women’s and family politics are pre-suppositions for the crisis and the new strategies of capital. The policy of population control, for example the change of the abortion law, is the attempt to have a qualitative influence on the development of the population. Among other things its aim is to multiply the ‘healthy’ German middle class together with state sponsored genetic technology, which is a development we have to prevent. Today we need more urgently than ever before, a radical women’s movement which has the power to prevent and break open the social and political encirclement, not only of women, but also of foreigners and minorities: a women’s liberation movement which does not reduce the hope for revolution to a nice dream.

Do you understand yourself as being part of the women’s movement, or of the guerilla movement, or both and how do you see the context?

Zora 1: We are part of the women’s movement. We struggle for women’s liberation. Beside theoretical commonalities there also exists another unity between our practice and the legal women’s movement, that is the personal radicalization which can encourage other women to resist and take themselves and the struggle seriously. It is the feeling of strength if you see that you can do things which before you were afraid of, and if you see that it brings about something. We would like to share this experience. We don’t think it has to happen in the forms we choose. For example, take the women who disrupted a peep show by drawing women’s symbols and dropping stink bombs—these actions encourage us, strengthen us, and we hope women feel the same way about our actions. Our dream is that everywhere small bands of women will exist, that in every city a rapist, a women trader, a battering husband, a misogynist publisher, a porn trader, a pig gynecologist should have to feel that a band of women will find them to attack them and make them look silly in public. For example, that it will be written on his house who he is and what he did, on his car, at his job—women’s power everywhere!

How can you take responsibility for possibly endangering the lives of innocent people with your actions?

Zora 2: Why is it that people always assume that those who deal with explosives don't care about what is self-evident for yourselves, for the women's movement or the Left. It's the opposite! Because of the possibility of endangering life we are forced to be especially responsible. You know as well as we do that we could give up if you were right with your question. It would be a paradox to struggle against a system for which life is only worthwhile as long as it is utilizable and at the same time to become as cynical and brutal as that system. There were many actions we rejected because we couldn't eliminate the danger to innocent people. Some firms know this full well which is why they prefer to move into residential buildings. They speculate with our morals if they move into residential dwellings to protect their property.

What do you say against the argument: armed actions harm the movement. They are part of the reason for increasing surveillance of the women's movement to denounce it as terrorist, that it's split and isolated from the majority of women in the women's movement.

Zora 1: To harm the movement—you talk about the installation of repression. The actions don't harm the movement! It's the opposite, they should and can support the movement directly. Our attack on the women traders, for example, helped to expose their businesses to public light, to threaten them, and they now know they have to anticipate the resistance of women if they go on with their business. These 'gentlemen' know they have to anticipate resistance. We call this a strengthening of our movement.

Zora 2: For a long time the strategy of counter-revolution has begun to split the radical wing from the rest of the movement by any means and isolate them to weaken the whole movement. In the '70s we had the experience of what it means when sectors of the left adopt the propaganda of the state, when they start to present those who struggle uncompromisingly as responsible for state persecution, destruction, and repression. They not only confuse cause with effect, but also justify implicit state terror. Therefore, they weaken their own position. They narrow the frame of their protest and their resistance.

Zora 1: Our experience: To stay uncontrolled and to protect ourselves against state attacks a strong unity is necessary. We can no longer afford to have every group repeat the same mistakes. There must be structures in which we share knowledge and experiences which are useful for the movement.

How can non-autonomous, non-radical women understand what you want? Armed actions do have a 'scare away' effect.

Zora 2: Why doesn't it have a 'scare away' effect if a guy sells women, but it does if his car burns? Behind it is the fact that traditional social violence is accepted, whereas similar reprisals 'scare away'. Maybe it is scary if everyday reality is questioned. Women who get it pounded into their heads from the time they are little girls that they are victims get insecure if they are confronted with the fact that women are neither victims nor peaceful. This is a provocation. Those women who experience their powerlessness with rage can identify with our actions. As every act of violence against one woman creates an atmosphere of threat against all women—our actions contribute—even if they aim only against the individual responsible—to the development of an atmosphere of 'Resistance is possible!'

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