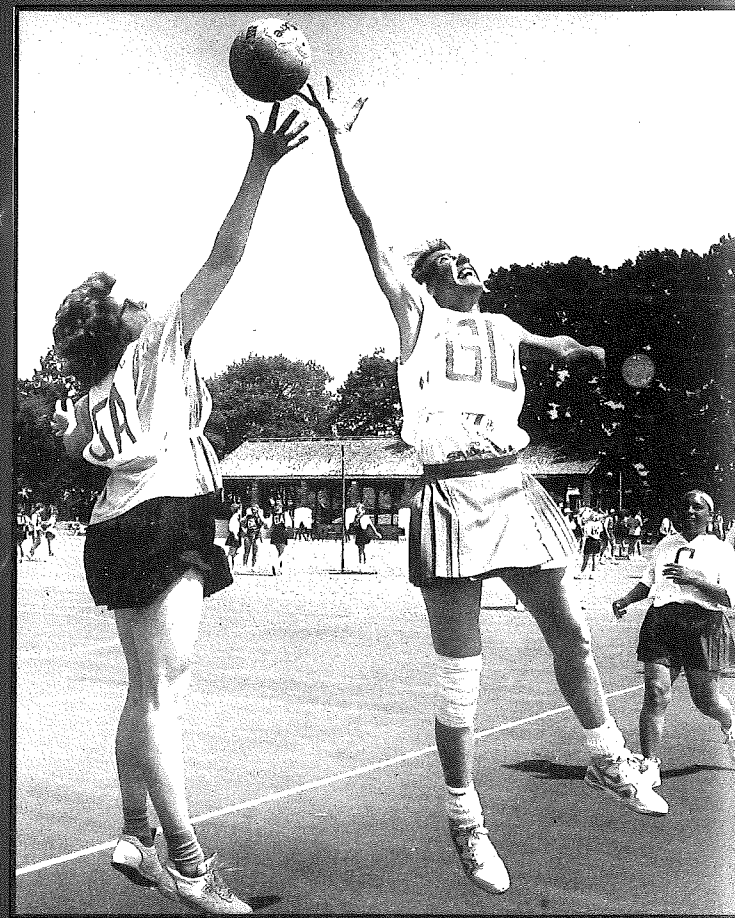


Trouble & Strife

The radical feminist magazine



Lesbians in soaps
Queer theorrhea
Saying no to assertiveness
MacKinnon interview
Femininity control in sport
Brazilian feminism

No. 29/30
£4.50

DOUBLE ISSUE!

Trouble & Strife is cockney rhyming slang for wife. We chose this name because it acknowledges the reality of conflict in relations between women and men. As radical feminists, our politics come directly from this tension between men's power and women's resistance.

Trouble & Strife is produced by Lisa Adkins, Dianne Butterworth, Debbie Cameron, Marian Foley, Stevi Jackson, Liz Kelly and Joan Scanlon: with help from Kate Cook, Caroline Forbes and Jane Taubman.

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Letters

Dear T&S,

Radical feminism in the 1990s: Whatever next?

(written in response to Issue 27)

I have called myself a radical feminist since I first heard the term, when I was a student in the mid-1970s. I woke up on new year's day 1994 and realised that, for the first time since, I'm not in any active women's group, radical feminist or otherwise.

I don't know what happened to radical feminism generally, but I got rather lost in the 1980s. At the time I put it down to a couple of things in my experience. It was mostly to do with increasing frustration about how women's groups worked, or often didn't work, particularly in the era of local government funding. Remembering *Spare Rib*, I recalled the utter unpleasantness of adrenaline at our apparent inability in 1984 and 1985 to stop it going bad, to keep any sort of reasonable dialogue in the magazine, and how that was just the first (but for me personally, the worst) of those power struggles in London that rarely had happy endings. There was never a golden age where all groups worked smoothly, but it was terrible to see those who had succeeded and survived from the 1970s and early 1980s fall apart, bitterly, in the mid-1980s. I didn't know then what to do about internal group organisation and dynamics, whether women used privilege or used identity as more-oppressed-than-you as their weapons. (Do we know now?)

The second problem for me, though, was uneasiness about some other radical feminists. I don't really like about a third of the books recommended in 'Going on Endlessly' in Issue 27, and actively distrust some of their authors. I actually enjoyed far more a couple of the books that are attacked elsewhere in the issues for being attacks on radical feminists.

The major part of my feminism in the last eight years has been trying to address issues by writing articles, newsletters, leaflets from an informed but personal position. Basing my

attitudes to issues on how they feel to me, while still trying to make sure my ideas were historically accurate, backed up with facts and reasonable, committed, caring arguments. I could make a good case for this, I expect, but it still leaves me short of the practises of most feminists who write: I'm suspicious of rhetoric (while the most successful radical feminist writers have been brilliant at rhetoric) or the overly theoretical (and so resisting the major thrusts in non-radical feminist thought) or the worthy academic study (where women — some more feminist than others, of course — work on an idea for several years solidly). I've been not very interested in women's studies all along, preferring the more journalistic approach, trying to write about issues in a 'light but powerful' way that all kinds of women would find interesting to read, and of course moving from one issues to another all the time; the idea of leaflets, newsletters, newspapers that I picked up from radical feminism in 1975 and don't seem to have moved on from. How do we build on a newsletter culture, especially when we don't have newsletters any more?

Part of my radical feminism has always been a profound mistrust of academic study of women. The history itself had to be live, connected to us and activism, based therefore on our own memories; scrupulously checked for dates, of course, and certainly not rewritten to excuse ourselves. No used to put down women who weren't there, but to help us all. To build up our understanding of our politics as a process.

So what is our history? Radical feminists I first knew weren't campaigners, in the belonging to an on-going campaign way: apart from newsletters, we ran women's centres, were keen on conferences, organised women-only marches or discos or one-off actions. Radical feminists had quite distinctive views on consciousness raising that didn't always work out in practice: we were anti-therapy and the whole idea of individual solutions, and saw CR as contributing the major part of our theory, which didn't

exclude reading all sorts of things, including books by men, but wasn't very respectful of what we read (even when it was by radical feminists). I did my bit to keep this going, organising a one-day conference on CR in about 1981, and setting up a free classified ad column in *Spare Rib* for anyone who wanted to start a CR group (the article based on the conference was the single biggest seller *Spare Rib* ever had, by a good margin), but even then I knew, really, it wasn't enough, or not enough for me: I wasn't in a CR group myself.

But I didn't let go of the idea of personal experience either, the sense that you have to keep checking that your political words match your feelings and the things you see around you. Otherwise: what keeps you from losing reality altogether? What stops you from going very wrong?

It was this insistence on starting from what we actually feel, as opposed to what we'd like to feel as good revolutionaries, that meant I would never make a revolutionary feminist. From where I sat, as a friend of Sheila Jeffreys', the revolutionary feminists were much more sinned against than sinning. But the differences came to me when we tried to put together a joint radical/revolutionary feminist *Shrew*, when we discussed doing an article on a feminist week. What did we do in all those groups, at those meetings most nights? The revolutionary feminists present argued for a wonderful description of what we ought to be doing, the perfectly right-on week of activism. The two of us radical feminists there thought how interesting it would be to write instead about why we actually did what we did, what really had made us decide to go to some meetings and not others, and why sometimes we stayed at home instead. The rest were not impressed.

The revolutionary feminists were the 'voluntarists', that classy word much bandied around at that time, who had an apparent clarity and purity of vision, a wonderful lack of scepticism, and some pretty charismatic speakers. I knew even then that my sort of radical feminism was probably not going to reach as many women. However: radical feminists in the 1980s found their own speakers and visionaries. The enthusiasm for theory — and the call for 'no compromise' and no truck with feminists who disagree — is clear now even in *T&S*. There is space to talk about our doubts, and our concern that sometimes

feminists are not very sophisticated about what it takes to bring about change; but that space is mostly in our friendship networks, precious and nurtured, between old-style feminists, who certainly won't give up thinking, but often keep their heads down in public.

After quite a few years of feminist activism, when I half-heartedly applied for a job with the GLC in 1983, I couldn't cite any big campaign I'd ever worked with: everything except my feminist 'journalism' was smaller scale, like organising a women and signing group, or working in a feminist anti-nuclear group, or getting involved with the local primary school (or living in group houses, or getting involved with other women's children, which I didn't mention was part of my politics). Everything was at a very personal level, really, apart from those leaflets and newsletters and magazines. (And I didn't get the job.) I don't think I was wrong, exactly, in my radical feminism — women's centres, conferences and articles can change women's lives — but in the late 1980s I wasn't even writing in British publications. And after that: a women's group I set up at college to encourage women to talk about their experiences drove me wild with boredom. In 1992 I could no longer take the dynamics of the funded collective I'd worked in since 1984 — why on earth couldn't we achieve more with the money? — and then I couldn't face propping up a newsletter any longer, that I'd worked on for the best part of eight years. I am group-less, and I don't believe you can be an activist on your own.

My problem is that I believe entirely in radical feminism, but not, perhaps, my own any more.

Ruth Wallsgrove

Postscript, April 1994:

Three times in the last six weeks I have read or heard someone say that they feel the women's liberation movement is reviving, that women feel enthusiasm for action and optimism that we can achieve things that is more like the 1970s than the 1980s. On a personal level, I've met up with a group — sounds like a romance, doesn't it? — in Manchester who share ideas about what we can do, and we're planning action, including organising a one day workshop and talking to other women's groups about ideas for joint projects. It's probably in this light that I'm reading Issues 28 and feeling more cheerful.

Dear Trouble & Strife,
On my first day back in London for a visit from Australia at the beginning of June I was browsing in a bookshop when I came upon the Spring 94 issue of *T&S* which I hadn't seen before. In it was a review of Sheila Jeffreys' book *Lesbian Heresy* as well as an interview with her. As I leafed through I saw that the reviewer, Rachel Wingfield, referred to the small section in Sheila Jeffreys' book which makes criticisms of me through an interview, 'Mapping: Lesbians, AIDS and Sexuality', which I did with Cindy Patton five years ago and published in *Feminist Review* (No.34, Spring 1990). Rachel Wingfield goes on in her review to attribute to me, with no supporting quotes, a position on SM and survivors of sexual abuse which misrepresents me.

Liberal criticisms

This is depressing stuff. I have been critical of Sheila Jeffreys' political perspective and activities for a long time. There is no reason why she or anyone who agrees with her should care about me personally or abstain from criticizing my work. What I do find more and more reprehensible is how easily those who disagree with Sheila Jeffreys' position are misrepresented and accused of liberalism — god no, a fate worse than death — or of 'reneging on their previous feminist positions to one extent or another'.

The *Feminist Review* interview referred to in *Lesbian Heresy* deals primarily with issues around HIV/AIDS. Within that context Cindy Patton and I said things about child sexual abuse, which while *not belittling* the reality, posed some difficult questions. In the interview one of the things I say which has never been quoted by critics is: 'I don't want to let abusers off the hook or suggest all over again that children lie, or wipe away the fact that millions of people, mainly girls, have been and continue to be sexually abused, mainly by men.'

Before FMS

Yes, we then went on to suggest some 'heretical' possibilities about the re-calling of abuse by adults and the way in which memory *can* sometimes be reconstructed by adults. We did question the usefulness of an undifferentiated definition of child sexual abuse and a rigid understanding of the inevitable negative effects on all children of a whole range of sexual abuse. We did bring up the feminist insight that

families mess people up — do away with sexual abuse (an excellent aim) and deeply damaged people would still be produced. (Let me add here that at the time of the interview neither of us had read anything about 'false memory syndrome' nor were we in any way addressing the issue of people who claim they were falsely accused of child sexual abuse.)

In her review, Rachel Wingfield makes her own misrepresentation of my politics. Talking about the undermining of 'a radical feminist analysis of male violence and sexuality' she says: 'However, as Jeffreys describes, whilst those lesbians are minimizing the reality of sexual violence, many of those lesbians involved in writing lesbian pornography, working in strip clubs, and getting involved in SM tell us that they are survivors of child sexual abuse or rape. Hence O'Sullivan has also been known to put forward the reverse argument — that SM "helps" women who are survivors of sexual abuse to "work through" the effects of their abuse.' Where the hell does this come from?

Cindy Patton states that in some American lesbian and gay communities the issue of child sexual abuse is coming up, possibly pushed forwards by discussions about AIDS and safe sex, and also that a number of current studies indicate that a significant number of lesbians and gay men are likely to have been sexually abused as children. I say that perhaps debates on child sexual abuse have come up differently in British lesbian circles in which child sexual abuse often has been discussed in the context of SM.

SM & survivors

I say, 'There has been no room yet, as far as I am aware, to engage in an open discussion about why you might, as a survivor of child sexual abuse, choose to practise SM in your sexual relationship. The survivor who is into SM is seen as continuing her victimization, or maybe as suffering from the disease of false consciousness. Lesbians are seen as deluded if they think they're able to deal with the trauma of abuse within or through SM activity. Child sexual abuse is so fused to SM that they cannot be seen separately. I find this frustrating because I would really like to be able to have a discussion which looked non-judgmentally at the emotional and cultural components of lesbian SM and admitted the possibilities that for individual lesbians SM has the potential to be both positive

and negative.' Are we to deny that lesbian sexual abuse survivors who practise SM and present their reasons for this positively are all liars or dupes? Without hearing them out, how can anyone understand or even attempt to analyse what might be going on? If we are to believe women's experiences, whose experiences do we believe?

In the *Feminist Review* interview, Cindy was reporting on developments within American lesbian and gay communities dealing with experiences of child sexual abuse and SM practice. I came in with an opinion that we, in Britain, would find it hard even to talk about this situation if it existed in Britain. My belief is that unless you can have open discussion on difficult issues, unless you strive for honesty, unless you allow for difference in experience and opinion and analysis within feminism around contentious areas, then you won't ever resolve them and may sink into sectarianism.

Look — as much as Sheila Jeffreys and Rachel Wingfield seem welded to the view that there was once something called lesbian feminism which we all marched to the tune of — this is an illusion. It is simplification beyond belief which leads Rachel Wingfield to say: 'All of which brings Jeffreys back to her original insight: the fact that what we once could assume to be shared ideals and values within lesbian feminism have now been largely eroded by the backlash both in and outside of our community.' Maybe it's sad that Sheila Jeffreys (and Rachel Wingfield) still refuse to see that assumption, while tempting and understandable fifteen years ago, was based on an exclusive notion of who 'we' refers to, and continue to project blame for the loss of this illusion onto other lesbian feminists.

Difference & disbelief

In *Lesbian Heresy*, Jeffreys says that 'O'Sullivan has chosen to abandon the important feminist principle that women should be believed, a principle set up in opposition to the routine disbelief of women practised by psychoanalysis and the justice system.' When and where and by whom was this important feminist principle set down in stone? Surely before Black women, working class women, lesbians, etc. pointed out that there were vast differences between women and some of these differences were structured and institutional; pointed out that some of them were about power

and exploitation. This was not the result of wicked old poststructuralism; it came out of different groups of women's *experience* and *analysis*. It's not lack of idealism which makes many lesbian feminists now ask: 'Is there only one woman's voice to be believed?'.

Contrary to Sheila Jeffreys and Rachel Wingfield, I do not believe the divisions and developments we see today are a simple story of weak-willed lesbian feminist soldiers, seduced by consumerism and gay male culture, breaking rank with the movement — there was never a ranked phalanx of lesbian feminists. As well, the simmering political differences between lesbians meant that many were disaffected with the content and style of Jeffreys' politics years ago, if they'd ever heard of them.

It is offensive to me, who will go to my grave a lesbian feminist, and a damned active and radical one as well, to be caught up in ongoing sniping with other lesbian feminists. I don't want to silence Jeffreys or drum her out of lesbian feminism but neither do I want to be dismissed by distortions of my politics.

Strands and labels

Jeffreys represents *one* strand within radical feminism, let alone a distinctly different one from whatever is left of socialist feminism (my politics of choice), postmodernist feminism, liberal feminism, feminist activism, studies etc. Recognition and willingness to engage in fierce argument, alliances, or complete disagreement, should not be dismissed as liberalism — labels heaved around by any 'side' hardly constitute a serious critique.

I wish I could simply be amused that I am now a 'pro-porn and SM writer' (Wingfield), as if this represented, true or false, the sum of my being. In the mid 1980s, when Susan Ardill and I wrote about the struggles over whether SM groups should be allowed to meet in the London Lesbian and Gay Centre (not to whip each other, just to talk), we ended up critiquing what Sheila Jeffreys then called revolutionary feminism. However, in that same article we also criticized SM dykes and others in the 'sexual fringe' group who claimed that sexual 'outlaws', by their very nature, were radical and politically progressive.

The reason I am not amused by a flattening of my politics is that I am, as always, a critical lesbian feminist. I do not believe porn is inevitably anti-women or a major cause of

violence against women. I do not believe SM is inherently negative or that the 'lesbian sex industry' is causing the downfall of lesbian feminism. I am critical of some pornography and much of the business of pornography. I am critical of some aspects of SM, even if I am always curious about who draws the line, when and where. I do not exclude lesbian and gay erotica/porn from criticism, even if I often view it in a different light.

Scrutinizing sex

Just because I am critical of Jeffreys, it does not follow that I think life is a Thatcherite dream of 'free choice', or that I have stopped being an activist or an intellectually engaged feminist, lesbian, anti-racist, anti-fundamentalist, challenged socialist. Strange as it may seem to Jeffreys and Wingfield, ('Sex, it seems, should be exempted from any political analysis but a liberal one: anything goes', argues Wingfield) — I have always believed that sex is political and not exempt from feminist scrutiny because of some simplistic notion of privacy or 'anything goes'. I, along with many, many others have regularly looked at sexuality and sexual practices critically and in the context of the whole of our lives. However, I don't think sexuality is *the same* as any other area of life. But that's too big a discussion to pursue here.

When I look back at the interview I did with Cindy Patton in *Feminist Review* I can see that the section on child sexual abuse was truncated in the published version. I regret that editing cut out too much, particularly of Cindy's contribution. Although I believe the published words do not diminish the reality and seriousness of child sexual abuse, an unsympathetic reading might misinterpret them. When dealing with such an emotive subject, I could have insisted that more space be devoted to it and clarified some of the words which have subsequently been used, more than once, to attack us. However, I recognise that no matter what clarifications or expansions had been included, some readers would still have disagreed with us.

Common ground

Which brings me to the end. I suppose the reason I'm taking up so much time and energy and possibly your space, is that I take lesbian feminism in its different shapes and forms seriously. I do think there are significant ways in which we can share common goals and, if not whole visions, at least parts of them. Through

the years, I have read *Trouble and Strife* more often than not. I don't call myself a radical feminist but I've always been influenced by women who are. Perhaps I should thumb my nose at the shit which still goes on over the sex wars or join some of my academic sisters who just don't engage with Jeffreys. Then I think, hey, I'm still around, still political, still passionately concerned about lesbianism, feminism, and changing the world. I still care! But I'm tired of it, tired of being patronized, misrepresented, and cheaply dismissed by women I disagree with. Come on, move a little. Allow me a tiny bit of feminist integrity.

Sue O'Sullivan

Dear T&S, *

We were astonished to read in Rachel Wingfield's review of Sheila Jeffreys' book her characterization of our book *Bad Girls & Dirty Pictures: The Challenge to Reclaim Feminism*, as suggesting that sexual violence and child abuse do not exist (T&S 28, 'Selling Out: the lesbian sexual revolution'). We certainly know that child abuse exists — two of the authors who wrote for *Bad Girls & Dirty Pictures* were battered children, and the book itself, in the introduction, refers to the appalling abuse that has been inflicted by social service 'carers' on the Orkney children. Quite a few of our writers and the members of Feminists Against Censorship have been sexually assaulted and/or have been in abusive relationships. We certainly take exception to the allegation that we wish to 'eroticize sexual violence'. One of the principal authors of the book was first sexually assaulted when she was only 10 years old; we are highly unlikely to deny, let alone promote, sexual violence.

Yours sincerely,

Avedon Carol & Nettie Pollard
Feminists Against Censorship

Editorial note: Because cases of sexual violence are not 'verified' by courts, this does not necessarily mean that women or children were not abused. Our view is that we do not, and may never, have enough information to make definitive statements about the Orkney case.

* indicates that a letter has been cut

From the Editorial Collective...

November 1994

Dear Readers

Apologies for the late arrival of this issue, which is a double issue 29/30 (Winter 1994/95). In order to ensure a future for *Trouble & Strife* we have had to reorganize how we produce the magazine. Changing production to desk-top publishing has taken much longer than we anticipated, although it will be a much more efficient system in the long run.

In this change over period, the scale of work-load for the collective has increased. As a small voluntary collective it is difficult to find that extra time, and we have to travel from different parts of Britain for meetings. We are therefore planning to produce two larger issues a year (instead of three shorter ones) as a way of using the time we have more realistically. You won't lose out; you'll get as much — or more — for the same price, because the issues we produce will be bigger (and hopefully better) than before.

Do let us know what you think about the new-style T&S.

Best wishes,
Trouble & Strife Collective

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Call for papers for the 1996 Berkshire Conference on the History of Women

The 10th Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, "Complicating Categories: Women, Gender, and Difference," will be held on June 7-9 at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA. Submit proposals in triplicate, postmarked by February 1, 1995.

Send proposals on **US and Canadian topics** to:
Evelyn Brooks Higginbottam, Afro-American Studies Department, Harvard University, 1430 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA, USA 02138;
on **other than North American topics** to: Merry Wiesner-Hanks, Center for Women's Studies, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, PO Box 413, Milwaukee, WI, USA 53201;
comparative US/non-US topics may be sent to either Program Committee Co-Chair.

JUST SAY NO: THE EMPIRE OF ASSERTIVENESS



Debbie Cameron exposes the questionable origins of Assertiveness Training and takes a critical look at its increasing popularity. She looks at the consequences of substituting AT for feminism.



In the late 1970s, when I was first involved in women's politics, I was vaguely aware of something called 'assertiveness training' (AT). I occasionally met women who had done it, and there were ads in *Spare Rib* for assertiveness groups as well as CR groups. I thought of AT and CR in similar terms, as expressions of the principle 'the personal is political'. In CR you learned that women were systematically oppressed, and if one logical response was to campaign for structural change, another was to try and change certain aspects of your everyday behaviour, by standing up for your rights and refusing to take sexist shit. That's what I thought 'assertiveness' meant, and I assumed that, like CR, it was a feminist invention.

Recently, though, I've discovered I was wrong; AT has a history that might raise a few eyebrows among feminists. And it's worth going into this, because where CR has declined, AT has gone from strength to strength: it seems to be everywhere you look. In many workplaces it's a cornerstone of the equal opportunities policy. Businesses often send women managers on a course (sometimes thrustingly retitled 'leadership skills' or 'personal effectiveness'), and if you work in the public sector, health, social services, education or local government, the chances are your employer will sponsor some kind of AT for women. Students can get it through the students' union, or if they're on an access course or a course for women 'returners'

it will often be part of the curriculum. If employers and colleges don't provide it, there are plenty of adult education institutes and commercial organisations doing day and residential courses, at a price. It's also common in intermediate treatment programmes for young offenders and preventive work around drugs and teenage pregnancy. ('Just Say No', the US anti-drug slogan, is classic AT-speak.) Even without going on a course, you can find the basics of AT recycled endlessly in self-help books and in women's magazines.

Over the past 10 years or so, thousands of women (and some men) will have encountered, by choice or compulsion, some version of AT. A feminist success story? I don't think so. Despite the superficial resemblance to feminist practices like CR, AT is not about making the personal political; instead it treats questions of power as personal problems to be fixed through behaviour modification. If you look at AT's history, at who was originally perceived as needing to assert themselves, by whom and why, it seems amazing that feminists ever had any time for it at all.

Assertiveness: what is it?

Assertive Training, as it was called originally, was not a feminist innovation but a form of behaviour therapy developed by clinical therapists at the very end of the 1940s. The men who started it were opposed to psychoanalysis.

Instead of long drawn-out Freudian therapy meant to give patients an understanding of the root of their problem, they favoured a more pragmatic approach, getting rid of the patient's 'dysfunctional' behaviour and substituting something more 'appropriate'.

The aspect of behaviour that AT was designed to modify was communication with other people. In practice, AT teaches you a particular way of expressing yourself. Trainees are told that everyone has the right and obligation to express their needs, desires and feelings clearly, directly and honestly (doing it indirectly is 'manipulative' and not doing it at all is 'passive'), but without infringing other people's right to *their* needs and feelings (which means not being 'aggressive'). The interactive strategies which go along with this, and which are practised in role-play exercises, include using 'I - me' language that focuses on *your* feelings and not the other person's, making requests and refusals directly, without hinting, hedging or excuses, and refusing to be silenced or ignored, if necessary repeating your point until it gets a satisfactory answer (this is called 'the cracked record technique').



The rationale for this sort of training came from clinical experience. A lot of the people therapists see have, among other problems, 'poor communication skills'. They may be extremely passive or withdrawn because of depression or long-term institutionalisation; conversely they may be extremely aggressive, or totally out of touch with reality and incapable of interacting 'appropriately' with others. 'Assertiveness' is supposed to be the golden mean between passivity and aggression. Depending on the type of patient, the benefits of teaching it are thought to include helping people participate actively in their own therapy, raising their self-esteem, giving them the ability to function normally in the outside world, and teaching

them to express aggressive feelings verbally rather than in anti-social acts.

Dealing with 'deviants'

If you associate it with feminism, as I did before I looked into its history, it comes as something of a shock to discover how strongly AT has been linked with the treatment of psychiatric patients. Even more startling is its popularity with therapists treating sex offenders. During the 1950s and 60s, AT was often used with homosexual men, who were defined at the time as suffering from a mental illness. Presumably the reasoning was that homosexuality was caused by low self-esteem or inability to resist peer group pressure (the same reasoning is now applied to drug taking and underage sex).

Other sexual 'deviants' may be prescribed AT to help them verbalise anger and sexual desire instead of resorting to violence. A clinical textbook published as recently as 1991 tells us that men who batter women can be good candidates for AT. At the same time, the book warns that although battered women often suffer from low self-esteem or depression, it is potentially very risky to recommend assertion to them, since the result may be to provoke [sic] further violence. The author also cites with approval an AT course designed for Puerto Rican women, from which the topic of 'saying no' to male partners had been removed. Submission of Latina wives to husbands, we learn, is a 'relatively intransigent cultural norm' which the therapist must respect if the training is to be 'effective' and 'socially valid'.

If AT really was about empowering women, this sort of thing would be paradoxical to say the least. In reality, however, AT's purpose has always been to make individuals conform to a certain model of social competence and mental health. This model, as even the textbook I have mentioned admits, is traditionally conceived in the image of 'mainstream societal values', which are white, middle-class, individualistic and male. In the 1950s, mainstream values included overt homophobia, in the 1990s they include a vague and muddled multiculturalism which leads to such travesties as the Puerto Rican example. The common thread running through this sorry history is that AT aligns itself with the status quo. It aims to make people 'better' in the sense of closer to whatever the current ideal is.

If this argument is correct, an obvious question is: why did AT become so strongly

associated with feminism? Did feminists in the 1970s not notice its conservatism, or did they seriously believe that what passed for 'normal' femininity at the time was a pathological state?

Feminism and assertiveness

The answer is, it depends which feminists you're talking about. Some apparently did take the view that the way women were socialised under patriarchy produced what amounted to large-scale personality disorder. Others made the political link between AT and CR. An early popular book called *The New Assertive Woman*, published in America in 1975, suggested that 'as an active force, assertiveness training goes beyond the process of consciousness-raising, by preparing women to act on what they recognize as problems'.



On the other hand, in the 1970s there were radical feminists who were critical of AT. The problem they saw with it was that in urging women to change their communicative behaviour so they could operate more effectively in the world, assertiveness pundits were failing to question the way the world itself was organised. AT in effect tells women that something is wrong with the way they are: it assures them it is not their fault, society is to blame, but nevertheless it is they who have to change.

This seems to me an accurate analysis, and it is an important reason why the story of AT since the 1970s has been one of ever-increasing popularity in the mainstream. Employers who have seized on AT as part of their equal opportunities policy may mean well, in the sense they genuinely want to help women, but at the

same time, they appreciate how cheap and non-disruptive AT is compared to what would be needed to tackle institutional sexism: changing your hiring practices, challenging men's workplace behaviour, setting up a nursery. AT is part of the fairy tale that women don't get systematically held back, they simply 'under-achieve'. The problem is in their minds and their behaviour — which can be altered through training, while everything else stays exactly as before.

Not only employers, but a lot of women have an investment in the idea that transforming aspects of your behaviour can transform your life — this is a central theme of consumerist culture, and it has been exploited in the marketing of AT as a cure-all of women's problems. The feminist psychologist Mary Crawford points out that there's something fishy about the way clinical practitioners over time made women rather than men the main targets for AT. In principle, AT addresses not only problems of passivity (a stereotypically female tendency) but also aggression (a stereotypically male one with far more serious anti-social consequences). Yet the problem of women's unassertiveness got disproportionate emphasis. Crawford notes that the therapeutic professions have a long history of trying to control women, regarding them not only as more in need of control but also as more 'receptive' to it than men. This 'receptiveness' is even more important once AT moves out of the clinic and becomes a business supporting armies of 'consultants'. If you're looking for people who are worried about their supposed inadequacies and willing to spend time and money on self-improvement, middle class women (or those who employ them) are the obvious market. For these potential customers, a bit of mildly feminist rhetoric is a good selling-point. Probably the most influential British text on assertiveness, Anne Dickson's *A Woman in Your Own Right*, contains the following passage, beautifully judged to appeal to the 'I'm-not-a-feminist-but' crowd:

Given our prevailing culture, women are, with obvious exceptions, in less powerful positions than men. This can be made into an overtly political issue — but that is not the purpose of this book. It is designed to help individual women in their own particular setting to live more assertively and powerfully. It provides simple, effective tools to accomplish this, and in some small measure, potentially to change the overall status of women in our society.

I don't dispute that some versions of AT had a much more explicit feminist agenda, and were done in the context of autonomous women's groups without the presence of experts or the intrusion of the profit motive. Nor do I dispute that changing your individual behaviour can be a necessary part of feminist politics. What bothers me about AT is partly the way it gets used as a substitute for other kinds of change; but also the actual content of it, the kind of behaviour it urges you to adopt. As I mentioned before, this behaviour is based on a covert male norm; and there is also an argument that a lot of 'assertive' speech is so linguistically bizarre no-one of either sex has anything to gain from it.



Talk like a man

When you look at the linguistic content of assertiveness textbooks, what's immediately striking is that all the ways of speaking you are told *not* to use are features of what used to be called 'women's language', a style said to hold women back by making them sound 'unconfident' and 'lacking in authority'. Compared to men's, women's speech is supposed to be more indirect, more polite, to use more hedging expressions (like 'well' and 'you know' and 'sort of'), more tag questions (like 'nice day, isn't it?' or 'I'll do it tomorrow, OK?') and more rising intonation (letting the pitch of your voice go up instead of down at the end of a sentence). AT manuals warn against all these things. Apart from 'expressing feelings honestly', all the rules of assertive speech reflect a way of talking stereotypically associated with men: direct, firm, authoritative and to the point. Some texts I've seen quite openly urge women to imitate men: a book called *Leadership Skills for Women*, for example, says: 'Men typically use less body language than women. Watch their body language to see how they do it.'

There are two problems with this. One is

that the stereotypes of 'women's language' and 'men's language' are exactly that — stereotypes, not accurate descriptions of how women and men actually talk. Probably no real person uses the extremes of unassertive 'women's language' that come in for criticism in training materials. The other problem, though, is that whatever differences do exist between men and women are being interpreted through a 'deficit model', the idea that one way of behaving (women's, needless to say) is intrinsically *worse* than the other. But this invariably turns out to be a social prejudice rather than a reasoned assessment. Hedging and rising intonation are 'ineffective' and 'lacking in authority', while 'less' body language is preferable to more, simply because of their association with women and men respectively.

Most linguists have rejected this kind of deficit model because it's biased and circular (if people are prejudiced against the way women talk, the theory that women's way of talking holds them back becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy). Gender differences in speech, to the extent they exist (which is variable, depending *which* women and men you study in what context), are often better explained as the result of differences in status or power. In AT books, however, even the clearest statements to that effect are reinterpreted through the deficit model so that women are held responsible for their own supposed ineffectualness. *Leadership Skills for Women* has this to say about the well-known research finding that men interrupt women: 'statistics show that women allow themselves to be interrupted up to 50% more often than men. Don't contribute to those statistics!' Not only is this a tendentious reading of the relevant research, it is a stunningly useless piece of 'advice'.

If the way women speak (accepting for the sake of argument that we can generalise) is not so much *causing* them to 'lack authority' as *reflecting* the fact that most are in relatively powerless positions, it follows that teaching women a more assertive style does not solve the underlying problem. It may even be counter-productive. Mary Crawford and her colleague Amy Gervasio have reviewed research on how real people evaluate so-called assertive behaviour. It seems that what experts think is healthy assertion strikes others as 'aggressive' and 'rude'; and this effect is magnified in the case of assertive women. Talking like a man, or the

stereotype of a man, exposes women to charges of being 'unfeminine' or 'uppity'. Talking like a woman carries the stigma of 'lacking authority'. It's a classic double bind.

Assertive codswallop

Gervasio and Crawford suggest that one reason why assertive speech is valued negatively regardless of the speaker's sex is simply that it breaks the rules of normal conversation. What could be more peculiar, not to say irritating, than someone who repeats the same thing over and over again or talks exclusively about 'I' and 'me'? When Anne Dickson informs readers they should stop 'padding' utterances, explaining that 'I'm terribly sorry to trouble you but I wonder if you could get me a clean cup' is manipulative and confusing, and what you should really say is 'I'd like you to get me a clean cup', you wonder what planet she's been living on and whether she has any grasp of the rules of ordinary politeness. Assertiveness experts do not seem to trouble themselves overmuch about how their magic formulas actually sound when uttered in public, but from a linguistic point of view they are talking utter codswallop. If indirectness were really 'dysfunctional', the correct answer to the question 'have you got the time?' ought to be not 'half past two' but 'yes' or 'stop beating about the bush'.



When I interviewed women about their experiences of AT, I found few swallowed the more nonsensical parts of it whole: most were sceptical about the specific techniques and formulas AT courses recommended. Many did feel they had gained something, but often they identified the opportunity to talk to other women



as the best thing about it — in other words, it was what they learnt from each other that counted most, not what they learnt from 'experts'. In this respect, AT can be like CR, especially if the trainer is a feminist and initiates political discussions (something that was reported to me by several interviewees). Interestingly, some women who were sceptical about what they did on their course still found the experience liberating, because it seemed to prove there is no magic recipe for success and thus relieved the pressure to be 'perfect'. One woman told me that playing roles had given her the confidence to 'be herself'.

It is not surprising that a lot of women, whether politically aware or not, should look for strategies to help them cope in a far from ideal world. The behaviour modification approach has its limits, but it also has its uses, and in practice therefore AT can be useful. What worries me, though, is how many women come to AT (or are sent to it) because of an unquestioned belief in the deficit model that locates the problem in women's ways of communicating. If women have internalized a stereotype of themselves as ineffective communicators, you can be sure that employers, educators, politicians and so on will also have incorporated it into their worldview, where it conveniently obscures the more fundamental causes of gender inequality.

Since mainstream institutions began paying lip-service to equal opportunities, there has been a steady stream of victim-blaming theories about women being their own worst enemies: fear of

success, the Cinderella complex, lack of assertiveness. These are examples of the solution creating the problem: experts get rich by devising quack remedies for trivial or non-existent diseases. The positive effects of AT are outweighed by the negative effects, which can include wasting women's time and energy, reinforcing anxiety and creating new negative stereotypes.

Though there has been feminist criticism of AT in the past, nowadays the prevailing view seems to be that at least it doesn't do any harm. With all due respect to the women I interviewed who expressed enthusiasm for it, I feel that AT has never really got away from its history as a therapy for the 'socially dysfunctional'. Always a politically dubious concept, applied to women generally this is grossly insulting. Feminism is not about making better-adjusted women, it is about making a better world for real ones. □



I suppose you want me to be assertive well I'm not going to be OK?



Anna Martin ©

Unfair play

Question: When is a woman not a woman? Answer: When she plays sports. In an extract from her wonderful book, *The Stronger Women Get, the More Men Love Football*, Mariah Burton-Nelson exposes the hypocrisy and confusion surrounding sex testing of women in sport.

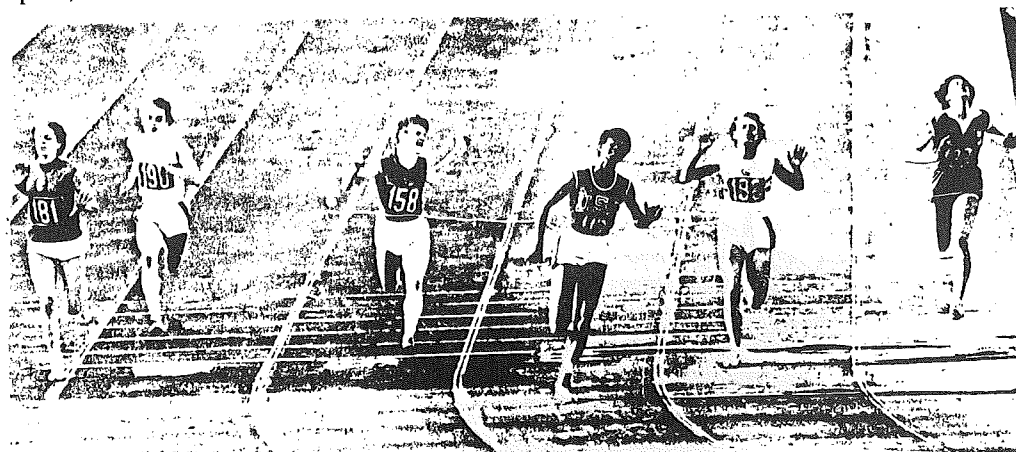
At the 'Femininity Control' outposts of international competitions, the world's best female athletes are tested to determine if they are male impostors. Supposedly, the tests are designed to protect female athletes from men who would attempt to use their superior muscle and stature to unfairly sneak into and win women's competitions. In actuality, the tests reinforce the myth of female athletic inferiority.

The tests seem misguided at best, misogynist at worst. They are ineffective, detecting women with genetic anomalies who have no unfair advantage, and passing over steroid users, who do have an unfair advantage. They are insulting: simply being a man would not give one an advantage over the best women athletes. And they are philosophically unsound. In some sports, women have an advantage, yet men are

never tested to see if they might be women in disguise.

'The problem with sex testing is it implies that women's capabilities are more limited than they really are,' says Alison Carlson, a tennis coach and writer who has spent five years researching, writing, and speaking about gender verification. 'If you've got capabilities beyond a certain point, you're not a woman. It's backwards. Instead we should say, by definition, if a woman does this, women can do it.'

The first modern 'sex check' was conducted in 1936 after Helen Stephens defeated Stella Walsh in the Olympic 100-meter dash, and Walsh's Polish coach complained, insinuating that Stephens might be a man. Stephens, now in her seventies, recalls feeling 'hurt and embarrassed, of course,' but went along with the



1960 Olympic 100m

United States Olympic Committee's request to have a male doctor 'look her over' to make sure she was female. She passed.

Walsh, ironically, fared worse during the inadvertent sex check that occurred during an autopsy after her death in 1980. The coroner found that Walsh, who had lived her entire life as a woman, was not a man exactly, but had been born with ambiguous genitalia. 'So it was a case of the pot calling the kettle black,' says Stephens with a lighthearted laugh.



WILDCAT
CARDS

NETBALL
by Pamela Rhodes

Dora Ratjen, a 1936 Olympic high jumper from Germany, was never tested but admitted in 1955 that he was in fact a man, and had been forced by the Hitler Youth Movement to compete as a woman 'for the honor and glory of Germany'. Three women had jumped higher than he did at those 1936 Games, but he had set a women's world record two years later. Of his

disguise he said, 'For three years I lived the life of a girl. It was most dull.'

In 1946, two French runners who had led a women's relay team to second place in a European championship were found to be living as men. 'Whether they had pretended to be women or were later pretending to be men was not absolutely clear,' writes Adrienne Blue in *Grace Under Pressure*.

In 1967, organizers first officially instituted what have variously been called sex tests,

femininity tests, and gender verification tests at international competitions. Not coincidentally, this new policy arose during a decade when women were beginning to shatter previous records and to narrow the gap between male and female performances. It was also a time when women (and men) were beginning to take steroids to build strength. Because the drugs can produce malelike secondary sex characteristics in women, female athletes with deep voices and beards were showing up at meets. Other women were eyeing these athletes suspiciously, unsure what was going on. They heard rumors that men were masquerading as women.

In the prefeminist era of the late 1960s, women were barred from marathon running and other 'masculine' competitions, but they were beginning to resist those restrictions. Serious female athletes were more severely harassed than they are today, often publicly ridiculed as 'manly' or 'dykes'. Such gibes inspired some women to welcome testing as a way to quell rumors, to prove that they

were female, and to weed out the 'masculine' women, whether those women seemed masculine because they were on steroids, because they were actually men, or because they were lesbians.

Pat Connolly, a three-time Olympian from that era, explains: 'At 17, I ... knew that some of my competitors had deep voices, beards, and

seemed to like women more than men. We felt a mix of emotions: resentment, anger, pity, and empathy...but...I was sick of being called a dyke. These things prompted us to say, 'Let's get the men out of our competitions. We had to overcome the stigma of overmasculinization, regardless of whether it was right or wrong.'³



WILDCAT
CARDS

FOOTBALL
by Maya Chowdhry[©]

The justification for testing put forth by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), then and now, is that the tests are designed to 'ensure femininity', to 'establish physical equality', and 'to prevent unfair, male-like physical advantage'.⁴

It hasn't worked. During 1967, testing's first year, women at major competitions were obligated to lift their shirts and pull down their pants in front of a group of gynecologists. They then had to wait while the physicians (male) decided if they were 'feminine enough.' The press jocularly referred to these as 'nude parades'. Athletes protested that the test was humiliating.

The next year, beginning at the Winter Games in Grenoble, the IOC rejected the nude parade in favor of a chromosome test known as the Barr body test. With this method, a technician scrapes some cells from the lining of a woman's mouth (a buccal smear), examines the cells under the microscope, and looks for XX (female) or XY (male) chromosomes.

But biology is not as simple as culture would have us believe. Not all women have XX chromosomes, it turns out, and not all men have XY. The differences between men and women, so obvious to any grade-schooler, are actually less salient than they seem.

Ewa Klobukowska, for instance, was found to have an XXY genotype. Klobukowska, the first woman to fail the chromosome test, was a Polish sprinter who had won a gold medal with the 4 x 100 relay in the 1964 Olympics. In 1967, physicians had declared her female during a visual inspection. But the 1968 test revealed her to be one of the six women in a thousand who have XXY chromosomes. At the world championships before the 1968 Olympics, doctors reported that she had 'one chromosome too many to be declared a woman for the purposes of athletic competition.' She was stripped of her Olympic and other medals.

'It's a dirty and stupid thing to do to me,' she said. 'I know what I am and how I feel.'⁵

This sort of thing keeps happening. The tests aren't turning up any male impostors — zero, in twenty-five years of testing — but, like people who fish for lobster but keep catching eel, test-takers keep uncovering people with genetic anomalies. The IOC does not release test results, but each year, about twelve women fail the test and are banned from competition for life, researcher Alison Carlson has found. There is no reason to believe, Carlson says, that any of these were male impostors. Shocked and humiliated, the women usually withdraw quietly, often faking an injury at the suggestion of tournament officials. Countless others withdraw after failing precompetition tests.

The only woman publicly to contest her disqualification so far is Spanish runner Maria Jose Martinez Patino. In 1985, at age twenty-four, Patino failed the sex test at the World University Games in Kobe, Japan. She had passed at the Helsinki World Championships in 1983, but had forgotten to bring her 'femininity certificate' to Japan.

'I could barely comprehend what was happening,' she told Carlson. 'I was scared and ashamed, but at the same time angry, because I couldn't see how my body was different from the other girls.' In shock, she did as told: feigned a foot injury.⁶

Patino's genetic anomaly is called androgen insensitivity. To understand it is to understand the mind-blowing concept that human beings do not fall exclusively into two categories, male and female.

People generally fall into two categories, but not all of us are so cleanly in one camp or the other. Says psychologist John Money, a leading sex researcher from Johns Hopkins University, 'The difference between male and female is not black and white. It is a biological continuum.'⁷

Gender is determined by five variables: chromosomes, hormones, gonads, external genitalia, and the most definitive one, the gender of assignment: what midwives, doctors, or parents say when they look at a newborn and proclaim, "it's a girl" or "it's a boy". Usually, all of the variables are consistent: a baby with XX chromosomes, for instance, will have more estrogen than testosterone⁸, will have ovaries, uterus, vulva, and vagina, and will be called a girl at birth.

During the first six weeks of embryonic development, internal and external genitalia are undifferentiated. This 'bipotential' tissue could develop into either ovary or testes, labia or scrotal sac, clitoris or penis. Which way it goes depends on hormonal secretions: if androgens are secreted, the tissue usually develops along male lines. If no androgens are secreted, the embryo will become female. Female is what happens if no hormones intervene, regardless of genetic XX or XY designation.

But sometimes, XY embryos can't react to androgens, so the fetus develops along female lines. This is what happened to Maria Patino



WILDCAT
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HIGH JUMP
by Pamela Rhodes[©]

and the approximately one out of 5,000 to 10,000 people who are androgen-insensitive. Patino's body ignored the androgens and went ahead and developed as a girl. Thus the physicians declared her female and she always thought of herself as female until astonished by the XY test results.

The athletic relevance of androgen insensitivity is that these people are immune not only to the hormones their own bodies produce, but also to steroids. Rather than giving them an unfair advantage in competition against women, their condition ensures that they will have no unfair advantage. There is no reason to disqualify them from Olympic competition against women. But they are disqualified.

Patino was banned from competition; she was ridiculed as a freak in newspapers and on the streets of Madrid; she lost her athletic scholarship; she was expelled from her Spanish national athletic residence; her coach was told he could no longer train her; and her girlfriends and boyfriend left her. Her records were struck from the books.

Men, too, have anomalies: some appear male but are genetically XX; others have XXY chromosomes; others are XX or XY hermaphrodites (possessing some aspects of both male and female anatomy, both internally and externally) who were assigned the male gender at birth. Some boys and men have no testicles, or even a uterus. Some men have genetic conditions that lead to unusual height or weight or strength. But men are never banned from competitions for being 'too malelike' or 'too femalelike'.

Ironically, the Barr body test and the updated (since 1992) sex test, the polymerase chain reaction test, not only miss steroid users, they also miss the one naturally occurring condition that does give women a 'malelike' advantage: adrenal hyperplasia, a hormonal imbalance in which girls with XX chromosomes develop muscle patterns (and genitals) similar to men's. This occurs in about one in one thousand women — common enough that at marathons, for instance, a few of the runners would have this condition. According to Dr. Maria New, head of the pediatrics department at New York



Sprint to Fame
DOROTHY HYMAN

Hospital — Cornell Medical Center, several women who have won Olympic gold medals have had adrenal hyperplasia.⁹

The Barr body test produced false positive results between 6 and 15 percent of the time. Kirsten Wengler, for instance, erroneously failed the test in 1985 before an international swim meet. During a coed team meeting, her female teammates were handed their femininity certificates ('fem cards', they're called) but Wengler was told she would have to return to the lab for further testing. After the second test, doctors told her she might not be able to have children. 'I was crying and really freaked out,' she recalls. Wengler's parents arranged to have more sophisticated tests taken, and those results — four months and many dollars later — revealed that Wengler has typical XX chromosomes and no abnormalities. Only then was she granted her fem card.¹⁰

The polymerase chain reaction test, a purported improvement on the Barr body test, is accurate 99 percent of the time. This means that one out of every hundred women tested will be fallaciously informed that she is not female. For the Summer Olympics of 1992, that would equal 30 of the 3,008 female competitors.

Physicians worldwide, including the American College of Physicians, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and the hospital originally contracted to conduct testing at the Calgary Olympics, have opposed sex testing, saying it is discriminatory and lacks scientific merit.¹¹ In a 1986 editorial in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, geneticist Dr. Albert de la Chapelle of the Department of Medical Genetics at the University of Helsinki called for an end to testing, saying, 'Eliminating screening would probably have little or no effect' on who won the championships, 'and it might restore a few personal dignities'.¹²

Helen Stephens approves of sex testing, saying 'I guess they have to do something to keep men out' but does not harbor any animosity toward Stella Walsh, her one-time nemesis, and does not want Walsh's eleven world records and two Olympic medals to be expunged from the books. 'Most of the girl athletes had thoughts that she wasn't exactly kosher,' says Stephens, 'but it was an unfortunate case of birth defects.'

Kirsten Wengler, who suffered the horror of a false positive test, now speaks out against the tests: 'If it's a choice between possibly com-

peting against impostors, and hurting even only a few women, I'd rather compete against a man.'¹³

Maria Patino was reinstated in 1988 after sex-test opponents argued her case before the IOC. She now compares the experience to rape. 'I'm sure it's the same sense of incredible shame and violation.'¹⁴

Taekwondo world champion Lynnette Love says of testing, 'It stinks. Why not test the men?'

Older athletes, especially those who have been tested many times or who have 'proven' their femaleness through motherhood, don't seem to spend much time thinking about the test. Deborah Holloway, a mother and a 1988 Olympic silver medalist in taekwondo says, 'It didn't bother me too much. I had no anxiety about it. They said they had to do it because there was once a man who was really a woman, or vice versa. I forget.'

After extensive review, the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) in 1993 recommended abolishing all gender verification tests. An IAAF council established to consider the medical, ethical, and philosophical aspects of testing had concluded that there is no indication that men are currently masquerading as women, there is no evidence that the people eliminated by the test have any biological advantage, and besides, 'The urine sample ... required to detect illicit substances must be produced under direct visualization; thus, simple visual inspection at that time would readily suffice to exclude men masquerading as women.'¹⁵

The IOC, however, persist in testing female athletes, 'a philosophy at odds with recommendations by major endocrine, genetic, and obstetric/gynecologic bodies,' says the IAAF.¹⁶ The IOC's position, stated by Prince Alexandre de Merode, Chairman of the IOC Medical Commission, is that testing has eradicated the 'denunciations, rumors, and scandals' that persisted before 1968 and were 'besmirching sport and the reputation of persons concerned.' Eliminating the tests would lead to 'a resurgence of scandals of which sport would be the victim'.¹⁷



To understand who exactly is being protected by gender testing, consider what happens when transsexuals (men who, through surgical,

hormonal and cosmetic interventions, 'become' women) attempt to enter women's competitions. If keeping people with 'malelike advantages' out of female competitions were the fundamental concern of the men in charge of such decisions, one would think they would refuse access to people who have XY chromosomes, who were identified as men at birth, and who, until recently, lived as men. In addition to male muscle mass, height, and weight, these men-who-become-women have had all the privileges of sports access that most boys and men receive: good coaching, good facilities, good school programs, and community and family support. Renee Richards, for instance, was born an unambiguous male named Richard Raskind. He attended a boy's prep school and the then-all-male Yale University, where he received athletic training from and competed against men. A New York Yankees scout expressed interest in his ability.

When, after his sex-change operation, Renee Richards announced his/her intention to play women's singles in the 1976 U.S. Open at Forest Hills, tennis's governing bodies (U.S. Tennis Association, World Tennis Association, and U.S. Open Committee) resisted, instituting a requirement that all women take a chromosome sex test. Richards refused and did not play. The next year, Richards took the case to the New York Supreme Court, which ruled that 'this person is now female' and that requiring Richards to pass the test was 'grossly unfair, discriminatory and inequitable, and violative of her rights'.¹⁸ Richards then competed in the women's professional circuit for a brief, undistinguished career before returning to his/her ophthalmologic practice. Other male-to-female transsexuals have been similarly protected and allowed to compete against women.

Small children sometimes believe that if a boy puts on a dress or high heels, he becomes a girl. Adults realize that this is immature, misguided thinking. Yet many adults have become convinced that if a boy ingests synthetic estrogen, has his genitals surgically altered, removes his facial hair, and *then* puts on that dress and heels, he really has become female.

What he has become, apparently, is more than a woman: a woman with more rights than a woman. He/she retains the right not to be sex tested, while no woman at the elite level retains that right.

✎

On September 29, 1990, a ten-year-old soccer goalie named Natasha Dennis was asked to pull her pants down. Two fathers of opposing players couldn't believe that a girl could be as good as Natasha. She might be a boy in disguise, they contended. Natasha passed the impromptu sex test.¹⁹

In the fall of 1989, a Union Bridge, Maryland girl named Tawana Hammond suffered severe internal injuries after being tackled in a high school football game. Her spleen and half of her pancreas had to be removed. She was one of 109 girls who played high school football that year.²⁰ Girls who play football are not more likely to get injured than boys who play football. But the town mayor responded: 'The feeling from a lot of the people was she shouldn't have been there [on the football team] anyway. A female playing a man's game has created a lot of hard feelings in this community.'

The football coach, Terry Changuris, said, 'You realize that you are at a major biological disadvantage because women are not as strong as men.'²¹

No one talks about the 'major biological disadvantages' of the smaller, weaker boys and men who are injured on football fields every day. No one seems to worry about the dislocated shoulders, twisted knees, broken ankles, and concussions that men commonly suffer during high school, college, and pro football games. Football causes more injuries, including deaths, per player than any other American sport. Virtually all of its victims are men.

In the 1992 season, almost five hundred players — 21 percent of the total National Football League player list — endured injuries severe enough to keep them from at least one game. Seventy-eight percent of retired football players suffer from permanent disabilities. The average career of a pro football player is three and a half years; the average life expectancy is fifty-six years. Hospital emergency rooms handle 300,000 football-related injuries each year. According to the National Athletic Trainers' Association, 37 percent of U.S. high school football players were injured during the previous year badly enough to be sidelined for at least the rest of the day.²² And each year, about eight high school football players die from football-related injuries.

Yet men say women are too weak to play football.

The truth is, *men* are too weak to play football — too fragile, too delicate to withstand the rigors of the game.

And men said that a very good ten-year-old soccer player must be male. Yet a very good ten-year-old soccer player is more likely than not to be female. In Arlington, Virginia, the youth soccer program is divided into two gender-based leagues because 'boys get frustrated and discouraged with coed, so we separate them,' says coach and organizer Mac Golden. 'The girls are so much better.'

In the 1993 Ohio Games, only one under-ten girls' soccer team (the Middleburg Diamond Football Club) signed up, so the girls played against the boys' teams. The boys resisted — 'I'd rather be shot than play against girls,' one said — and it soon became clear why: the girls won the title, defeating all four teams they played, three in shut-outs.²³

What seems important to the male-dominated sports authorities is not protecting women, or protecting men, but protecting male privilege. By keeping females out of so-called male events, and by questioning the gender identity of girls and women who excel at sport, and by propagating the myth of female frailty, men cling to an antiquated dividing line between men and women. On one side are the supposedly superior athletes (who don't look so superior when women compete side by side). On the other side are women — supposedly inferior, questionably 'malelike,' and in need of protection by patronizing sports organizers who have yet to ask the athletes themselves how they feel about the need for gender verification.

Who gets to determine who is female and who is not? In the case of Renee Richards, male physicians performed his surgeries, male medical experts testified that Richards was now indeed a woman, and male judges concurred.²⁴ So a man becomes a woman with the help of other men. And men decide that certain women are not really women, not 'feminine enough' to compete.

What is a malelike advantage? Did Flo Hyman, the world's best female volleyball player, have a malelike advantage? She had a genetic condition called Marfan's Syndrome, which is associated with height (she was six-five); long fingers (good for blocking volleyballs), and a weak heart (which eventually killed her). Should she have been kept on the sidelines? What is a woman?

Gheorghe Musorean, the 7'7" Washington Bullets center, owes his extraordinary height to the excess growth hormone his body produces. Should he be banned from playing basketball against men? Does his pituitary disorder somehow render him not male?

Most of us are not in the habit of wondering if gender, like eye color or skin color, could in some utopic future be largely irrelevant. But the less relevant gender becomes in business, politics, medicine, law, and child-care arrangements, the more relevant it seems to become in sports. The clearer women become about what femaleness, feminism, and femininity mean to them, the less clear the sports world becomes about these concepts, trying to ensure femininity and test femininity as if what were in question were a woman's ability to apply mascara.

Maybe that, fundamentally, is what the 'amazon' labels are about, what the 'women can't play football' chants are about, what the 'sex control' centers are trying to control: not makeup application, exactly, but women's acceptance of the artifice called femininity. Maybe the concern is not so much that men will masquerade as women, but that *women* will no longer masquerade as women. Gloria Steinem once said, 'Women are all female impersonators.' What if we stopped doing that, stopped impersonating someone else's idea of how women should behave?

Female athletes, sweat soaking their muscled chests, aren't half-women, half-men. They aren't Lady Panthers or Lady Rams or Lady Cheetahs, trying in vain to catch up to Gentlemen Bulls. They're people in pursuit of perfection — a quest that human beings, in all their diversity, seem to enjoy. □

¹ Deborah Larned 'The Femininity Test' *womenSports* (July 1976) p 10.

² Adrienne Blue *Grace Under Pressure: The Emergence of Women in Sport* (Sidgwick & Jackson 1987) p 148.

³ Alison Carlson 'The Athlete's View of Gender Verification in Sports' Paper presented at the International Athletic Foundation Symposium on Gender Verification for International Team Physicians (London: May 15-16 1992).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Larned, 1976 p11.

⁶ Alison Carlson 'When Is a Woman Not a Woman?' *Women's Sports and Fitness* (March 1991) p 26.

⁷ Ibid p 29.

⁸ Calling estrogen 'female' and testosterone 'male' is misleading, since both genders have some of both, and there is considerable overlap; some women have more testosterone than some men.

⁹ Gina Kolata 'Who Is Female? Science Can't Say' *New York Times* (February 16 1992).

¹⁰ Alison Carlson 'Chromosome Count' *Ms.* (October 1988) p 43.

¹¹ Carlson, 1991 p 26.

¹² Albert de la Chapelle 'The Use and Misuse of Sex Chromatin Screening for "Gender Verification" of Female Athletes' *Journal of the American Medical Association* (vol 256 1986) pp 1920-23.

¹³ Carlson, 1988 p 43.

¹⁴ Carlson, 1991 p 29.

¹⁵ Joe Leigh Simpson et al 'Gender Verification and the Next Olympic Games' *Journal of the American Medical Association* (January 29 1993) p 357.

¹⁶ Ibid p 357.

¹⁷ Prince Alexandre de Merode, in a letter to Albert de la Chapelle (University of Helsinki: July 14 1987).

¹⁸ Susan Birrell and Cheryl L Cole 'Double Fault: Renee Richards and the Construction and Naturalization of Difference' *Sociology of Sport Journal* 7 (1990) p 2.

¹⁹ 'Who's That Girl?' *Baltimore Sun* (October 29 1990).

²⁰ National Federation of State High School Associations 1989-1990 Handbook (Kansas City, Missouri 1989) p 71.

²¹ Frank Hughes 'Female Football Player Files Suit on Injury' *Washington Post* (October 29 1992) p D3.

²² Judy Oppenheimer *Dreams of Glory: A Mother's Season with Her Son's High School Football Team* (Summit Books 1991) p 67.

²³ Jerry Kirschenbaum ed 'Scorecard' *Sports Illustrated* (July 1993) p 10.

²⁴ Birrell and Cole, 1990 p 5.

Black Women's Movement in Brazil

Alzira Rufino, founder member of The Black Women's Collective of Baixada Santista, Brazil, was in London this November to speak at a conference on 'Fighting Sexism: North and South', organised by War on Want. We reprint here a summary of her talk/speech and information about the activities of The Black Women's House of Culture in Santos.

Violence against women is a world-wide phenomenon and is found in all cultures, races and social classes.

In Brazil, this violence is particularly serious because Brazilian society is very conservative in relation to women, and maintains especially patronising attitudes and behaviour towards Black women.

Women are greatly affected by the wretchedness suffered by the majority of the population. Approximately 30% of Brazilian families are headed by women, who, alone, support their children and other relatives. This reality is particularly that of Black women, who occupy the lowest position in the income scale, undervalued and discriminated against in relation to white women.

It is necessary, therefore, when speaking about the situation of women in Brazil, to define whether we are speaking of white women, Black women or indigenous women. Each one lives a different reality, with distinct challenges and achievements.

For centuries in Latin America, Black and indigenous women have suffered the reality of belonging to a crushed ethnic group, brutally exploited by colonisation, deprived of their culture and beliefs, and subjected to a racial ideology classifying them as primitive and inferior, according to white cultural and racial standards.

In Brazil, as in the rest of the world, women are repudiating the social, economic and cultural disadvantages they have been subjected to, together with the violence done to their human rights by sexism and racism. Women are also denouncing the material and spiritual evils caused by the economic elites who keep the world in a state of war, in permanent disequilibrium, destroying nature and throwing tons of food, leftovers from their greed, to the millions of humans who fight over their refuse. These people live above open sewers, anxiously awaiting the next day's hunger in their tin and cardboard shacks, squeezed between rats and the remains of human indifference.

In Brazil, as in other South American countries, it is not surprising that the women's struggle and the struggle against racism are also a struggle for better living conditions and fight against poverty, against that poverty which increases our vulnerability to all kinds of violence.

The process of mobilisation of Brazilian women has been slow, but it is now having its effect in the political sphere, though only to a lesser degree for black and indigenous women. In recent years, women have been appointed to decision making positions. In 1988, 107 cities were headed by women mayors. At the following election, in 1992, this number rose to 171, including 3 state capitals.

In the 1994 election there were further advances: two women were candidates for the Vice-Presidency of the Republic, 10 were contenders for the position of State Governor and 12 for the Senate. The biggest revelation came with the results of the Senate elections: 40 women will begin their mandates next year, of whom 2 are black, on the renowned Benedita da Silva. Both belong to the Workers Party and have overcome the historic obstacles keeping Black women (approximately 32.4 million) at the lowest level of education and professional achievement.

Approximately 80% of domestic servants are Black, and it is in this function that most Black women begin their working life, being excluded from the so-called female professions. One of the elected Black senators is an ex-domestic servant, confirming this common reality of all Black women.

To better understand the position of Black women in the employment market, it is necessary to examine their opportunities of access to different levels of education. According to the 1982 census, 78% of white women completed elementary education, while only 22% of Black women achieved this level, of whom only 1% reached university. It is still common to see Black women with a higher level of education employed as domestic servants, unable to find other types of work.

The limited data available refers to Brazilian women in general, taking no account of the differences among them. Hence there exists no statistical analysis concerning Black and indigenous women in Brazil.

Indigenous women have also begun a process of communication between the various tribes and with Black women, so that their strength as women may finally be the united strength of the women of all ethnic groups.

We have held this position for the last 500 years, heroines of so many double and triple working days, contributing to the production of wealth, but relegated to the margins of development.

In Brazil, half the female population is represented by Black and indigenous women and their political and economic progress represents an authentic democratic revolution. In real terms, one cannot claim to embrace democracy as long as all women, and particularly Black and indigenous women, are excluded from power.

In this context, the role of Black and indigenous women's organisations is very important, as the mouthpiece for the reality of the excluded millions. With great effort, Black and indigenous women's organisations are carrying out this work within the women's movement and within the indigenous movements. We have put pressure on the government, we are bringing awareness to society, we are qualifying ourselves to fill decision-making positions in political and economic life. Many of the present female leaders in Brazilian politics have passed through the women's movement, and for us Black and indigenous women, the feminist experience contributed greatly to our assertiveness and visibility.

Although we are only a small group of Black and indigenous women to occupy these new positions, we believe that our resistance, our struggle, will expand our movements, giving strength to more women, removing prejudices, eliminating the apartheid and the violence which separates the races and sexes. In South Africa, hope changed into reality, and that is the symbol of all that shall be conquered by resistance and human struggle in every time and place, in the name of dignity and justice for each person, and for each people.

AMANDLA!



Casa de Cultura da Mulher Negra *Black Women's House of Culture*

The Centre was established in June 1990 by the Black Women's Collective of Baixada Santista (the region surrounding the including Santos city), one of the oldest Black women's groups in Brazil, formed in 1986. The Collective has 23 women members who have responsibility for managing the Centre.

The Centre, which is the first centre to be established by the Black Women's movement in Brazil, aims to provide a permanent forum for debate on racism, sexism and offers legal support for the victims of racism, domestic and sexual violence. It also aims to empower Black women and raise community awareness about discrimination against women and Black people, through media campaigning and lobbying work with political parties, trade unions and popular organisations.

Aims of the Centre

1. To provide legal and psychological support to Black and white grassroots women who have been the victims of domestic violence, sexual violence, racial discrimination, or who need protection of their employment rights, covering the legal costs of those who cannot afford them.
 2. To promote the services of the Centre through printed materials which are distributed to places such as women-only police stations and community centres.
 3. To strengthen the activities of the Centre related to the issues of racial and sexual discrimination.
 4. To strengthen training activities for women victims of violence.
 5. To promote the training of monitors and women leaders of the community to take information about racial and sexual discrimination back to women in their communities.
 6. To stimulate the creation of a new nucleus of women who will fight against violence in their communities.
 7. To campaign and lobby locally and nationally to influence public and political opinion on policy issues related to racial and sexual discrimination.
- Currently, the Centre is the only Black organisation offering legal services for

victims of domestic violence and defending women's rights in court, as well as supporting racial discrimination cases.

- Women assisted by the legal services are also offered other services: meetings, seminars, workshops and discussion groups to raise awareness about the roots of racist/sexist violence, group and individual psycho-therapy; helping in dealing with the police, and home visits.
- The Centre's counsellor runs group and individual sessions twice a week in the Centre.
- The Centre also runs a 24-hour phone service to assist women who are victims of domestic violence.
- The Centre run a series of meetings and seminars in conjunction with community associations to talk to women about their legal rights, health, non-sexist/racist education, sexuality, AIDS sickle-cell diseases, citizens' rights and contraceptive methods.
- The Centre publishes a bi-monthly newspaper for Black women called 'Eparrei', mainly covering the issues of violence against women and racism, legislation that is benefiting women's and Black people's rights and actions to combat all kinds of discrimination. The newspaper also acts as networking tool and information exchange for Black women's groups.
- Leaflets advertising the Centre's services are distributed to women's police and regular police stations, and handed out in shanty-town and slum districts, in samba schools, and community centres.
- Since 1992, the Centre has been pressing local governments to implement some measures to give support to women victims of violence. The Centre is currently holding discussions with the municipal authorities of Baixada Santista to set up the first women's refuge in Santos.
- The Centre also runs a restaurant serving traditional Afro-Brazilian food, an Afro-wear clothes shop, and a bookshop stocking publications on ethnic and gender issues.

An interview with Alzira Rufino will appear in the next issue of Trouble & Strife.

Development, Ecology and Feminism

Sue Lamb reviews Ecofeminism, by Maria Mies & Vandana Shiva and Women, The Environment and Sustainable Development: Towards a Theoretical Synthesis by Rosi Braidotti et al. She draws out the implications for what has become known as global feminism.

While most people are aware of the ecological crisis now facing the world, what is not so frequently understood or acknowledged is the way that the burdens created by 'development' and the resulting environmental degradation are primarily shouldered by women, and that as such, ecology is, or should be, a central concern of feminists and the women's movement. Both the above books represent an attempt to inform feminists of the importance of protecting, and in many cases the improving of the environment, in order to protect women and their children from increased poverty, work and exploitation, and decreased power and autonomy brought about by the degradation of the environment and mal[e]-development.

Both Maria Mies & Vandana Shiva's and Rosi Braidotti et al's books challenge the implicit assumption of the early 'interventionist' debates of the development crisis that women's main problem was their marginalisation from the basically benevolent processes of 'growth', 'progress', and 'development'. That increasing women's participation and their share of resources, land, wages, and job opportunities to that of men would be a necessary and 'sufficient' solution to bring about dramatic improvements in their living conditions.

Both argue that empirical evidence and their experience as researchers and activists lead them to reject this 'solution'. Women's 'inclusion' into the development process over the last decade or so has resulted in women being worse

off now than at beginning of the UN Decade Women which began in 1975. Access to economic resources, income, and employment have all worsened, the burden of their work has increased, women's relative and even absolute health, nutrition, and educational status have all declined.

The 'integrationist' methods have failed, partly because of the nature of the developmental process into which women were to be integrated and partly, and no less importantly, on the grounds of traditional cultural attitudes and prejudices against women's social and economic participation. What is increasingly clear is that 'development' as a Western project



to modernise the post-colonial world, does not bring about improved standards of living for the majority of people living in the South. Rather, it has increased poverty and feminised it, has increased gender inequality and led to the massive degradation of both local and global environments, which then further diminishes the well-being of all poor people, and especially women.

Taking responsibility

Ecofeminism by Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, is a wide-ranging, accessible and interesting account of women and the world in which they live. It provides much-needed evidence to show that women are not just passive 'victims' of male oppression, development and environmental crisis, but are prime actors in the management and protection of the environment. The authors stress women's centrality to both local and global economies, and their increasing prominence as activists and theorists in the emerging environmental movements and in the Women, Environment and Sustainable Development (WED) debate. In doing so they highlight the need to challenge all exploitative and destructive lifestyles and structures; to educate ourselves about our



relations to other women; and to develop an awareness of environmental and mal-development issues and their consequences on women in particular, and people in general. The emphasis is therefore on the need for feminists (and not only feminists) to take responsibility for their own (over-)consumption and (excessive) lifestyles (for instance coffee, tea, and sugar are all luxury goods, produced as 'cash-crops' that deprive indigenous peoples of access to their own subsistence lands, which force women (especially) into extremely low paid jobs in order to survive. Cotton is also a cash-crop grown mainly in Third World countries, and most 'fashion' goods are manufactured in the industrial sectors of the Third World, in conditions that resemble those of Victorian cotton mills, with women and children locked into factories, in poor light, with poor sanitary conditions, no access to canteens etc. for up to 18 hours a day) and to challenge the destructive policies of their own governments. Not only are Western governments responsible for inappropriate aid projects, which generate more profit for themselves than use for the recipients and support and encourage policies and actions of transnational companies (TNCs), but they often, as in the recent case of the Pergau Dam in Malaya, tie aid to military contracts, thereby increasing militarism and oppression in many recipient countries.

Maria Mies & Vandana Shiva demonstrate that radical critiques of the global nature of both environmental pollution and the developmental crisis, have been co-opted by those in power in a negative and destructive way. The new rhetoric of globalism adopted by national and international institutions in fact conceals the true nature of power and control, masks the real concentration of wealth, the domination of the 'local and particular' interests of the Group of Seven (G7) countries and TNCs and thus denies the diversities and complexities of different economies and cultures. G7, the group of the world's most powerful (economic and 'political') countries, dominates global affairs, but the interests that guide them remain parochial. As Maria Mies & Vandana Shiva point out, the World Bank does not really serve the interests of all the world's peoples or communities,

... but is an institution in which decisions are based on voting, weighted by the economic and political power of the donors. In this decision-making, the communities who pay the real price, the real donors ... have no voice (p 10)

Playing 'catch-up'

They demonstrate how the dominant 'catching-up' model of development is both logistically and logically impossible. For example, the 6% of the world's population living in the USA currently consumes 30% of the world's fossil fuels; it is therefore impossible for the remaining 94% of the world's population to match that consumption. If they did, we exhaust reserves of all fossil fuels in 34-74 years. Since energy consumption is a major element of pollution, the already over-burdened 'sink capacity' of the environment to absorb pollution would soon be swamped if the globe was to match the US in its consumption of fossil fuels. Yet an equitable distribution of current energy use would require the average North American to use only one-fifth of their present energy consumption. But it is not only the finite nature of resources that prevents the South 'catching-up', but also the fact that the dominant development model, oriented as it is to unending growth and profit, is in fact dependent on the further exploitation of both internal (women and ethnic groups etc) and external colonies (peoples in the Third World). This 'myth' inevitably leads to more destruction of the environment, further exploitation of the Third World, increased violence against women, and increased militarisation of men. In a similar way women in Western industrialised countries who believe that women can simply 'catch-up' with men through the establishment of equal rights for women, are also sadly mistaken, since the status quo, the political, economic and cultural structures in these societies, is dependent on the continued exploitation and subjugation of women as wives and workers. Maria Mies & Vandana Shiva believe that women cannot have equality in a man's world, since that world is dependent on their inequality; if we remove the base of this oppression then we radically change the system.

Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva thus present a radical critique of mainstream development, ecological and environmental thought and practice that emphasises the need for both feminist and ecological activism to ensure women's survival as well as that of the planet. It combines new insights into the relations between 'First' and 'Third' World women that takes account of both the differences and commonalities between them with a demand for new theories and strategies of feminist action as well as new models of women's social, political

and economic participation. This results in a passionate plea for the rejection of ethnocentric (white, Western, middle-class, educated, colonialist and neo-colonialist) perspectives and the adoption of a 'subsistence' perspective based on a belief in importance of perspectives generated by people who are marginalised in political, social and economic decision making.

This 'subsistence perspective', is informed by 'marginalised people', feminists and ecological grassroots movements, and other perspectives that define the 'good-life' radically differently from the dominant perspectives of either the 'growth-oriented' capitalist or socialist 'industrialist systems'. This, they believe, entails:

- A realisation that the main aim of 'economic activity' is not to produce an ever-increasing mountain of consumer goods, but activity aimed at the 'creation and recreation' of life.
- Acknowledging that man's domination of women and nature are inextricably linked, and that we cannot create non-exploitative relations with nature without fundamentally challenging human relations, especially those between women and men.
- The use of participatory democracy, not only in political, but in all social, economic and technical decision-making.
- Abandonment of the notion of a 'universal fix' and/or 'technological fix' to solve the diverse and complex problems of different cultures in their different environments, since such a notion has been a major constituent of the environmental and developmental crisis.
- A new paradigm of science based on non-exploitative, ecologically sound, feminist, principles informed by the subsistence perspectives.
- The reintegration of work and culture, and of work as both a burden and pleasure. It is also necessary, they believe, to reintegrate spirit and matter, if we are to escape both 'mechanical materialism' and 'airy spirituality'. (p 320)
- Demands for the preservation and regeneration of nature.
- A challenge to the sexist division of labour and the separation of 'private' and 'public' spheres of activity that ensures that women will do the work, while men make decisions, and theorise subsistence perspectives.
- The demilitarisation of men and society, and their closer involvement in caring and nurturing both of people and the environment.

- That we in the West be prepared to make changes, and curtail our extravagant life-styles. As Mahatma Gandhi pointed out over 60 years ago, 'To have its standard of living a tiny country like Britain had to exploit half the globe. How many globes will India need to exploit to have the same standard of living?' (quoted p 332)

It is particularly important to review this particular strand of ecofeminism, and hence this particular book, because Shiva has been so influential in the formation and articulation of WED debates, that have informed much of current thinking in the 'public' arenas of the UN, IMF, World Bank, governments, and aid and development organisations, as well as some elements of the 'Green' movement. These debates are long overdue, as is a feminist analysis of the crises of development and the environment, since women are central to the issues raised. They are, as Maria Mies & Vandana Shiva point out, primary 'managers' of the environment and eco-systems since they are theoretically, and thus practically, more closely associated with 'nature' in most cultures. Feminists have analysed the growing feminisation of poverty, women's increased responsibility for the survival of both themselves and their life-styles, women's increased work-loads, as well as their overall decrease in literacy, comparative health and welfare, longevity, and even in their absolute numbers. Women can thus be seen as the main victims of mal[e]-develop-



ment programmes, dominated by the Western model of 'progress' and 'development'.

Women and Nature

For Maria Mies & Vandana Shiva the importance of developing a feminist environmentalist project based on women's 'privileged' knowledge of nature, and the 'feminine principle', is encapsulated in the expression 'Mati Devata, Dharam Devat' — 'The soil is our Goddess; it is our religion'. This essentialist perspective is obviously problematic to Western feminists, who have theorised (and experienced) the consequences of women's closer association with nature, and therefore stress its role in the construction and continuation of women's exploitation and subordination. But as Vandana Shiva points out, they do so in the context of a culture in which male/female, nature/culture relations are, and have been since the middle ages, seen as one of superiority/inferiority. Rosi Braidotti et al also stress the need to avoid any ethnocentric or universalising tendency, to project our own 'truths' onto women in the South, and acknowledge that since most cultures in the South do not perceive the female/male relation as one of perpetual opposition, it is not so problematic for women in the South to identify themselves with Nature, and to use this identification as a source of empowerment and the basis of their struggles for emancipation. (All terms such as North/South, Developed/Developing, First/Third World etc. are conceptually problematic, since they all contain implicit assumption about the people, culture and geography of various cultures. However since we must differentiate, we must adopt one label or another. I personally prefer the terms North/South since though this does create a geographical misrepresentation, Australia being in the South and Romania in the North, at least it is not so imbued with ethnocentric, racist or elitist assumptions implied by other terminology.)

For example, the Chipko movement in India, where women protect the indigenous forestry by 'embracing' individual trees, is often represented as a romantic 'tree-hugging' project. It is, in fact, one fraught with danger and requiring immense personal courage by the women concerned. These women face the disapproval and often the hostility of husbands, fathers, brothers and other men in their communities, based on the indigenous cultural beliefs. They have to directly confront individual men as workers, as police and armed forces, their

weapons and machinery, such as chainsaws, axes and huge earth diggers. They also confront the power of men invested in the state, World Bank, IMF, TNCs, 'developers' etc. As a former Greenham activist, I can appreciate the terror generated by such forces and the courage needed to simply 'hug a tree'. It is very important to recognise these activities for what they are since as Sen and Crown (1988) point out, if women do not recognise, acknowledge and proclaim the importance and strength of their own actions, then they can be absolutely sure no one else will.

So while acknowledging that appeals to women's close association with nature has potentially dangerous and negative implications for women in both the North and South, it is also imperative to recognise it as major mobilising force for radical women's activity in both. Braidotti et al reject the biological determinism inherent in Shiva's notion of the 'feminine principle' and adopt instead Bina Agarwal's approach to WED. Bina Agarwal maintains that women have emerged as main actors in the environmental movements of India not because they are women, but because their marginality in the political, social and economic processes of India has forced them to maintain a reciprocal link with nature. In this context Rosi Braidotti et al argue that we must leave open the question of women and nature, and be prepared to challenge any negative uses/associations where and when they arise.

As Maria Mies (German, Marxist feminist social scientist) & Vandana Shiva (Indian, theoretical physicist active in the Ecology and Alternative Development movement) point out, their book constitutes an example of women from very different backgrounds working together, and extending their individual work, through increasing their understanding and broadening their analysis. While Maria Mies previously focused exclusively on 'capitalist accumulation' as the root of developmental crisis, she now acknowledges the fact that since socialist countries share the same ideologies of science and technology they have in effect, treated women and the environment in a very similar way to capitalists. In both the West and the East women have to carry the double burden of housework and paid work, and not only do women have to work in a gendered work-force, but those areas where they do work have been 'feminised', resulting in low pay, low status and

usually poor conditions of employment. The shared belief of both in the ultimate manageability of nature and the need to conquer it, has rendered entire landscapes uninhabitable, and threatens many more for years to come. Vandana Shiva's focus on the 'feminine principle' has been modified somewhat in this book, so as to take on board some of the main worries of Western feminists, away from a biologically determinist exposition, towards a more 'constructive' explanation.

'Difference' and ecofeminism

While sharing many of the same concerns as Maria Mies & Vandana Shiva, the main aim of Rosi Braidotti, Ewa Charkiewicz, Sabine Hausler and Saskia Wieringa's main aim in *Women, The Environment and Sustainable Development: Towards A Theoretical Synthesis* is to investigate the consequences of 'difference' between women, feminisms, various environmental and social liberatory movements and its consequences for both unified theory and for knowledge itself. This is a postmodernist project, but one whose aim is to create a coherent body of knowledge, and a coherent 'subject' from which to speak as women. They are concerned to analyse the theoretical implications of the critical debates that have taken place within the development, environmental and feminist epistemology that follow from feminist critiques of Western science and knowledge. Since they oppose any new 'correct' view and see diversity as a strength they do not attempt to provide a 'blueprint' for change, or separate out the true and untrue, good or bad positions. Their emphasis therefore is on generating questions, emphasising both the paradoxes and the commonalities amongst the various social liberatory movements, in order to discover points of convergence and divergence between and among such groups and thus to help reverse the increasing trend toward global homogenisation of culture. They stress the importance of celebrating and learning from heterogeneity and diversity so as to create dialogue, exchange and even co-optation of ideas, and thus encourage broad transformative movements.

Rosi Braidotti and her co-authors argue that any analysis that simply leads to the reversal of old hierarchies will necessarily fail to bring about the qualitative changes needed to create a more equitable and just society. Since many men are also victims of (race, class) subjugation,

development and environmental crisis they reject any feminist analysis that insists on seeing men as wholly responsible for the subjugation of women and the exploitation of the environment. However since men dominate the institutions that control development, they stress that we cannot ignore the masculinisation of power. They therefore call upon feminists to question and transform all ways of thinking, especially those associated with 'Western' science, technology and the project of rationality, which are simply tools for the domination of both people and nature, whose uncritical application threatens bio and cultural diversity and indeed all life on this planet. As feminists, and other social emancipatory movements, challenge the very basis of a Western epistemology that effectively invalidates all 'other' knowledge, the scientific claim to an 'objective' and 'universal' truth, Rosi Braidotti therefore argues that if we are to effect any fundamental and effective change, we must question all epistemologies, and the way that they create knowledge.

Rosi Braidotti et al criticise all 'stand-points', including feminist standpoints, and claim that their own analysis presents a unique insight into the basis of Western (male) thinking as fundamentally dependent on the existence of the 'other' and as the main organising principle of society. Yet as Maria Mies (feminist marxist) & Vandana Shiva (feminist, Southern, Alternative development standpoint) reach many similar conclusions and argue that women (and others) need to deconstruct Western science, rationality and beliefs, and redefine existing structures in order to make them less discriminatory, not only for women, but ultimately for all people. Many share the same objective of removing hierarchical oppositions and the power structures that maintain them. But according to Rosi Braidotti et al the other approaches are all, to some degree or other, essentialist.

They acknowledge that postmodernism can deny women any position from which to speak and struggle for change. But they claim that their postmodernist focus on feminine subjectivity, 'where multiple codes of power and knowledge are inscribed' (p 174), takes them beyond the classical notions of materialism, towards a new (unique? superior?) form of 'embodied' materialism that sees the female subject in terms of 'a network of simultaneous power formations'. They claim as new the insight that 'the body is not an essence, and

therefore not an anatomical destiny: it is rather an individual's prime location in the world, one's primary situation in reality'. (p 174)

Invisible women

While I must agree with this conclusion, I cannot agree that it is an exclusively postmodernist one. My readings of both feminist standpoint and materialist feminist theorists, is that they make similar non-essentialist claims. However they manage to avoid those negative aspects of postmodernist theory which denies the existence of the category women and therefore the platform from which women speak and organise their opposition to patriarchal structures and practices, and the global homogenisation of culture. Rosi Braidotti et al believe that since women have been 'cannibalised' by the post-industrial system (Donna Haraway, 1990), they effectively disappear as sex-specific social agents. This position, as Rosi Braidotti et al acknowledge, not only 'makes oppositional politics utterly redundant' (p 54), but makes women, as women, disappear.

Since my own research is focused on the consequences of women's 'invisibility' within economic theory (they do not work, are not productive, and whatever they do, it is not an economic activity unless it is exchanged for wages in a gender-segregated workforce), I find this approach highly questionable. The pernicious use of economic indicators (GNP etc) and census that define women's 'primary occupation' as 'housewife' and thus ensures that the majority of women's labour is dismissed as non-economic, non-work (even if it is responsible for the production of 70% of the nutritional value of subsistence diets, almost all wood and water collection, and most care work performed in, and for, the community). This not only reinforces their theoretical invisibility, but also ensures their marginalisation in the developmental process. Women are only now managing to force themselves and their interests onto the social, political and economic agendas of governmental and international agencies, and since we have not achieved our aims of recognition, emancipation, and social justice, the abolition of women's subjugation and exploitation, of sexual violence, and so on, it does not seem the right moment to abandon this recently won 'visibility'. As Christine Delphy & Diana Leonard have shown in their book *Familiar Exploitation*, the problems associated with the economic 'invisibility' of women are not restricted to women in

subsistence economies of the South. It also constitutes a major element in the continued subordination of women in both rural and urban areas of the industrialised North.

Knowledge, politics and the government

Both books powerfully illustrate the urgent need to radically alter the existing development model and the power relations that inform and structure it. They stress that if we are to improve women's lives we need to rethink our relations with nature and the environment, and include women, at all levels, in the processes that determine the material and psychological aspects of their lives. But since their individual perspectives are so radically different, each has its own very different aims and agendas, and also very different strengths and weaknesses.

Since *Ecofeminism* provides such a wide ranging and thorough description of women's actual and theoretical positions in the world, it is a useful tool for the projects of education and change that Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva advocate. If we are to use this 'tool' effectively, however, we must be aware of the limitations of the analysis provided. Maria Mies' & Vandana Shiva's advocacy of a return to a system of 'global/local' subsistence agriculture and a simple lifestyle, is useful in highlighting the need to question our current life-styles, to take personal responsibility for our own actions and our position as net gainers of the colonial system of exploitation. It is however logistically impossible in the densely populated areas of India, let alone in the densely populated and urbanised European countries, to give each citizen a plot of land sufficient for subsistence. While this may be an ecologically sound principle or ideal it is, for the time being at least, impractical given the current densities and distribution of the world's population, and the degradation and destruction of so many its environments. Its implementation would require a massive (forced?) relocation of people and hence the destruction of the very communities which Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva see as fundamental to the process of change.

Apart from Vandana Shiva's fundamentally essentialist valorisation of the 'feminine principle', her (almost exclusive) focus on the 'Western' nature of the development crisis must be seen as highly problematic to any feminist perspective. While it is obviously essential to acknowledge 'development' as a 'Western

patriarchal project based on reductivist science and technology' that generates a partial and distorted account and analysis of the lives and interests of its 'subjects', we should not neglect an analysis of indigenous patriarchal structures. It is questionable whether any future development programmes based on Maria Mies & Vandana Shiva's proposed 'subsistence' perspective would truly result in the emancipation of women if the strength of indigenous patriarchal beliefs and practices, and their consequences, are underestimated.

In India, for instance, amongst the poorest castes/classes an estimated 50% of women are malnourished compared to only 14% of men (70% or less of the expected body weight for height). Yet Indian women put in an estimated 51% of the energy/work performed, whereas men contribute only 31%, and children the remaining 16%. Janet Henshall Momsen points out that differences in patriarchal attitudes, beliefs and practices within a country can radically affect women's lives and their potentials. Differences between the experiences of women in the North and South of India are dependent on the cultural attitudes, patriarchal patterns of ownership, and transmission of wealth and property along the male line. In the South of India where a woman plays an important part in subsistence agriculture, she has a higher social status and on marriage her family usually receives a bride-price (though dowry payment is on the increase). Women in the North though cannot own property, and have to pay large dowries on marriage, and this is



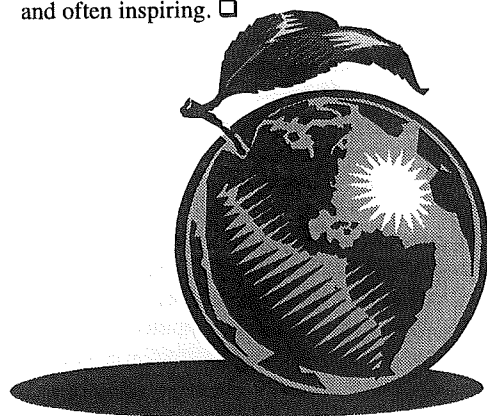
considered to be an important factor in the abortion of 78,000 female fetuses between 1978 and 1983, since the cost of a sex test and the abortion of 'the dispensable sex' is less than the price of an average dowry. Of the 8,000 abortions carried out in Bombay in 1990 only one foetus was male. It is also significant that many women claim that they are prepared to abort female fetuses since they do not wish to bring daughters into the world to suffer as they have suffered. In some areas of Northern India practices such as female infanticide, differential treatment of girls when ill, poorer food, poorer education of mothers etc results in death rates for girls aged 1-4 being as much as double that for boys. Dowry deaths and the illegal practice of Suttee (widow burning) are both increasing throughout India, indicating a re-trenchment of indigenous patriarchal values, but in the South of India, where women at least have access to the means of subsistence, fewer girls die, and women have better access to education.

Without such an analysis, evidence suggests, women are simply 'included' into development, their workloads increase and their only 'compensation' is increased status, not increased wages or recognition of their interests. They invariably remain excluded from any decision-making processes as to what type of development (or not) they require, what type of crops are best suited to their needs, and to those of their environment. Their access to vital resources, land and its products, is also diminishing as is the cultural independence needed for genuine emancipation. Therefore a thorough understanding of the inter-relationships between Western and indigenous patriarchal beliefs and practices is needed, if many more women in the South are not to be forced away from their dependency on the land into increasing dependency on men, with all the negative effects on their work and personal autonomy that this would imply.

Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, I believe, do achieve their professed aim to discuss the issues and problems that we face if we are to preserve life on the planet, the production of knowledge, poverty, development, and the industrialisation of all life forms, the search for cultural identity, and for freedom and self-determination. They lay their vision of 'a society benevolent towards nature, women, children and men' (p 20) open to criticism and further analysis. But even though Rosi Braidotti and her

co-authors provide a thorough and wide ranging exploration of the histories and development of environmental, developmental and feminist thought, and explore the potential ground for coalitions with other groups, I find it ironic that despite their criticisms of feminist standpoint theory in general, and Sandra Harding, in particular, they believe her proposals for 'Rainbow Coalition politics' (Sandra Harding 1992) to be the only way forward.

Sandra Harding's proposal for the creation of temporary and shifting 'Rainbow Coalitions', which build on areas of mutual concern where the interests and aims of different groups coincide, is firmly situated in a feminist standpoint which Rosi Braidotti and other postmodernist writers reject. By claiming unique understanding, and the superiority of 'situated knowledge' over a feminist standpoint, not only do they set themselves in opposition to other feminists (and women), but it appears, in hierarchical opposition at that. But since they argue that 'the embodiment of the subject is the political standpoint which allows for a critique of dualism as ... an oppositional form of thought which has the effect of psychic warfare.' (p 174) I find it surprising that they insist on maintaining, what to me appears to be a purely semantic division between a feminist standpoint and 'situated' knowledge. Not only are the nuances of their argument in support of such oppositions beyond me, but they are in a real sense 'purely academic' to the lives and struggles, hopes and aspirations of the huge majority of women. Vandana Shiva may not be 'politically correct' according to the new feminist hierarchy that appears to come out of feminist postmodernism, but she does address the issues of real concern to the great majority of women, in a way that is both accessible to them, and often inspiring. □



Rosi Braidotti et al *Women, The Environment and Sustainable Development: Towards a Theoretical Synthesis* (Zed Books Ltd 1994)

Christine Delphy & Diana Leonard *Familiar Exploitation: A New Analysis of Marriage in Contemporary Western Societies* (Polity Press 1992)

Sandra Harding 'Subjectivity, Experience and Knowledge: An Epistemology from/for Rainbow Coalition Politics', in *Development and Change* (Sage, Vol. 23, 1992, No.3, 175-193)

Maria Mies & Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (Zed Books Ltd 1993)

Janet Henshall Momsen *Women & Development in the Third World* (Routledge 1991)

Gita Sen & Caren Grown (DAWN) *Development, Crisis and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspectives* (Earthscan Publications 1988)

It all comes out in the wash: Lesbians in soaps

The last two years have been touted as the time when lesbians made it in mainstream television. Nicki Hastie takes a closer look, and asks how are lesbians and lesbianism being re-presented.

Apparently lesbians are 'fashionable' in the mid-1990s and it is now possible to find images which indicate 'lesbianism' in wide-ranging cultural locations. The concept of 'lesbian chic' has been debated in numerous publications, from the August 1993 *Vanity Fair* front cover featuring Cindy Crawford and k d lang to Joanna Briscoe's *Sunday Times* article ('Lipstick on her collar', 5 June 1994). According to these recent articles you can see lesbians, or at least lesbian iconography, everywhere, and it no longer 'takes one to know one'. Yet lesbians remain suspicious and sceptical of articles directed towards a less predominantly straight audience. Cherry Smyth in *Everywoman* (April 1994) asks: 'How do you tell a lesbian these days, now that androgyny is common and straight girls are impersonating dykes?'

Designer lesbianism

I share the view that 'lesbian chic' is a media-manipulated designer package which bears no resemblance to the daily lives of the majority of lesbians. 'Lesbianism' becomes a temporary fashion or fad for mainstream consumption. The popularity implied by 'lesbian chic' is far removed from the homophobic condemnation of Hackney school head, Jane Brown, which formed the media's other high-profile 'lesbian' story in 1994. Brown became the focus of anti-lesbianism in January 1994 after refusing subsidised tickets for a performance of *Romeo*

and *Juliet* on the alleged grounds that it is a 'blatantly heterosexual love story'. Her treatment exposed how lesbians are treated in reality by the mainstream media. 'Being seen is not the same as being heard, visibility is sometimes but not always power' ('Lesbian Chic' *Diva*, April 1994).

This is an important point which makes us ask: Which images of lesbians are acceptable in the mainstream? And which are supported by the lesbian and gay press?

I am particularly interested in how being a lesbian is represented on TV. Where US culture supports the 'lesbian chic' phenomenon through exported images of the stylishly famous (eg Sandra Bernhard), the British press turns a sensationalist lens on *characters* within British TV soaps; although still, it seems, with an emphasis on glamour. So David Plusfeder comments in the *Times* that ITV's soap *Emmerdale* 'has recently made its prettiest character into a lesbian' (19 June 1993), and newspapers reproduce time and again the photograph of 'the kiss' (or 'lipstick snog' as it is sometimes called) between Channel 4's *Brookside* characters Beth and Margaret. When BBC1's *EastEnders* introduced a lesbian storyline in June 1994, rumours about character, Della, in the Summer 1994 edition of lesbian magazine *LiP* implied that what was most significant for *EastEnders*' producers was how to construct her

fashion consciousness and status as a consumer: 'given the budget that's been handed over for her new wardrobe, she's going to be a designer dyke with a vengeance.'

Lesbian visibility

Although aspects of the British and American press represent 'lesbian' through high-level visibility, style and glamour, it is still more usual in the lesbian and gay press to find the accusation that 'you never see lesbians' in the media, at least not represented 'positively'. Hence, the exclamations of astonishment or celebration in publications such as *LiP*, *Diva* and the *Pink Paper* when lesbians do take to the TV screen. It is my sense that because of their scarcity on television, lesbian themes are often viewed by lesbian audiences with a mixture of celebration and trepidation. As Megan Radclyffe comments in her *Time Out* review of *Brookside*'s lesbian storyline: 'Far more rests on this than meets the eye'.

I am focusing on *Brookside* because it has caught the imagination of both straight and lesbian/gay audiences, whereas other TV soaps and dramas have either sparked momentary interest or the lesbian content of the programmes themselves has been shortlived. One of the positive aspects of *Brookside*'s lesbian story is that it has never represented lesbian themes solely for the benefit of a straight audience. It has been prepared to challenge heterosexist assumptions. As Mal Young, the soap's producer, told me, '*Brookside*'s not about

making people feel comfortable.' Compare this with *Emmerdale*'s character, Zoe, who discovered her lesbianism in Summer 1993. After a couple of coming out scenes and a visit to a gay club in Leeds, the scriptwriters seemed unable to decide what to do with her. There was little mention of Zoe's sexuality again until November 1994. The newest lesbian plot, in *EastEnders*, has been significant in challenging the all white representation of current TV lesbians, but hasn't received as much enthralled attention as *Brookside*. In the mainstream press, *EastEnders* has been accused of 'copycat' tactics, while the lesbian press has considered characters Della and Binnie 'two-dimensional'. *Brookside* has so far provided the longest and most consistent lesbian storyline in British TV drama.

Images and words

Brookside's lesbian theme has developed in many directions, both on- and off-screen. One of the most significant of these was the publication of *The Journals of Beth Jordache* on 25 April 1994. It is around the character of Beth Jordache (played by Anna Friel) that the lesbian theme has been focused. The publication of the *Journals* invites the interesting question: What can be seen of Beth through her diary writings which isn't available from the TV screen? And vice versa: what is shown of Beth on the TV screen which cannot be represented in diary form?

This raises questions about the ways in which different audiences construct readings of the lesbian storyline — who sees lesbians? when? and how? The quote, 'You never see lesbians', appears in *The Journals of Beth Jordache*. Interestingly, Beth's comment refers specifically to the visibility of lesbians on television, and takes television to be an important cultural resource when wishing to develop one's understanding of a range of subjects, including issues of sexuality. This is the context of Beth's sentence:

You'd have thought it would be easy to find out about it these days. I've always been sort of aware of it, but I don't really know what being gay means. The only thing you see on the telly is a lot of camp idiots poncing around playing hairdressers. It's one of the rules. If a man's a hairdresser, then he's gay and so limp wristed you wonder how he can hold the scissors. Either that, or he's incredibly sensitive and dying of AIDS. You never see lesbians. (80-81)

That this comment forms part of Beth's diary entry for 28 November 1993 has everything to do with issues of lesbian visibility in *Brookside* because at this point in the TV series there were few on-screen references to lesbianism.

Intimate embraces

When and how does a lesbian storyline become visible? For the tabloid press, the lesbian storyline really began in the week leading up to Christmas 1993 and seemed to receive confirmation only after the 14 January 1994 episode. In the Christmas Eve transmission Beth tells her friend, Margaret, that she loves her and attempts to kiss her, providing the first 'lesbian kiss' scenes.

What does it take for the mainstream press to see lesbians on TV? The second kiss screened on 14 January 1994, reciprocated this time by Margaret, apparently marks the deciding factor. 'It's the Clincher' according to that day's *Daily Mirror* headline, printed alongside a photograph of Beth and Margaret's kiss. The *Mirror*'s article opens with the lines: 'Here is the picture that says it all. Beth Jordache loves Margaret Clemence. And viewers will be in no doubt about it when the two girls have a close-encounter kissing session on tonight's episode' [my emphasis]. Without supporting picture evidence of a particular kind, an intimate female embrace or kiss, for example, it seems there is no lesbian story.

But in fact such an intimate embrace had been screened on 19 and 22 November 1993. On both occasions, Beth and Margaret are shown in bed together in each other's arms. They kiss and hug; they are depicted as 'innocent' friends free from the suggestion of lesbianism. This is how Mal Young represents those scenes:

The girls went to sleep in each other's arms, and not one letter of complaint. Everyone said 'Gorgeous scene'. And then a month later we showed them back in bed together kissing and everyone said 'Disgusting. You should be taken off the air.' And I said, 'What's the difference? It's exactly what they did a month ago. They kissed a month ago, but because we didn't suggest any undertones you were quite happy.' We wanted to point up people's hypocrisy, and it kind of worked.

Now I want to turn to the 25 October 1993 episode, which I identify as a pivotal moment in the lesbian storyline. Beth calls on Margaret and immediately begins to talk about the book she is holding.

Beth: I brought this over for you. I finished reading it on the way home.

Margaret: Is it good then?

Beth: It's really sad. I'm so embarrassed. Can you believe it, I started crying on the bus. Some old woman asked if I was alright so I told her my auntie had died. I don't know why.

Margaret takes the book, turns it over to read the back cover, and it is never mentioned again. This whole scene probably takes up less than a minute of screen time. It may not seem like much to get excited about, but it demands specialised knowledge on behalf of the viewer if the book exchange is to have any meaning other than an attempt to introduce a level of narrative realism. At no time is the title of the book or the author's name visible. The model reader for this scene is someone who can recognise a book by its cover and come up with the Virago edition of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, and then go beyond this to interpret the book as a code word for 'lesbian'.

According to Rebecca O'Rourke who has written extensively about *The Well of Loneliness* and its meaning for different readers, the painting by Gluck on the Virago cover is enough on its own to signal 'lesbian':

It... shows two heads, cheek to cheek. The figures are androgynous women: short cropped hair, no make-up, noble features. This image represents lesbian whereas... [covers on different editions of *The Well*] represent women; a subtle yet very obvious distinction. It also represents two women as lesbians, a way of underlining what most interpretations of the novel elide: that Mary is as much a lesbian as Stephen.²

(Could this possibly suggest that Margaret is as much a lesbian as Beth? I'm reading ahead here,



but it's worth a thought.) Beth adds her response to reading *The Well of Loneliness* to the many others documented throughout lesbian publications. It is a popular myth within lesbian culture that reading *The Well of Loneliness* features on 'a kind of checklist of things-you-do-as-you're-coming-out'.³

It is not necessary in terms of its narrative function that viewers recognise Beth's gift to Margaret as *The Well of Loneliness*, but it does offer some viewers a further interpretive device by which to measure the developing intimacy between the two young women at this stage in the TV narrative and in subsequent episodes. *The Well of Loneliness* features in an important episode for the strengthening of Beth and Margaret's friendship, for it is at this stage that Beth begins to talk to Margaret about her violent and sexually abusive father. The discussions about Beth's father are continued when Beth and Margaret are in bed together on 19 November. Beth shares more and tells Margaret that she was raped by her father when she was fourteen. Margaret is upset for Beth and hugs her, urging her not to talk any more about men because 'it's friends who count.'

Subsequently viewers were teased by a consciously heterosexist plot involving a form of love-triangle between Beth, Margaret and their friend Keith. Heterosexual pairings are assumed and the possibility of same-sex desire is continually denied. Beth's behaviour around Keith and Margaret is interpreted by other characters, including Margaret herself, as a jealous reaction; the only conceivable reason is that she must fancy Keith.

All this highlights the gaps between the TV narrative and the journal narrative and their possible effects on the TV viewer. One of the constraints of soap opera is that as it is based on the idea of community, the narrative has to be built around social exchange. What happens to one character is important primarily in terms of the effects it has on other characters, so an individual can only reveal their feelings if they share them in a social context. Soap opera doesn't allow introspection. You are not allowed inside a character's head, and rarely do you see through their eyes. This is where *The Journals of Beth Jordache* complement the experience of watching *Brookside*. In the *Journals* the lesbian story is available to all readers, and Beth's exploration of her sexuality is neatly detailed as a process.

While the TV narrative provokes confusion in the viewer, especially a viewer looking for the heterosexual story in the relationships between Beth, Margaret and Keith, the *Journals* simultaneously present Beth's own confusion about sexuality and relationships. The diary format allows Beth to discuss her feelings far earlier in the narrative than that represented on-screen in the social world of soap opera.

However, my pivotal moment involving *The Well of Loneliness* does not appear in Beth's diary. Instead, Beth describes how she called on Margaret merely to lend her a CD. Perhaps *The Well of Loneliness* becomes redundant here as a 'lesbian sign' because the diary reader has access to Beth's private thoughts. But when I questioned Mal Young about the book's absence he said that besides issues of copyright, mentioning *The Well of Loneliness* would have been a distraction within Beth's story as most readers will have no knowledge of it. Although this omission prioritises the experience of a straight reader, it is also encouraging that Mal Young takes very seriously reactions to *Brookside* in the lesbian and gay press, and has become more aware of lesbian and gay audiences through Beth's story. The publication of Beth's story in journal format provides a valuable resource for the young people who have identified with the character of Beth and written in both to the producer and to Anna Friel. The *Journals* promote the possibility of lesbian existence, particularly for younger women, and Mal Young has already had an enquiry from a Theatre-in-Education company wishing to dramatise the *Journals* for discussion in schools.

The impact of the on-screen kiss

Of course, what the *Journals* cannot provide is a visual representation of lesbian desire. I have already suggested that the visual impact of the kiss scenes in the television narrative has been important for the mainstream press in recognising a lesbian storyline, and that this has contributed in some part to the media's continued high profile interest in *Brookside*'s lesbian themes. What I don't want to do, though, is deny the significance of these on-screen kisses for lesbian audiences. If heterosexual desire is shown, but lesbian desire remains taboo, heterosexuality will continue to be normalised. The absence of lesbian desire conceals the fullness and reality of lesbian lives and can effectively make lesbians invisible by ignoring

lesbianism as a factor of a character's identity and by obscuring the cultural position of lesbians.

Articles about the representation of lesbian characters on American TV (currently more abundant than those from a British perspective), have criticised the way in which lesbian characters are not allowed to express sexual desire or passion. To be non-threatening to heterosexual screen characters or TV viewers, lesbian characters must not display lesbian desire. You may see lesbians on prime-time American TV, but you never see lesbian characters being sexual. The much-hyped 'lesbian kiss' on *Roseanne* wasn't really a kiss at all, and certainly didn't represent lesbian desire for this viewer. Even so, the American TV networks threatened to cut the episode. Such censorship of lesbian sexuality is relevant to my discussion of *Brookside* because Margaret and Beth's kiss was cut from the Saturday omnibus edition due to its earlier transmission time of 5.00pm and the alleged unsuitability of lesbian scenes for 'family audiences'. Ironically, this action may have helped TV producers to justify further representations of lesbian desire. Many viewers were prompted to contact Mal Young over this censorship, resulting in 80 percent viewer support in favour of the kiss being shown.

Sasha Torres suggests that 'TV's refusal to represent lesbian erotic life' has to do with one of the particular narrative roles constructed for lesbian characters.⁴ A lesbian character may be introduced as an example of 'otherness' which serves to keep interactions between the rest of the female characters free from any suggestion of lesbianism. If her erotic life and desire for another woman were to be represented, lesbian sexuality would no longer be contained and controllable. This point may explain the previous absence of lesbian issues in soap opera:

it may ... be because of the crucial role of women in soaps that the representation of lesbian relationships is so difficult. ... The representation of female friendship ... through the presentation of a lesbian couple, could reverberate through the soap, calling into question the basis of the relationship between other women in the programme.⁵

There has been no attempt in *Brookside* to limit lesbianism to the character of Beth Jordache, in fact quite the opposite. The subject of women's desire in general has been opened up for discussion, and in a way which challenges

the dominant discourse of sexism and heterosexism. *Brookside* has been prepared to eroticise female friendship, upsetting the heterosexist assumption that a character can be 'safely straight'. Rather than lesbianism being limited to one character, the visibility of Beth's sexuality through her relationships with Margaret and then Chris has led to the extension of the lesbian plot into other characters' lives. Outraged by her husband's homophobic remarks directed at Beth, *Brookside*'s Jean Crosbie began to re-live the love she had for a woman friend when she was eighteen.

I would like to suggest that *Brookside*'s ability to enact lesbian desire has kept lesbian audiences focused on the character of Beth Jordache, whereas interest in *Emmerdale*'s Zoe soon waned. While *EastEnders* introduced its own lesbian couple through characters Della and Binnie, they have not met with the same enthusiasm as Beth. Tilly McAuley (*Diva* August 1994) writes of Della and Binnie: 'there is no chemistry in their scenes together which are therefore hopelessly unerotic', whereas 'there is a genuine emotional and sexual frisson in Beth's "sex" scenes'.

Endangered species?

If it seems at the moment that every British soap (not yet *Coronation Street*) must have its lesbian character, there is an accompanying awareness that these are only characters who may all too soon disappear from our TV screens.

Contradictions between being seen and being heard, and between visibility and power come to the fore when exposing the gaps between characterisations of lesbians and real lesbian lives. While current TV soaps steer away from stereotypically negative representations of lesbians, the mainstream media's treatment of real-life lesbians tends to reinforce the notion that lesbians *really are* 'depraved freaks'. On 14 January 1994, Anna Friel and Nicola Stephenson (who played Margaret in *Brookside*) were interviewed on Channel 4's *The Word*. By this time, *The Word* had its very own lesbian presenter, Huffy. But only fictional lesbians were allowed to perform *as lesbians* on the show. Through its treatment of Huffy, *The Word* effectively silenced lesbianism except in a fictional context. She was continually undermined by the other presenters, made to perform heterosexist stunts, and reportedly even banned from the studio so that she could not get 'too

¹ *The Journals of Beth Jordache* adapted by Rachel Braverman (Boxtree 1994)

² Rebecca O'Rourke *Reflecting on The Well of Loneliness* (Routledge 1989)

³ Christine Holmlund 'When is a Lesbian Not a Lesbian? The Lesbian Continuum and the Mainstream Femme Film' *Camera Obscura* 25/6 (1991)

⁴ Sasha Torres 'Television/ Feminism: Heartbeat and Prime Time Lesbianism', *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* edited by Henry Abelove et al. (Routledge 1993)

⁵ Christine Geraghty *Women and Soap Opera: A Study of Prime Time Soaps* (Polity Press 1991)

close' to fellow-presenter Dani Behr. Huffty's frustration was clear when on the final show in the 1993-94 season, she shouted 'Lesbian Power' over the closing credits. Huffty was axed from the show before its new series. By attempting to voice lesbian reality, she was finally denied both power and visibility.

When well-known TV personality, Sandi Toksvig, came out not only as a lesbian but also a lesbian mother, the Save the Children charity dropped her as their host for a prestigious fundraising event. Lesbian 'celebrities' are not celebrated in Britain, and certainly not if children are involved. The high-gloss popularity associated with 'lesbian chic' comes into view only when women are considered to be playing a

part and to look the part. In the mainstream press, 'chic' often means 'an acceptable performance of femininity'. Homophobic abuse of headteacher Jane Brown condemned her for her 'donkey jacket, jeans and clodhopping boots, her 'stubborn look', and a haircut considered too short.

Brookside's lesbian storyline isn't merely a reaction to the 'lesbian chic' craze; it is a central text in the current cultural debates about lesbian visibility and lesbian representability. As lesbian characters explode onto the TV screen and 'lesbian' stories hit the headlines, it becomes imperative to question the gaps between visibility and empowerment. □



Queer Theorrhea

(and what it all might mean for feminists)

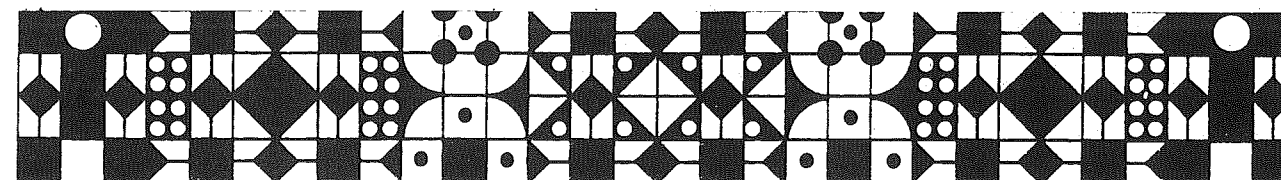
Catherine Grant encourages us to think about the context from which 'Queer Theory' emerged, and to look at what this can tell us about the relationship between 'Queer Theory', 'Queer Politics' and feminism.

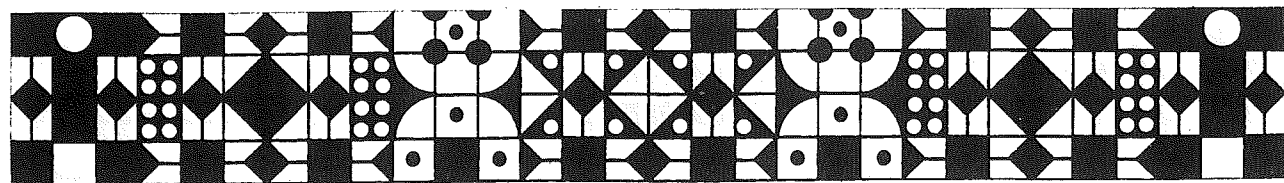
In her recent study of contemporary lesbian writing, which is aimed at a Lesbian Studies/ Women's Studies readership, Paulina Palmer asks whether or not Lesbian Studies are best pursued in the context of feminism, or if such a frame is restrictive. In another recent book of contemporary lesbian literary and cultural readings, Sally Munt addresses, with Venn diagrams, a similar question of the space or context occupied by Lesbian Studies, this time as opposed to Women's Studies and to what she calls Gay Studies. Meanwhile, in a recent journal article, Sheila Jeffreys asserts that lesbian feminism has been 'disappeared' by both 'traditional' Women's Studies and by the new 'Queer' Lesbian and Gay Studies. Certain points or questions occur to me as I read all of their comments: the first is that in many respects this question about academic or theoretical debates parallels what have also been 'practical' deliberations about the space(s) of lesbian activism, which some rather tired-looking lesbians used to solve by 'being everywhere'. The second question and the main area under discussion in this article is, what is happening first to the context and then to the content of

Lesbian Studies, given some of the recent developments? In the present environment, characterised by a flurry of conferences and publications marketed as 'Queer', an atmosphere of veritable 'theorrhea' on this topic exists (a term to describe the end-product of the institutional valorisation and encouragement of 'Theory' in the humanities). Will 'Lesbian Studies', with its 'cumbersome' feminist baggage and/or separatist connotations, be swept away as a rather passé label in this supposed new age of perversity and queerness, along with the broad spectrum of political ideas or commitments which used to be part of it?

How did we get queer?

'Queer', like many umbrella terms, has come to mean different things to different groups. However, as a term applied to theoretical work in Lesbian and Gay Studies it generally denotes the application of poststructuralist and post-modern ideas to interdisciplinary studies of the historical formations of lesbianism and homosexuality, and of the relationship between these formations and those of heterosexuality. It implies a shift from the consideration of

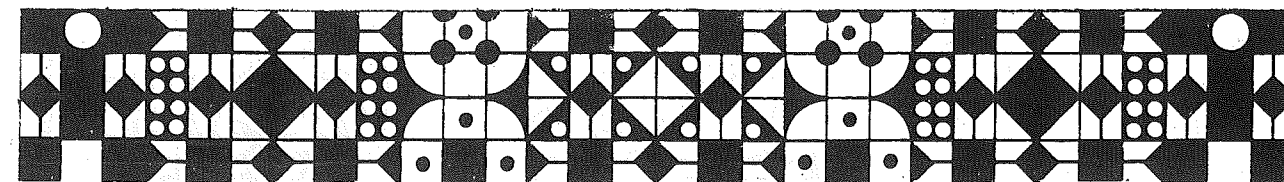
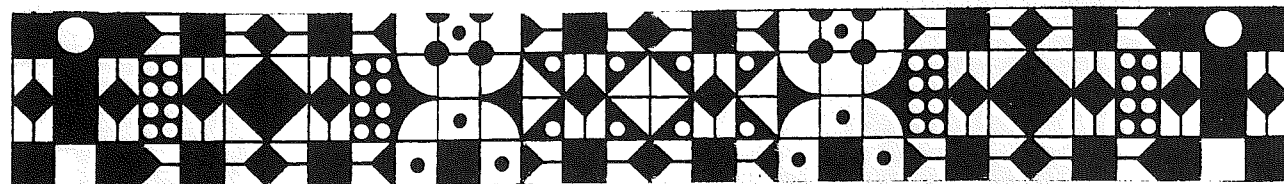




lesbianism and homosexuality as discrete identities to one of homosexualities as kinds of discursive construct. 'Queer' theorists also often advocate the disruption or destruction of traditional categories of sex and gender. Of the two books I mentioned above, both appear to refuse the 'Queer' label. Sally Munt's edited study, *New Lesbian Criticism*, is slightly pre-'Queer Theory', so to speak, since the essays it assembles with their mainly British focus appear to have been written between 1990 and 1991. Some of the essays could, however, be retrospectively labelled 'Queer' in focus and outlook, being firmly in the tradition of lesbian writing augured by *Feminist Review*'s Spring 1990 *Perverse Politics* issue. On the other hand, Paulina Palmer's book, *Contemporary Lesbian Writing*, published in 1993, was in time for the British departure of the 'Queer Theory' bandwagon (for example, Cherry Smyth's *Lesbians Talk Queer Notions* appears in Palmer's bibliography). She, however, prefers to stand on the sidelines and simply survey 'Queer' politics and theory in her attempt to contextualise key lesbian works along with key political events and movements. I shall summarise her version of the emergence of these "Queer" discourses as a preface to my own discussion.

Palmer sites her account of these developments in part of a chapter on 1980s theory and politics entitled 'Libertarian and poststructuralist approaches'. This follows on from a critical discussion of what she calls, following Faderman, the lesbian 'sexual radicals', the increasing influence of a psychoanalytic account of lesbian desire, and the publication of such mixed lesbian/hetero/bisexual women's writings on sexuality as *Desire: the Politics of Sexuality*, *Pleasure and Danger* and the 1981 edition of the American Journal, *Heresies*. After the (SM,

'Butch/Femme', pornography) 'Sex Wars', in Palmer's account, with the lines clearly drawn between lesbian feminists and sexual radicals, came further division over the issue of bisexuality before the late 1980s homophobic backlash — in Britain, in the form of Section 28 — led to a greater willingness among many lesbians to work alongside gay men. The perceived failure of conventional campaigning methods and of what became known as 'Identity' or 'Affirmation' politics resulted in many lesbians and gays turning not only towards what were seen as more radical forms of direct action aimed at confrontation with the state, particularly as a means of responding to the AIDS crisis, but also towards new kinds of identity politics which were more welcoming of bisexuals, for example, as well as other varieties of self-defined 'sexual minorities'. Thus, argues Palmer, the late 1980s and early 1990s saw the migration of many lesbians away from feminism, influenced by, or attracted to, libertarian attitudes — towards a participation in the new mixed political movements: in the USA, Queer Nation and ACT UP; in Britain, ACT UP and OutRage (now with its new offshoot, the Lesbian Avengers). She does point out that many of the forms of direct action used by these groups resemble the activities of the early WLM. Palmer also notes, without really attempting an explanation — it seems to be, after all, simply the culminating point in all this political activity — the emergence of Lesbian and Gay Studies courses in universities in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Without going as far as acknowledging the existence of an entity called 'Queer Theory', she does point out the increasing influence in academic and publishing circles of the poststructuralist perspectives and modes of thought, and names theorists (Butler, Fuss) that others have come to designate as 'Queer'.



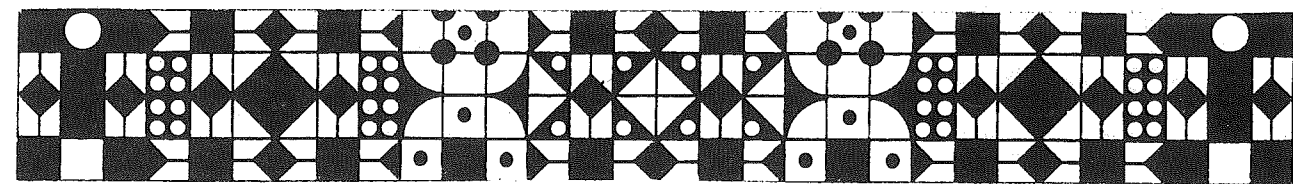
Palmer's account is, on the whole, reasonably well-documented and extremely valuable for the way in which it attempts to contextualise politics (including discussion of her own political experiences in a British lesbian feminist context) alongside theoretical considerations and lesbian creative writing. However, there is one issue concerning her contextualisation of recent lesbian theory that I feel is worth taking a closer look at. As I have mentioned, Palmer offers no real opinion as to why Lesbian Studies and Gay Studies emerged in the late 1980s as separate disciplines, or why poststructuralist approaches have become in the 1990s the most highly valorised form of theorising. This is after all a rather paradoxical, if not totally contradictory development in many ways: 'Queer' theorists have been able to establish their own academic territory, creating their own identity as a group, even as they deconstruct away the notions and categories involved in such a move.

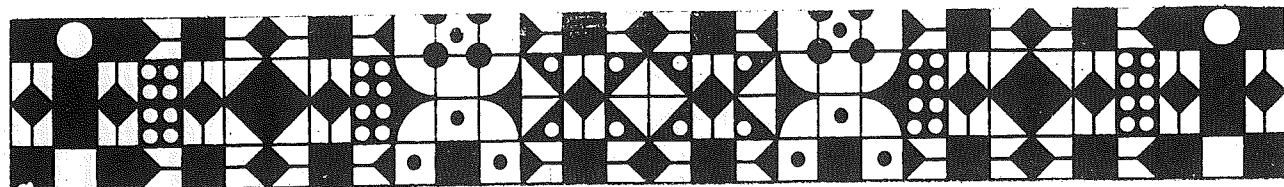
Consuming identities

Why did this happen? Why did these discursive and institutional spaces open up, and why was it that a particular kind of theory generally filled them up? In Britain, at least, the Thatcherite 1980s with the racist, misogynist and homophobic baiting of the GLC and 'Loony Left' and, in particular 1988 with the passing of Section 28, saw unprecedented amounts of publicity in all areas of the media on the subjects of homosexuality and lesbianism which were both highly negative and positive. This topicality when taken with the mass mobilisations of lesbians and gay men and their sympathisers against what was originally Clause 28, and the thirst of this temporary community for knowledge, information or 'images' of gay and lesbian identities provided a ready market for publish-

ers, part of which was an academic market. In the introduction to her book, Sally Munt also briefly examines this question and argues that it was the forging of these social movements in the late 1980s precisely within a *consumerist aesthetic* which paved the way for a mini-boom, for example, in the publication of lesbian-authored texts about lesbian writing. She writes: 'A postmodern culture has seen the development of reading communities with purchasing power, which publishers have rightly perceived as potential micro-markets' (1992, p.XVII). My own memory is that at this time identity politics did indeed fuse with this kind of niche-marketing, so that being lesbian or gay was seen to be partly achieved by buying the right books, wearing the T-shirt (or the 501s) or by dialling the 0898 number. Clearly, neither the causes nor the effects of these developments are only aesthetic; they are part of a wider social, economic and cultural consumerist shift.

This may well answer certain questions about demand, but what of the supply side? Courses, publications or conferences do not just happen without teachers, authors and organisers, and in this case, all with particular identifications. Obviously, there were lesbian and gay-identified academics and theorists before Section 28. Also, many women and men academics and theorists, both during and after this particular struggle, came out or identified as lesbian or gay, or bisexual. Many of the campaign activists have got jobs as academics. Some of them will have been 'self-consciously moving out of one political location into another, recognising the contextual imperative' (p.XVI), as Sally Munt describes it. In other words they have perhaps been wanting to 'do something' about their identification in their current context, although the pressures on them not to do so would vary according to their job status,





gender, class and ethnic background, amongst other factors. Some of this is also true of the earlier development of academic feminism in response to the struggles of the Women's movement, of course. Munt writes that the way in which Lesbian and Gay Studies is being seen in some North American and British universities as now occupying the radical space which was once feminism, is disturbing in that it has displaced feminism as something more academically conventional. On an anecdotal level, we may well agree with her, and some of us, for example, Sheila Jeffreys in her recent article, may suspect that it is all down to dubious alliances with gay men who have not always all been the best friends of feminism. But would we be misplacing our blame?

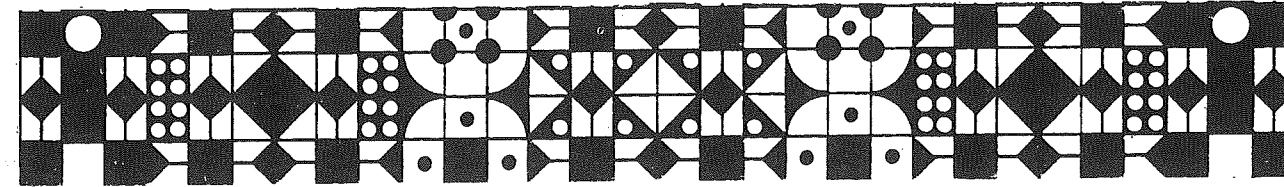
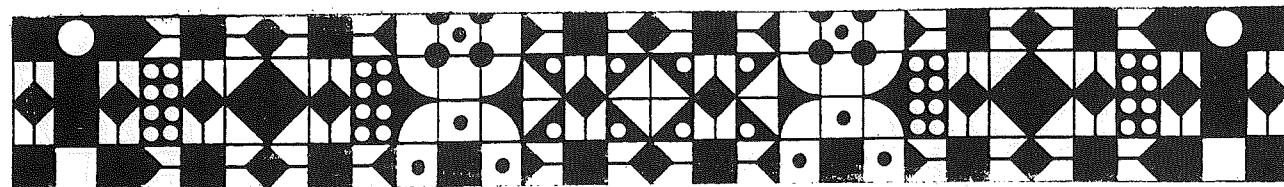
One of the insights from the work of Michel Foucault, so beloved of certain 'Queer' theorists, is that power has not operated primarily by denying sexual expression but by creating the forms that modern sexuality takes; individuals are categorised and attached to their identities. Similarly, power has not always denied radical political or social expression, for, as John Champagne writes, 'special' fields of knowledge are occasionally created, such as Gay Studies, in attempts by the academy to 'manage diversity', or as Munt puts it, this is the way that the establishment assimilates in order to de-radicalise. I would add that it is in this very way that institutions mask the very conflicts which constitute them. Even if, however, the establishment does, once in a while, allow the creation of carefully managed spaces, which it further de-radicalises by marginalising them, surely it doesn't always dictate the kind of theory that they must use?

Catching theorrhea

I feel that a possible key here lies in the term

that I mentioned at the beginning of my discussion: 'theorrhea', the current valorisation (and outpouring) of theory. 'Queer Theory', whilst in itself, can hardly be said to have much affected the curriculum in either British or North American universities, has certain antecedents in common with other supposedly radically-oriented theories and practices, such as deconstruction, or with 'Theory' itself, that problematic umbrella term under which are grouped various poststructural and postmodern approaches to particular areas of knowledge. Such perspectives have in certain circles, most notably in academic literary and Cultural Studies, achieved a critical hegemony. Patrick Brantlinger, in his discussion of 'theorrhea' in Cultural Studies, outlines three possible causes for the proliferation of 'Theory' from the 1960s onwards: the existence in the academy of political aspirations thwarted on the 'outside'; authentic, progressive movements of knowledge; and careerist responses to both 'inside' and 'outside' marketing considerations (consumerism at work again?). He sees these causes not as alternatives, but most likely as political, economic and cultural factors that have operated simultaneously. I find this a very convincing argument when discussing not only 'Queer' and Lesbian and Gay Theory, but also some feminist theorising now and in the past.

If 'theorrhea' might link various forms of theorising about sexuality and gender, perhaps now is the time to turn to an examination of some specifically lesbian examples of 'Queer Theory' itself in order to address some of the other questions I posed in my introduction. Interestingly, as I have argued so far, amongst other considerations, the 'outside' of politics has a good deal to do with the 'inside' of theory, Teresa de Lauretis in her introduction to the 1991 'Queer Theory' issue of *differences*: a



journal of feminist cultural studies disavows a straightforward connection between 'Queer' activism and theory. De Lauretis argues that 'Queer Theory', based as it is for her on the deconstruction of the binary categories underpinning the formation of gender and sexual subjectivities, is often way too radical for an activism which sometimes just isn't queer enough, frequently recreating, despite its best intentions and efforts, the identity politics it aims to transcend. Judith Butler, in a chapter of her 1993 book, *Bodies that matter*, entitled 'Critically Queer', argues that while in some contexts the term, 'Queer' appeals to a younger generation attempting to resist the reformist politics sometimes signified by 'Lesbian and Gay', this is the same predominantly white movement that 'has not fully addressed the way in which "queer" plays — or fails to play with non-white communities' (p 228, my emphasis); it is interesting to see how Butler portrays racism as such a playful entity, even as she critiques 'Queer' for failing to take it seriously, here). She also argues that there is a similar issue at stake along gender lines: 'whereas in some instances [the term "Queer"] has mobilized a lesbian activism, in others the term represents a false unity of women and men' (p 228).

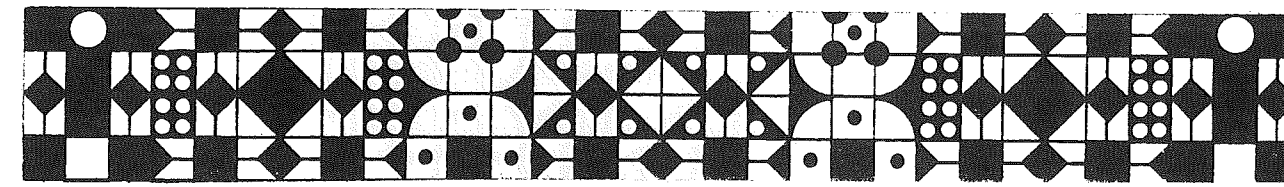
While I note that this account sounds suspiciously like some past phases of lesbian/gay activism, it is interesting that Butler here footnotes Cherry Smyth's book, *Lesbians Talk Queer Notions*, as her example of lesbian activism being mobilised by the term 'Queer'. Smyth's book, which is clearly an artefact of 'Queer Politics' based as it is on fragmented interviews with activists and critics of the movement, is also a self-conscious piece of 'Queer Theory' (in the manner of certain pieces of feminist theory), an attempt at a kind of *écriture queer*. Many (lesbian) feminists would

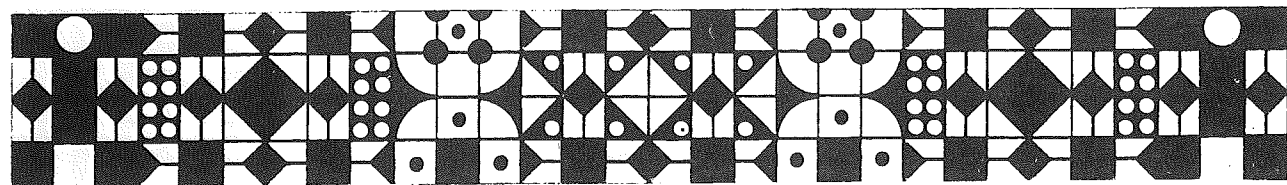
baulk at the assertion of a connection between 'Queer politics' and feminism, with the proliferation of references to an heroic lesbian sexual outlawism pitted against comments about the past 'silencing of anything but "right on" forms of sexual expression' (p.37), but this is precisely the connection Cherry Smyth invokes when she states in her introduction that '[the book] is situated firmly within feminism and queer politics, while expressing ambivalences towards both' (p.12).

For 'ambivalences towards feminism' read code for a feminist ethics set up as the bad, prudish mother in opposition to her renegade, sexual daughters, to paraphrase Arlene Stein's account in her collection of essays edited in the US, *Sisters, Sexperts, Queers: Beyond the Lesbian Nation*. While this current of thought is not an essential component of all 'Queer Theory' it does crop up in many 'Queer' books in some of the old, familiar guises, sometimes, as a romantic attachment to a particular version of 'transgressive' lesbian sexual practice, or as an idealisation of other practices such as lesbian 'butch/femme' role-playing with little or no reference to historical or other contextually specific ways of interpreting these practices.

High (Queer) Theory

Judith Butler is an interesting theorist in this regard. Her work, like that of Diana Fuss, falls into what might be described as 'High Queer Theory' (a false binary category, of course...), in other words, work heavily informed by feminist philosophy, as well as by many other areas of theory in the humanities. Paulina Palmer, in her survey of contemporary lesbian theory admires the questions which Butler addresses while disliking the 'esoteric tone and elitist attitude' (p.30) associated with her work. While Butler herself states that she is working within a





feminist tradition, the poststructuralist framework of her analyses means that she treats 'woman' and 'lesbian' as very unstable categories indeed, which engenders difficulties for a (lesbian) feminist politics. What happens to your politics when your 'identity' category has been deconstructed out of 'false' existence. Butler discusses this hypothesis in her essay 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', which opens the 1991 collection of mixed lesbian/gay 'Queer Theory' edited by Diana Fuss, *Inside/Out*. Here, she summarises the above problem:

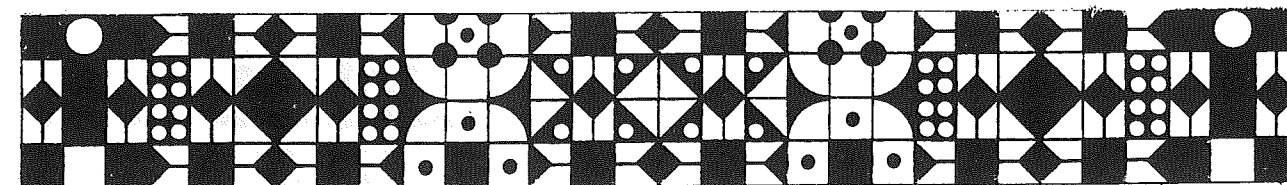
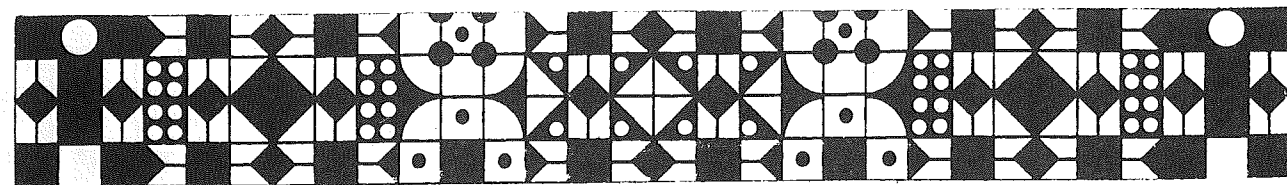
It is one thing to be erased by discourse, and yet another to be present within discourse as an abiding falsehood. Hence, there is a political imperative to render lesbianism visible, but how is that to be done outside or through existing regulatory regimes? (p.20)

Butler resorts in this essay to a defence of these 'necessary errors' or 'category mistakes' of sexual identity categories in the face of the political imperative of fighting homophobia and the oppression of women.

Several things are striking to me about Butler's brand of 'Queer' discourse: it is less confrontational about the whole spectrum of its acknowledged feminist and lesbian antecedents without falling into an apolitical stance. It also tends to stray less than other attempts at 'Queer Theory' into the realm of nostalgia for a mythical, pre-feminist, lesbian past when supposedly we could dress how we liked and do what we wanted within our own outlaw culture. The only time that Butler seems to wander into this area is when she outlines her theories that all gender is performance and that there are no gender 'originals' for which drag performances and lesbian butch/femme 'stylisations' are 'copies'. Her version of butch/femme relationships in *Gender Trouble* is drawn from Moraga and Hollibaugh's account in *Desire* and it inherits many of their attitudes.

In some respects, 'Queer' is posing no new dilemmas for academic, lesbian-feminist theorising, which is still going on in almost all the old spaces, within Women's Studies and Lesbian/Gay/'Queer' studies. This is not to say that it poses no dilemmas at all, it's just that we've met them before. For example, when Cherry Smyth launches an attack in her book on 'misplaced feminist morality' and then another on the sexism of 'Queer' men, she clearly wants to have her cake and eat it too. The old-fashioned kind of 'sex radical' similarly never could jettison completely the 'prudish mother' of feminism, either. This is the paradox that some 'Queer' theorists describe as 'desiring the law', and the precursors of a good deal of lesbian 'Queer' criticism are the earlier attempts at a sex-radical feminism (quite often the theorists involved are one and the same), and both forms of criticism have been afflicted with this anxiety about ethics, or values. It seems that it can never be quite 'queer' (ie. radical) enough just to be lesbian, 'Queer', and publishing in academia, without some larger political, ethical (and institutional?) framework, most usefully provided by feminism.

What has changed in the last seven or eight years is that the proliferation of published academic work on the subject of lesbian/gay/bisexual identities and identifications which has taken place has generally made use of a particular group of poststructuralist theories which have been valorised over and above others by the academy. I have attempted to trace at least a slightly more compelling account of how this 'Queer Theorrhea' came to pass, by arguing that the late 1980s lesbian and gay movements forged their identities almost as much through consumerism as through political activism. After the perceived 'failure' of lesbian and gay movements to effect real political



change outside the academy, what were genuine progressive movements of knowledge created by a growing number of lesbian/gay/bisexual-identified academics on the inside were co-opted by difficult-to-avoid careerist responses to both the external and internal marketing considerations. So, while it seems to me that academic lesbian feminism has nothing to fear from the more historically specific accounts of the formations of 'homosexualities' or from the more materialist forms of 'Queer' cultural criticism, the real danger lies not in oppositional

theories (which can always be contested) but in the 'theorrhea', in the pressures and demands of careerism and consumerism. While this consumerist version of education and academic publishing is allowed to predominate, we should continue to be aware that the spaces that (lesbian) feminists and other progressive political movements have fought for in academia, from which some of us are able to speak, would not necessarily survive any changes in the 'market' to which we are supposed to respond. □

Patrick Brantlinger *Crusoe's Footprints: Cultural Studies in Britain and America* (Routledge 1990)

Judith Butler *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge 1990)

Judith Butler *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of sex* (Routledge 1993)

Judith Butler 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', see Fuss, ed. below, pp.13-31

John Champagne 'Stabat Madonna' in Lisa Frank and Paul Smith, eds., *Madonnarama: Essays on Sex and Popular Culture* (Cleis Press 1993) pp.111-138

Feminist Review No 34 Spring 1990, 'Perverse Politics: Lesbian Issues'

Diana Fuss, ed. *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (Routledge 1991)

Heresies 12 1981

Amber Hollibaugh and Cherrie Moraga, 'What we're rollin' around in bed with — sexual silences in feminism' see Snitow et al, eds. below, pp.404-414

Sheila Jeffreys 'The queer disappearance of lesbians: sexuality in the academy', *Women's Studies International Forum* Vol 17, number 5, Sept-Oct 1994, pp.459-472

Teresa deLauretis 'Introduction' to *differences: a journal of feminist cultural studies* 3 2 (1991)

Sally Munt, ed. *New Lesbian Criticism: Literary and Cultural Readings* (Harvester 1992)

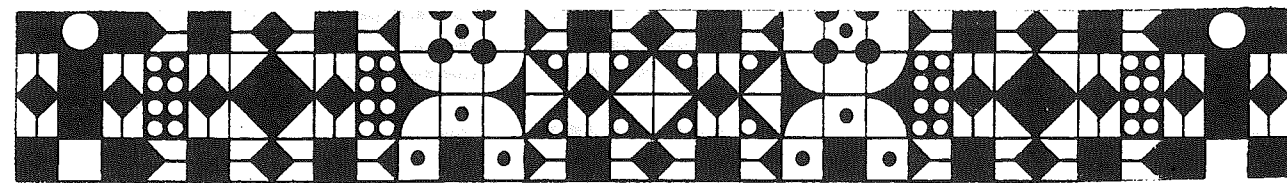
Paulina Palmer *Contemporary Lesbian Writing: Dreams, Desire, Difference* (Open University Press 1993)

Cherry Smyth *Lesbians Talk Queer Notions* (Scarlet Press 1992)

Ann Snitow, et al eds. *Desire: the Politics of Sexuality* (Virago 1984)

Arlene Stein, ed. *Sisters, Sexperts, Queers: beyond the Lesbian Nation* (Plume/Penguin Books 1993)

Carol Vance, ed. *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (Routledge 1984)



Stuck in the Middle

It used to be assumed that feminist theory and practice informed each other. Liz Kelly addresses the growing divide between the two and reasserts the need for feminist praxis.

One of the central tenets of feminist thought was the link between theory and practice, but this seems to have fallen into something of vacuum, with most commentaries stressing the sister principle of the personal is political as the foundation of 'second wave' feminism. This short 'think piece' is an exploration of the consequences of this loss, and a plea for a rekindling of our desire to create feminist 'praxis' (an old fashioned, and now unpopular, term meaning the ongoing linkage between theory and practice).

Several radical feminists have noted the way in which the feminist practice of consciousness raising has been re-defined (see for example Sophie Laws, 1990). In its original conception women met in groups to share their personal experience of oppression. This sharing of experience was *not* the primary purpose of cr, although this is how it is most commonly understood today. It was a first step. The second was to analyse our experiences; through making sense of our lives and asking 'why', women aimed to better understand what needed to change. The third step was to work together to create change. The cr groups I belonged to in Norwich in the mid 1970s were also groups of women I did activism with. And we sometimes worked in the 'opposite' way, beginning with a written piece of 'theory' and exploring how far it

reflected our experiences/helped us make sense of it.

But this passion (and we were passionate about it, and I still am) to understand, to make sense of women's lives seems far less evident today. Whilst there are many factors involved in this shift, the one I want to explore is the increasing separation of theory and practice in British feminism, which undoubtedly has parallels in other contexts. What I encounter far too frequently these days is either abstract difficult feminist theory, which has minimal connection to the complexity and messiness of everyday life, or unmediated personal accounts, a wallowing in the messiness of one's life with little or no reflection, self-criticism or awareness of other women's realities.

The last decade has been one in which British feminists have come to see themselves as increasingly beleaguered, witness the constant references to 'backlash' in the written and spoken word. A sense of threat and loss pervades many discussions, and such a pessimistic climate tends to produce a defensive clinging onto old certainties, or alternatively an abandonment of them as elements from a previous idealistic, but no longer relevant, time. These distinct responses often result in our fighting each other rather than the institutions and practices which reproduce women's oppression. What is seldom evident these days is women seriously discussing a vision of a different world, a sense of what we might be fighting/struggling for.

Whose experience?

Beginning from one's own experience was a fundamental challenge to traditional politics — be it right, liberal, or left. Most political theories were based on men's experiences and analyses of the world, and we had the temerity to place ourselves at the centre. The majority of left politics 25 years ago consisted of either arid arguments about the 'true' meaning of parts of texts, conducted in a style and language which, for those new to the ideas, were alienating and frequently incomprehensible or lectures by comrades who had studied something in depth. Telling each other about aspects of our lives, and trying to develop understanding and explanation from there, created a political process which was accessible and intentionally involving of everyone. We shifted the terms of debates from the labour theory of value, modes of production, false consciousness and class struggle to housework, patriarchy, sexuality and women's liberation, and in the process created both a new language and a new political approach. The extent of the shifts in consciousness from that early period are easy to forget, and I try to keep vivid my mid-70s memories of bemused (and frequently hostile) responses to political meetings on motherhood, housework and violence.

But we rapidly became aware of the limits of personal experience, when all, or the majority of the persons involved were white, heterosexual, educationally privileged women. Challenges from women within, and outside, the WLM made it clear that experience had to be more inclusive. Some cr groups, and other kinds of women's groups did include women with different experiences, but many did not. One outcome of this process has been identity politics, in which experience of a particular form of oppression has come to be defined as a politics in itself. Some forms of identity politics appear to create a personal investment in maintaining and even celebrating one's oppression credentials rather than a political movement to end the oppression.

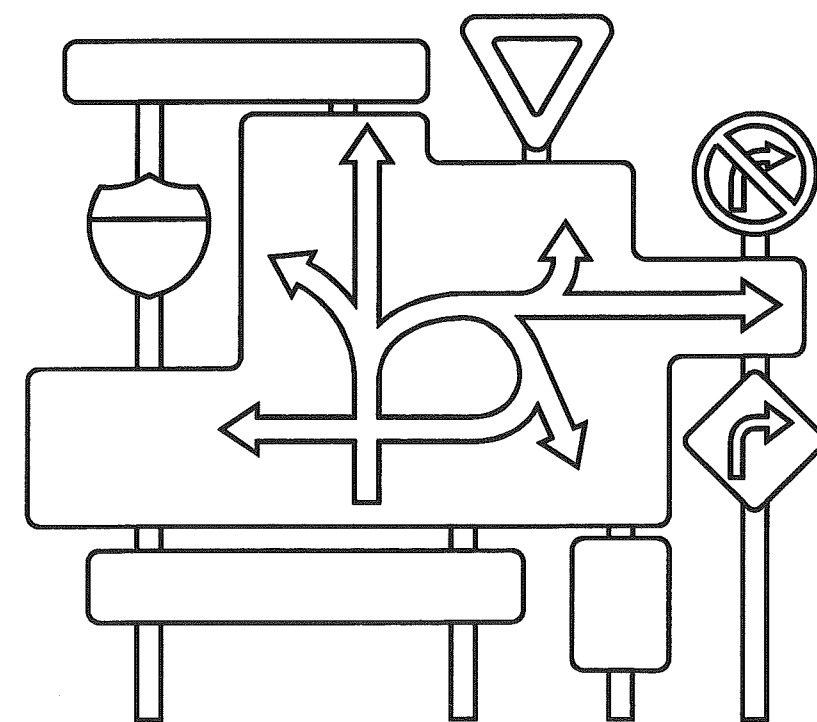
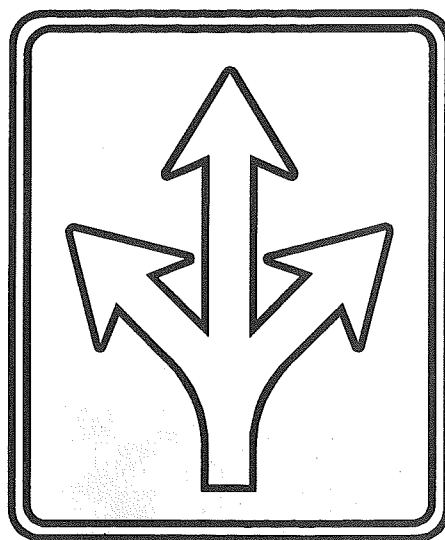
Within cr, and outside it, it also became clear that 'experience' itself was complicated — it was not some essential unchanging truth, but messy, and even at times contradictory. How I've always understood feminism is as a tool for making sense of both individual lives, and the context in which they occur. Where what

already existed did not enable 'sense making' then we needed to develop theory and concepts which did. Some of the most exciting feminist work begins from an issue, or question, we have not yet addressed and builds a feminist analysis through using old and new insights. But the failure of what already existed to provide women with immediate answers/explanations increasingly led many to look outside — be it to other theories like psychoanalysis or post-structuralism or to other practices such as therapy.

These shifts in how we think about experience have resulted in the separation of theoretical and personal approaches to experience; the theoretical approaches using women's lives (if at all) merely as illustrations of the theory, and personal accounts being presented without wider contexts in which they are located.

Theory for its own sake

There was a time when the books/articles which moved women — be it to anger, action or heated discussion were shared inside and outside the academy. We might have taken different things from them, even understood them in different ways, but it was possible to discuss the ideas



within them in various contexts. This is rarely the case today. Too many of the texts which currently excite academic feminist debate are complex and inaccessible ones which few outside those circles would know about, let alone understand.

Some of the issues we are grappling with now are complex, but nonetheless it is possible to say difficult things in accessible ways. However, women have to *want* to do this. One writes with an audience in mind. It is more than obvious that some audiences in mind are other academics, men and women, rather than the wider audience of feminists. Some feminist academics resolve this dilemma by self-consciously writing for different audiences, but I still wonder whose game is being played here. One of the very odd things about academia is that when academics become 'successful' — by promotion to the status of professor and particularly through popularity as a columnist, broadcaster or media

'expert' they begin to speak and write much more simply, and accessibly. How much of this convoluted language and argument is simply a claim to the status of academic/intellectual, which once that is conferred, can be shed?

'Theoretical theory' — theory for its own sake — is the opposite of the 'useful knowledge' feminist academics and researchers set themselves the goal of creating, and as such it serves as confirmation of the justness of an anti-intellectualism which has always had some support in British feminist politics. For women who are excluded by complex and inaccessible theory what is available to them are old certainties, approaches and analyses which made sense, even if they can't fully encompass changed times.

Much recent feminist academic theory is either deeply pessimistic about the possibility of an inclusive feminism, or oddly celebratory about the trappings of gender identity. Little engages directly with the changed and unchanged material conditions of women's lives. Pessimistic feminist theory has become entangled in the conceptual impossibility of holding at the same moment a range of oppressions without prioritising one. But

what may be conceptually difficult in theory is developing in practice. Local, national and international feminist networks and coalitions and some feminist research projects are finding ways of practising inclusive feminist politics. These realities always occur within the context of a particular issue. Through working together to create feminist social change, women are finding ways of working with similarity and difference at the same time. The more isolated and unaware feminist theoreticians become from feminist activism the more they are disconnected from the source which would encourage and enable them to resolve some of the theoretical knots.

Whilst 'theoretical theory' angers me, so too does sloppy use of theoretical concepts. One of the most powerful things feminism has done, and must continue to do, is to create new language and meanings which provide women with ways of naming and understanding their own experience. The redefinition of 'the personal is political' from its original meaning that personal life could be analysed and understood, not to mention transformed, through politics to its common current use as 'one's personal life simply *is* political' is one example. The way many of us unthinkingly, and not ironically, use 'pc' as common currency, when it carries underneath it a deep hostility and derision for our attempts to change language and meaning is another. It was our experience of language as a form of power — the power to name and define — which made it such a key issue from the beginnings of this wave of feminism. We didn't need linguistic or semiotic theory to understand how basic and fundamental an issue this was. It still is. We do our movement, and the constant and costly challenges and struggles countless women engaged in to create changes, an injustice when we abandon this commitment.

Activism in a vacuum

The inaccessibility of much academic feminist theory has both further entrenched 'anti-intellectualism' amongst activists and deepened the divide between feminist activists and academics (although some of us do attempt to combine the two). It is one thing to want accessible theory, it is another altogether to resist it in any form at all. Theory and concepts

are frameworks which enable us to make sense of the world; without them there can be no movement for women's liberation, for the idea/vision is itself a concept which arises out of analysis of women's oppression. We all need to be able to analyse events, to understand how they fit into a broader picture. This is in fact the principle underneath feminist services such as refuges and rape crisis lines. We sought not just to provide 'victim support' but to offer women different ways of making sense of their experience: feminist ways, which drew on feminist theory.

When there was more connection between feminist theory and practice, women used to bring new insights to their support and campaigning work. This is far less likely today, creating a reliance on established ideas, and a weak basis on which to respond to new developments. One consequence has been that simplistic concepts are adopted to take the place of political analysis and understanding, and here too women have sought out non-feminist sources, such as traditional counselling methods or 12 step models.

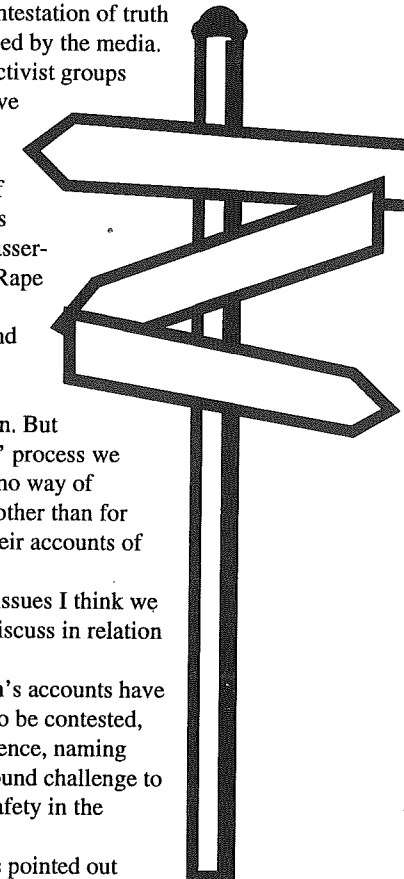
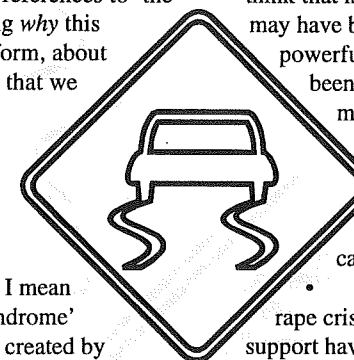
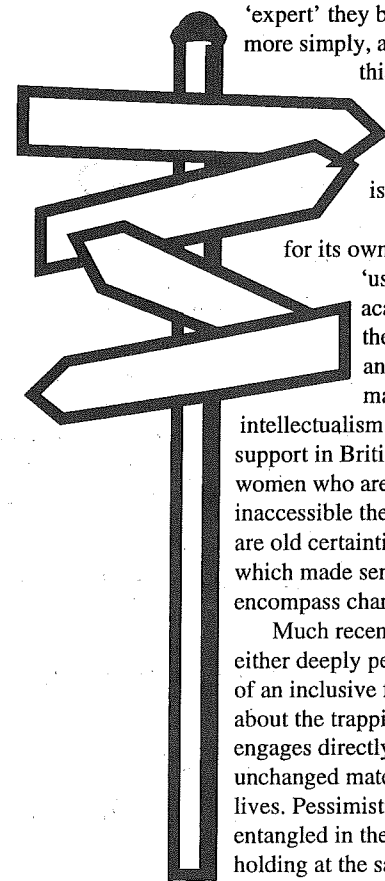
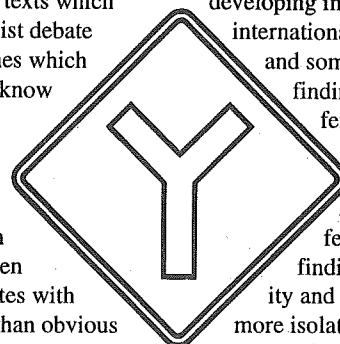
The most obvious example of this in recent years is the overused concept of 'backlash', producing a pessimism of action paralleling the pessimism in theory I mentioned earlier. I don't think backlash is a particularly useful concept since it implies an unfair and unique phenomenon, but more importantly it serves to substitute for a political analysis. If we take seriously the implications of fighting for women's liberation then resistance to this by men is inevitable. A heightened intensity of resistance could be understood as a response to the success of feminism, which reveals to us some of the fault lines in patriarchal power. Rather than making depressed references to 'the backlash' we ought to be asking *why* this resistance at this time, in this form, about this issue. The result would be that we could understand the current situation enough to be able to adapt our own strategies and struggles: a position from which we can continue to act, rather than feel defeated.

A good illustration of what I mean is so-called 'False Memory Syndrome' (FMS) — a fictional syndrome created by groups of parents (predominantly fathers) who have been (they claim, falsely) accused of sexual

abuse by their adult children (usually daughters). This public contestation of truth has been gleefully publicised by the media. Most women working in activist groups supporting women who have been abused have been shocked, disturbed and angered and the analysis of 'why now' and 'why in this form' has been limited to assertions of 'backlash'. In the Rape Crisis group I belong to an attempt to discuss 'why' and 'what is going on' was responded to extremely defensively by some women. But without this 'sense making' process we have very little to say, and no way of entering the public debate other than for individuals to assert that their accounts of abuse are true.

These are a few of the issues I think we needed, and still need, to discuss in relation to this issue:

- That women and children's accounts have been, and will continue to be contested, because breaking that silence, naming men as abusers is a profound challenge to their power, status and safety in the world.
- As Louise Armstrong has pointed out (T&S, 21), at least in the US — where FMS originated — an incest industry has emerged, with countless books and therapies being offered to women as routes to 'recovery'. It is possible that within this 'circus' there are some charlatans, or even unprofessional individuals who take advantage of vulnerable and distressed women. I do not think that is inconceivable that some women may have been encouraged, even coerced by a powerful therapist to think that they have been abused when they have no memories of it. Feminists have always had a healthy scepticism of therapy, have challenged the abuse of power by therapists. It is dangerous to abandon that caution.
- However, women who approach rape crisis and other organisations for support have either always known about their abuse, or begun to remember it themselves. One common response where memories are



just emerging is to for the woman to ask us to tell her they are not real.

Louise Armstrong points out in her new book (1994) that FMS has emerged at the historical point where a relatively large number of adult women decided to sue their abusers for financial damages. In other words when women were just talking to each other there was little threat to men as individuals or a group, but once numbers of women chose to call them to account in ways that might hurt them, financially and in terms of their public reputation, a different response emerged.

Louise Armstrong argues that the movement of survivors to sue their abusers was a 'wrong' move in this particular political struggle, since it individualises the issue and requires women to prove and display their damage in public. Another reading is that something like FMS only becomes necessary when power is perceived to be in jeopardy. The choice need not be either suing for damages or collective resistance. It is possible to envisage a co-ordinated calling to account, which would be premised on arguing for common levels of compensation (thus eliminating having to show you are 'more' hurt than others) with a proportion going to the individual and a proportion to support services, prevention or campaigning groups. Creating this kind of movement, however, requires an analysis of what the potential losses and gains of particular strategies are, and how we could minimise one and maximize the other. That in turn demands that we value and develop tools through which we can create feminist praxis.

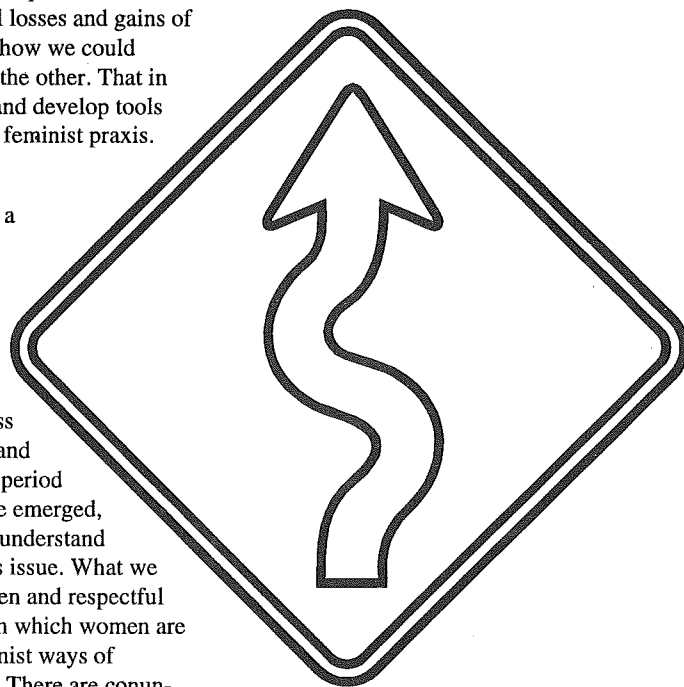
The way we were?

'Second wave' feminism has a quarter of a century history. Depending on how you measure 'success', much or very little has changed. We have not achieved women's liberation, but women's consciousness across the globe has shifted in vast and ever increasing ways. In that period new issues and concerns have emerged, and indeed we have come to understand that every issue is a women's issue. What we do far less of is discuss in open and respectful ways the multitude of ways in which women are still struggling to create feminist ways of thinking, working and living. There are conun-

drums and contradictions in trying to create alternatives in the eye of a storm; we sometimes fall short of our best intentions and aspirations.

What we need more of is neither theoretical theory nor personal accounts, but honest and critical reflections from the experience of working in women's groups, in coalitions — accounts which are attempts to make sense of the tensions, dilemmas, attempted solutions, unresolved issues. We all know that there are recurring themes which tear women's groups, and even friendship networks apart. Beginning to record and make sense of what is going on, and why, can involve women on the outside and the inside of groups working together to explore what they can bring to this 'sense making' process.

The feminist organisations which I know still try to combine theory and practice are all involved in campaigning. Is it in fact the case that it is only through attempts to understand more fully and then act to create change — the purpose of praxis as it was originally defined — that theory and practice can be closely connected? □



Louise Armstrong 'Surviving the Incest Industry' (*Trouble & Strife* 21)

Louise Armstrong *Rocking the Cradle of Sexual Politics: What Happened when Women Said Incest* (Addison Wesley Publishing Company 1994)

Sophie Laws *Issues of Blood: The Politics of Menstruation* (MacMillan 1990)

ONE HELL OF A TRIP

*We reprint the conclusion to Louise Armstrong's new book **Rocking the Cradle of Sexual Politics**, her personal account and analysis of fifteen years of struggles around the reality and meaning of widespread sexual abuse of children.*

What strikes me most as I review the evolution of this issue is how effective fifteen years of diversion and newspeak have been. How oldthink it sounds to say what the evidence continues to show to be true: that the thorny issue of incest, the core around which intransigence reigns, is an issue of male privilege. It is not, any more than it ever has been, an issue of what all men do or what all men want to do. It remains an issue of what those men who so choose feel is part of their presumed prerogative; at the very least, their business, no one else's. Denials have varied over time to aggressively meet circumstance: it doesn't happen, it's all in the kid's mind or fantasy, children are sexual and seductive; children make it up, women lie; the aggressor as victim....

It is worth suggesting that just because we identified this early on as the very cradle of sexual politics — said it and said it — and went unheard, does not mean that what we said was wrong. It is equally likely, especially in light of the evidence that has subsequently accrued, that we were right — but that dealing with that fact was far too troublesome, far too socially disruptive.

Despite all efforts to gender-neutralise the issue, on the evidence, it certainly remains true that if all we were looking at were sex crimes committed against children by women, we would have something of such small scale as to not even be identifiable as a social problem, much less an occasion for massive machineries designed to palliate and pacify. And it does not seem outrageous to suggest that if we are willing to see women punished for failing to protect children (failure to protect), and if we are willing to see women in jail for attempting

to protect children (vindictive mothers), scruples about punishing women as offenders would not run too high.

Virtually every aspect of the social response to the issue of incest has been crafted to divert challenge to male authority, beginning with 'decriminalisation' and the family dysfunction rhetoric, and extending to faulting women who 'knew or should have known'. Virtually every step of the way — from the allowances made due to men's own imperfect childhoods, or to their wives' claimed inadequacies — has implied a policy of appeasement toward men.

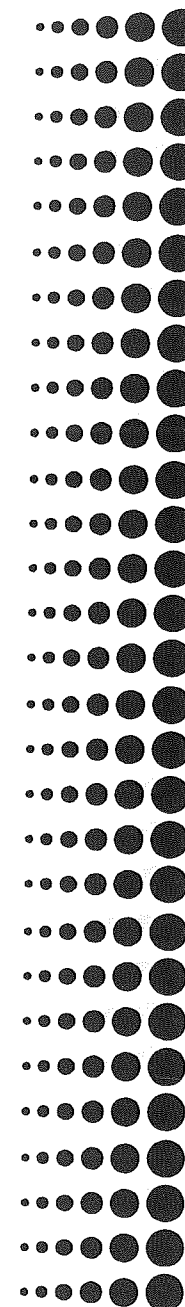
That despite all this effort there is backlash, that the policy has not entirely succeeded, is a sign only of the heightened sensitivity alleged perpetrators and their sympathisers feel on this issue. That they do not even acknowledge all the efforts on their behalf shows only their sense of privilege due.

As a society, we have defused accountability. We have identified women as causative, removed their children, even jailed them. It is enough to make one sigh: What more do men want?

We have devoted a huge amount of energy and resources to denying what is overwhelmingly apparent. We have made a huge investment in convulsion in order to turn the focus of attention from male responsibility for household predation to children's responsibility for prevention.

There has been funding here.

Enormous resources have been used to turn the problems this predation causes women and children into their illness. To turn the fact that children may later be battered or raped because of this same sense of male privilege into the children's, the women's, predisposition to



having this happen. We have made sexual and physical assault the victim's (unwitting) design, rather than acknowledging that it is to luck that any woman owes escaping such an encounter (thus shifting those issues to allow focus on her vulnerability).

There has been money to be made from this.

And we have gone to all lengths to avoid knowing that this lesson in permitted rage against women as wives and mothers leads to the likelihood that men will continue to express anger at women through aggressions against their own children. (What else do silly excuses for paternal child-rape like the wife not putting out enough or her being ill imply?)

Experts skilled in designing language to assist this knowledge-avoidance have been well compensated.

The issue of incest as it pertains to children now has been chopped free of the issue as it pertains to adult women whose violation was in the past. And even within the subset of children's issues, areas of specialisation are sequestered from one another. Thus, when I went looking into the reality for kids of what intervention meant, I found myself in a separate universe, child welfare. Here, an entirely different set of experts holds sway, and a different set of measurements. And I found myself all but alone in asking what it was that really happened to the young victims of incest who had done what we had suggested they do: tell.

Then, as I discovered how quickly children identified as sexually abused became targets for mental health labelling and 'special needs' designations, searching for that reality in terms of children's lives took me into yet a separate world — that of children in institutions labelled psychiatric or therapeutic.¹ Here, again, yet another set of experts was dominant, and here yet again I was all but alone in inquiring specifically about the path designated for young incest victims. Child advocates' estimates of how many children in these psychiatric institutions were in fact incest victims ranged from 'a great many' to a firm 75 percent.

It would be natural to believe that these children had been so psychologically devastated by their violation that they 'needed' to be in such places — subjected to regimentation, to psychotropic medications, to restraints, and to isolation. That, however, did not prove to be at all true.

Rather, other things entirely were operating, dictating these children's placements. For one, the assumption that incest caused inevitable emotional impairment led to these kids being scrupulously scrutinised for any nonconformity or rebelliousness or dispute with the system. Once identified as an incest victim, the child was under surveillance for symptoms, and even normal responses to childhood upheaval were taken to be clinical symptoms that inhered to some individual child's disease. (Ironically, dizzyingly, this exactly mirrored the search among adults who shared symptoms for a past that included incest.)

For another, the child protection intervention system often had nowhere else to put the kids down. Facilities designated 'therapeutic' were simply someplace.

For yet a third, during the 1980s kids were becoming the cash cow of institutional psychiatry. There was an explosion of private inpatient psychiatric facilities specialising in kids. (Again, this was reflected in the world of adults as well, as more and more private psychiatric institutions offered specialised treatment programmes for the panoply of adult female problems said to result from incest.) During the 1980s, the range of possible disorders in children expanded to include even Arithmetic Disorder, alongside all manner of conduct and behavioral disorders. (And during the 1980s, the number of disorders to be searched out in adult women multiplied as well.)

Identified as individual children's mental health problems, incest had enormous consequences for children — well beyond the rape itself. Yet to view those consequences meant entering different arenas, and so they tended to remain unseen by those specifically concerned with policy on incest, and by the general public as well.

The social vehicle for achieving all this succour for the status quo has been the therapeutic ideology — which has gone all but unchallenged. There is no question that consolation and an understanding outside presence offer some individual children and women benefit. Nor is there any question that change in the future cannot mean ignoring those damaged in the present. But the dominant emphasis on the language of pathology, treatment, and therapy as the primary social response to incest, actually isolates and marginalises victims — even while announcing that 'you are not alone'.

It is an emphasis on pacification, on deflecting attention from all larger social meaning.

Astonishingly, even this has had unwitting side effects greater than what the backlash can bear — and the backlash activists have reared up and raised fists, and railed against 'over-zealous feminists' engaged in a 'lifelong vendetta a campaign of vengeance that will involve the destruction of every man who has the misfortune to cross their path and whom they have an opportunity to destroy'.²

Encouraging women to regress and obsess is anything but feminist. Indeed, the dominance of this ideology is counterfeminist and anything but radical. But given the emotional plane on which the issue has come to rest, accuracy here is not required — any more than it was during the commie-bashing McCarthy days to which the backlash spokespersons so often refer. Compared with the charge of 'man-hating', woman hating has never had much cachet.

The confusion generated by talking about the 'crime of incest', while treating it as a psychological matter, has left the backlash free to swing allegations about wildly — of men automatically assumed to be guilty; of courts' hair-trigger reactions, severing their parental rights; of the massive and peremptory jailing of alleged offenders....

The actions dictated by those who focus on individual pathology are carefully claimed to derive from no moral or political base; ordered to no social goal beyond that of patching the wounded. This has left the moral high ground for the backlash to seize, themselves posturing as the grievously wronged, as the real victims; declaiming the violation of their rights. No one much speaks of the child's rights; of her right to remain free of what — where fathers and stepfathers are concerned — is surely sexual slavery.

Working backwards from the diagnostic category of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, much has recently been made of likening the psychological effects of incest to the effects of captivity on political hostages, or the aftermath of combat.³ While this has the considerable virtue of extricating the emotional damage from the welter of disorders ascribed to biology and female pathology, it still focuses on a psychiatric diagnostic category, on the need to prove severe and lasting injury. It still retains the medical model. And it elides important differences.

Combat takes place in the openly acknow-

ledged context of war, with the other side clearly marked 'enemy'. It has the support of the state and generally is seen as necessary for some greater good. While casualties and fatalities may be labelled a byproduct of winning, they are expected. It is openly agreed that trampling the other side is the goal.

Similarly, those who fall victim to terrorists and are captured are the (unwilling) victims of a deliberate act openly intended to cause terror. It is considered an act of high valour to resist and to try to escape.

For all that the effects (symptoms) of 'post traumatic stress' may be similar to the effects of incest, extending that clinical analysis to routine child-rape by fathers and stepfathers has remarkable implications. Neither national enemies nor political terrorists stand in a position of trust to their victims; they are not expected to act in their captives' interests.

Within the family, we would not be willing, I suspect, to say of fathers and stepfathers the same: that, as a class, they can be expected to behave like the enemy. That is the meaning behind the rhetoric about incest as a 'betrayal of trust'.

While a great deal has been said about that betrayal, little has been said about the fact that the offenders are persons the children are beholden to obey. This is one of the prime sticky wickets of incest (as opposed to generalised child sexual abuse) prevention. Obedience is part of the deal. You get no medals for escape from your captor, or for running away, and certainly not for turning a weapon on him.

Additionally, the problem with the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder model is that it masks the gratuitousness and the deliberateness of the offence, and the fact that it is so often done amidst mumblings of love.

More cogent than a combat-hostage model, which is predicated on later emotional distress, is a basic civil rights argument: that paternal child-rape is a form of sexual slavery — in a society in which slavery is emphatically illegal.

We are not talking here of a child's right to refuse to do her homework, or to clean her room. We are talking about the offender's act of sexual enslavement. He stands in a position to make both legal and illegal demands, and to do so as a matter of routine. Of course we would be back in courts with this paradigm, and consequently back with all the evidentiary issues and court biases and charges about protecting

mothers and radical feminist therapists programming kids....

But at least to see it as sexual enslavement is to more clearly name what it is offenders do (rather than focusing on later emotional disrepair in the victims). And it is to begin to speak the language of accountability. To name it 'sexual slavery' would at least position incest as exploitation for the benefit of the slave-holder.

You'll remember that even as the framing of the Thirteenth Amendment was being negotiated, there were those who saw the explicit connections between the enslavement of Blacks in this country and the status of children. There were those who saw the connection so clearly, in fact, that they sought to explicitly exempt children from the protections of a ban on slavery. We have spent fifteen years enacting demonstrations to show that incest is not safe to bring up in any court.

We have spent fifteen years extolling as the solution the therapeutic response, the therapeutic ideology. The kids who have been treated with all this benign sensitivity do not, in my listening experience, seem to be saying thank you.

My friend Tracy puts it well. She blew the whistle on her father when she was thirteen, spent a short while in foster care (with mandatory therapy). A psychiatric evaluation brought her three years in various mental health facilities. I asked Tracy if she saw any relevance in the response to her problem.

"I - do - not - understand," she said. "I do understand that it was important a dozen years ago for you to tell people this stuff happened. Back when nobody knew. To break the silence and all that. But we did that.

"Now we're just going over and over the same shit over and over again. It's kind of like, 'Okay, guys, well guess what! We've dealt with this.' At least I have. And I think it's now time to deal with how we're dealing with it.. Fine, we know that incest is there. We know that these things exist. We know that it's happened to a lot of people. And I think ... I think we all feel that we're not alone anymore. I mean, give me a break; I do not feel alone.

"There's groups everywhere, 'counselling' everywhere. There's so much 'treatment' out there it's not funny. But they don't discuss what kind of treatment it is. They don't talk about how this stuff is helping nobody.

"The difference between saying, 'Yo, this

happened to me, too,' and going after the offenders is that all this speaking about it just makes you a patient or an inmate. It doesn't challenge power. Because if you say, 'My daddy's a big, rich man over there, and he did this. Go do something about him,' then you're challenging a higher power. I feel there's a war going on with all this who's gonna get which kids in treatment.

"And I feel in my mind that there should be a war on the treaters. Some days, I just want to go in and let all the kids in 'treatment' go free — let them out, like the animal rights groups let minks out. Set them free. But — what are the kids gonna do then?"

I think we should be unsurprised to find that the kids we have beckoned forward, told to tell, in these years — the kids then victimised by custody courts, the kids coerced into endless therapeutic circumstances — may well have been re-silenced. No small number of kids suggested to me that it was harder to survive the ensuing 'help' and 'treatment' than it was to survive the incest.

What happened to them felt like punishment of them. It did not help to keep telling them over and over that the incest was not their fault.

Oddly enough, we could have anticipated the response from the 'bad guys'. What we could not have anticipated was how much ammunition would be proffered to them by the 'good guys'.

We could not have anticipated the degree of dominance of the therapeutic ideology. Nor the way in which a concept like speaking out would be transformed from a political one into a clinical or therapeutic one. The way in which the feminist concept of the personal as political would be translated to read the personal is the public. Nor the way in which the concurrent rise of talk shows would work to take the making of the personal public, and transform that — so that what appeared to be public in fact conveyed the idea that the issue was intensely private: a matter of individual treatment, individual wounds.

No matter how sundered aspects of the issue become, one from the other; no matter how scattered the parts become; no matter how many diversions can be thought up; no matter how many vaudeville or cream-pie-and-banana-peel burlesque turns are staged, it will always come down to the early questions. How serious do we think the sexual exploitation of children by men

who hold them in power is? What are the rights of women and children in the face of victimisation? (Can they, at the very least, be allowed to go free?) Does seriousness depend on proving dire injury? And — the question I see nowhere considered — is the price of proving dire injury simply too high?

In terms of present circumstance, it will always come down to the testimony of a child, with assistance from medical technology as it becomes more sophisticated. Benign rescue will always depend on the actions of a protecting parent. And that, in turn, will always depend on that protecting parent herself being accorded dignity and credibility. Social 'rescue' will always come down to some challenge to the due process protections that — when it is their robust ox being gored, and not the poor bedraggled creature possessed by women in family court — men find so dear.

For adults victimised as children who would triumph, it will always come down to an act of incorporation, a way of finding coherence. And that can only be helped by understanding the larger context of the experience, its relationship to the experience of others and to different experiences (of one's own and of others). It will always be helped (I believe) by seeing incest as one among the violences against women. Personal comfort and personal change will always be private events, no matter how many talk shows and speakouts go by.

There is no final place called recovery. Among the reasons there cannot be is that any girl growing up, and any woman, is likely to encounter events reminiscent of early exploitation. (This is not a matter of women whining about victimhood. It's simply a matter of the degree to which — despite propaganda of progress — the sense of male entitlement still obtains for many men.)

As a result, there is, as well, no self-conferred thing called empowerment. A deliberate victimisation is a deliberate victimisation (whether incest, sexual harassment, rape or battering). Pigs is pigs. All that can be changed is from now on.

What could happen from now on to provoke the kind of change we might reasonably call progress? What might we do to have an impact on the lives of kids now, and to begin to seriously reduce the incidence of incest in the future?

Women as a political force need to take

mothers' issues, children's issues, more seriously — beyond issues like day care and parental leave. Issues of violence cut to the core of sexual politics. And there is a connectedness between assaults against women and those against children. In 1970, Shulamith Firestone wrote in her book *The Dialectics of Sex*: 'Except for ego rewards in having children, few men show any interest in children So it is up to the feminist revolutionaries to do so. We must include the oppression of children in any program for feminist revolution or we will be subject to the same failing of which we have so often accused men: of not having gone deep enough in our analysis.'⁴

In the 1990s, of course, we might amend this: Even as it appears that more men are embracing fatherhood, too many men continue to show a predatory interest in children. It is women, as mothers, who are obliged by the state to protect those children. And it is women, as mothers, who most often act to do so. Women, as mothers, need full feminist support in this.

Somehow fundamental connections became obscured during the 1980s by debates on essentialism, by the perfectly reasonable reaction of early second-wave feminists against the social enforcement for women of the motherhood role, by critiques of the heterosexual family. And many battles were over-ridden by the necessity of struggling to preserve the right to choose abortion. Yet women who choose motherhood should be able to do so without the extreme risks they now face — almost total vulnerability in the eyes of the state (whether in the form of the child welfare system or the domestic relations court) — and lack of support by the activism of feminists, or of the very women, survivors, who wish their mothers had acted to protect them.

There needs to be a greater awareness on the part of adult survivors that their experience is part of a greater social problem and that they could play a role that can make a difference to children now. This is a role with risks; it defies fashion. It is, quite simply, undiplomatic to identify incest as other than gender neutral. It is impolite; it is rude; and it is not socially safe. But as recent history has shown, diplomacy is useless when the other side's position is non negotiable. What is needed, however is the courage to know, the courage to understand; the courage to think and to speak in one's own language, and to make that language heard in

the larger world.

For many survivors, I believe, such awareness, such a role, would carry the reward of a greater kind of connectedness, and would lend greater meaning to what they endured. This would require that women reclaim their own experience, and adopt scepticism that one can find empowerment by turning power over to 'experts'.

Too many women have succumbed to the charm of a sales pitch that seductively promises personal salvation and offers tasks to keep them occupied until that day comes: too many have accepted as their failure, the failure of these tasks or steps to make much of a difference. And too many women have been lured into believing that incest by itself explains their adult misery — by those whose professional speciality it is to do so.

The current exposure of overeager 'healers', looking for memories of incest in adult women everywhere is not in itself necessarily destructive. It is not, in itself, backlash — though it draws the enthusiasms of those whose agenda that is. What it does do, alas, is come perilously close to rendering real memory of real events vulnerable, and real events befalling real children suspect. Adult survivors need to speak for themselves, out of certainty — not out of therapy.

It would make a serious difference should survivors decide to organise with the goal of supporting children now, and supporting mothers who believe their children's disclosures of abuse. It would make a greater difference yet if these mothers could find support somewhere in the system, and if alliances could be set up, networks....

As a political issue, incest describes a stunning parabola. From silence to satanism in a dozen scant years. From professionals' denial to professionals' fervour. From ignominy to vogue. The focus on incest-as-illness has served as a form of pacification of an otherwise potentially contentious population.

Perhaps it is time to reclaim that contentiousness, and to set for ourselves the terms of the debate — not on the grounds of 'sick' or 'well' but on the grounds of a far-too-rampant sexual assault on children that continues to be quasi-legal.

For me, personally? Optimism is a struggle. Pessimism is unbearable. To stand on neither side of an ever-tensing polarity is to feel

excluded, to feel — well, yes: alone. The energy and passion that informed our early protests are now dismissed as unstylish. The clarity, the naming, is labelled simplistic. The humour that leavened the early stages of the journey is now taken for sacrilege.

Do I believe there will come a time soon when women will, on this issue, once again listen to their own voices, follow their own moral compass toward their own defined goals — independent of 'experts'? I need to believe that if I continue to hope for change.

For all the talk of listening to the children, in a very important sense the children continue unheard. Their voices come to us through interpreters. Do I believe we will ever start really listening to the kids themselves? Again, I need to believe that if I continue to hope for change.

And of course I do quite profoundly hope for change.

I've been down all the fascinating highways and byways that radiate out from this issue so far.

It's been one hell of a trip.

For all the curlicues, filigree, and baroque, however, I remain as convinced as ever that we were not incorrect the first time out in identifying incest as the cradle of sexual politics.

We gave it a push.

The bough is still holding.

The cradle's still rocking.

It remains to be seen what will happen next. □

¹ A journey I describe in *And They Call It Help: The Psychiatric Policing of America's Children* (Addison-Wesley, 1993).

² Richard Gardner *Sexual Abuse Hysteria: Salem Witch Trials Revisited* (Creative Therapeutics 1991).

³ Judith Herman *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence — From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (Basic Books 1992).

⁴ Shulamith Firestone *The Dialectics of Sex* (William Morrow & Co 1970) p 117-118.

Exchanging Feminist Words

Following the publication of Only Words earlier this year, Catharine MacKinnon spoke to Joan Scanlon about her work developing theoretical perspectives and their practical implementation.

Joan Scanlon: Could you say something about the way in which Canadian women's groups tackled some of the issues you raise in that book — for example the relationship between substantive equality and abstract equality?

Catharine MacKinnon: Canadian women managed a super-human feat to get as strong language as they did in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms — but an even better equality provision could be framed, building on that experience. It would be even more substantive, abolish the subordination of women to men, and find ways to address social as well as legal inequality. A Bill of Rights should be written with those goals in mind, and I would be honoured to provide technical consultation. The problem usually is, whether anyone with power in the process wants inequality to be effectively addressed.

Joan: Both Canada and the US have guarantees of free speech and equality, yet one of the things that you say in the book is that the relationship between equality and speech is different in the Canadian constitution. Could you explain how it's different?

Catharine: US law protects hate speech and pornography as expression, and doesn't recognize the equality issues they raise at all. Canada adopted a serious approach to equality that also differs from the more abstract American approach, and applied it to its hate propaganda statute to save that statute as an equality provision from being struck down as a violation of freedom of speech — so that racial hate propaganda in Canada is now understood as a violation of equality rights, not just saying bad

things about good people. And then when the obscenity provision was similarly attacked, the Canadian Supreme Court saved it in the same way, accepting the approach that Andrea Dworkin and I created, recognising that pornography harms women and equality. They used the equality interests in the Canadian constitution to argue that equality rights were more important than whatever speech rights were being restricted by restricting pornography.

Joan: One thing that puzzled me is that the ordinance that you and Andrea Dworkin introduced was civil rights legislation — and yet obscenity law both here and presumably in Canada is criminal legislation.

Catharine: We don't favour criminal approaches in general. I had been working for a long time with a Canadian women's rights litigating organization — LEAF (the Women's Legal and Educational Action Fund) — and they decided that they wanted to save their obscenity law by reinterpreting it in terms of harm to women. Canadian women have a different relationship to criminal law in general. They think that if the harm is that bad their government ought to stop it — and with pornography it is that bad. This was a difficult political call for us, but it was my decision to accept the political judgements of the women who lived there. It's a complicated question; indeed Andrea Dworkin thought their law should not be defended. And in this case I proceeded to work with these women, to make an argument that the Supreme Court of Canada accepted. The Court did not accept our sex discrimination ordinance; indeed what I would have preferred, and urged, is that this group —

and Canadian women generally — whatever the Supreme Court decided about the obscenity law, should urge Parliament to pass our civil rights law against pornography. Under the rationale through which the obscenity law was reinterpreted, our ordinance would most likely be constitutional. The question then becomes whether it is politically possible to pass this law, which would constitute a real remedy for pornography in Canada. One reason why we oppose criminal remedies is not only that they empower the state to do all the wrong things, but they don't give women power to do the right things, so they don't get done. Usually governments don't want to do anything against the pornography industry; and so they do nothing. So far that's exactly what's happened in Canada.

Pornography and art

Joan: Also, regardless of whether or not the legislative initiatives you introduce are criminal or civil they will always be perceived as censorship. With obscenity law, the arguments about 'art' — which you allude to in this book — get trotted out far more readily, because you are discussing pornography within that frame of reference.

Catharine: That's really right. Obscenity laws all have a provision that says that if the materials are 'artistically valuable' they are not obscene. So presumably obscenity laws are supposed to take care of that — but they never do. They have always been more usable against art than they are against the pornography industry. By contrast, our ordinance uses a harm test. Women don't get raped because of great art; they do get raped because of the pornography industry. If you have a test that makes whether something is pornography turn on whether women get hurt, you target the pornography industry, not great art. Some people then want you to add a provision which says that great art is more valuable and important than whether or not women are harmed; in other words, if a woman is raped shouldn't we also take into account whether the picture of it is a pretty one? So the fact we are raped or killed would be outweighed by whether the product of doing that was 'valuable' or not. It's an outrage to women's human status.

Joan: The only thing I wonder is, when you talk about 'pretty images', in other words where

aesthetic value is added to similar content, isn't that precisely what makes it 'art'? You seem to be saying, here and in the book, that you can distinguish between art and pornography, but surely aesthetics don't let art off the hook? It seems to me that we can't make that distinction in terms of the artefact, but only in terms of its production.

Catharine: And also in terms of the harm that it does, and under our definition.

Joan: Your definition is a very clear statement about what's pornographic, but art is surely not exempt from that definition.

Catharine: No, it isn't exempt as such. If it does the harm, it's pornography, and it doesn't matter if somebody else thinks it's art.

Joan: Then surely what that means is that art is everything that your definition is not — which is not how it's generally understood.

Catharine: That's exactly correct. Anything that is not under our definition can be called anything at all. What we have done is to define pornography in terms that essentially describe the products of the pornography industry. Whatever else it also describes, which in reality is very little of what anybody considers art, also belongs under that definition. It belongs there because it's proven to do the same harm. One way someone who is dealing with those materials can tell whether it does the harm or not is by looking at the contents, as we list them in the definition. If that content is there, and the materials are sexually explicit, it is very likely that the materials will be able to be proven to subordinate women.

Racist and sexual harassment

Joan: Some of us have had quite animated discussions recently about the chapter in your book where you talk about the relationship between racial and sexual harassment. I was interested in the section where you talk about the place of sex within sexual [note: racial?] harassment and abuse, and about how this 'manipulates the perpetrators' socialized body relatively primitively and directly'. I wondered whether it wasn't true that all forms of hate speech operate at a visceral level, rather than as an opinion or idea or argument — for example the irrational fear of other races which fuels neo-Nazi violence...

Catharine: Racism operates in a way that is sometimes sexual, in terms of the thrill of dominance, but what being sexual — or sexualized — is about, other than power, we don't really know. To deconstruct (I used that word before they did so I get to use it my own way) the sexual, in other words, to take it apart, unpack it, see what's in it and what's behind it (which is part of the impulse with deconstruction, it's just been really twisted) to go behind it, is to ask: So what is sex about? not just, What is about sex? Beginning by facing the sexual dynamics in white supremacy seems to me a good start, opening up the role of fear, mortality, and other things in sex, as well as in power apart from sex, if that exists. All this needs more extended discussion by our movement.

Joan: Why I asked you was partly because in *Feminism Unmodified* and here, you talk about the way in which the domination and subordi-

nation dynamic defines what is understood to be sexual, and vice versa. And as racism is still fundamentally about domination and subordination, isn't it true that racism is sexual, in the broadest sense, according to your analysis of power?

Catharine: Yes, but I'm not saying this swallows all of racism. But it is interesting that when you talk about sexism you quickly get into discussions of what it's really all about, while when you talk about racism, people don't act as if you have to know what it's been about all these centuries in order to address it, as if you have to understand why there's racism between the Koreans and the Japanese to do something about white supremacy in England. I think it's very important to ask those questions and pursue those issues, but it's also very interesting that there is this ultimistic tendency — this giant sucking motion in the direction of ultimate answers, when it comes to gender issues and



Mimi Cocker

sexual domination. It's as if you can't do anything about this abuse until you have the final answers, and I don't think that's right.

Redefining 'pleasure'

Joan: Linked with that is a question I wanted to ask you about your work in general. One of the most significant things for me about *Feminism Unmodified* was the way in which it opened up a different way of thinking about, and asking questions about, sexuality. In the introduction to that book, and in the essay 'Desire and Power', you talk about the way in which women's powerlessness and humiliation is actually made 'pleasurable' or 'sexy' for them. That helped me in teaching women's studies and thinking about the issue of sexuality to ask the question: If women's pleasure is about empowerment, acknowledging that one inhabits the world physically, but with a sense of self-worth, dignity and integrity and so on — then just because a physical or sexual response takes place in response to abuse, degradation or humiliation, is that really pleasure? Should we even continue to use that word? I wondered, where you talk in *Only Words* about women's pleasure being 'both fake and at times tragically real' in response to abuse, whether there's an argument for saying that's a term we need to reclaim to describe a different reality for women?

Catharine: That's visionary! The discussion of that subject, including mine, has been beaten down to where it wasn't possible for me to imagine that until you just said it. 'Pleasure' has been *their* word. Because I don't deny the reality of women's reported experiences, when people say that they experience pleasure from X, what I try to do is to recontextualise X, rather than take back the word. There is a very serious process in choosing what words we give away and what words we try to reclaim. I decided to reclaim *equality*. Early and excellent feminist essays and arguments give away equality, looking at what it means, saying: We don't want it, take it out with the trash, wrap fish in it, do anything with it, but keep it away from us; we want freedom, we want liberation, we want change, and equality means this and equality surely doesn't mean that. They were descriptively right, but I decided I wanted equality back for us and put some twenty five years into

getting it back, trying to make it ours. Believe me we had to go back to Aristotle and say he was wrong to even begin to do it. With 'pleasure', I guess the reason I have let them have it, is that it seems to be a term that people attach to an experience of physiological release, an endorphine connection that can be stimulated by aggression, pain, manipulation, abuse and violation — even though that can have absolutely no connection with what someone really wants, what they like, or the kind of life they want to have. So I just never thought to try to think about pleasure in different terms, and have been concerned instead with reclaiming women's lives for ourselves so that we recontextualise our experiences and have the pleasure we choose rather than the pleasure that's imposed on us. And now you say pleasure should *only* mean that which we choose and which is consistent with our values and the lives we want to have. I'll see you twenty five years from now...

Joan: It occurred to me because your analysis of sexuality — which in *Feminism Unmodified* meshes with an analysis of women's oppression as a whole, is probably more thorough-going than any other radical feminist theorist...

Catharine: And Andrea Dworkin...

Joan: Yes, and Andrea Dworkin also. What I was thinking of in particular was that even though other radical feminists have acknowledged the role of sexuality in women's oppression, they have seen it as part of women's oppression, or additional to it, but not *as* women's oppression, including economic exploitation.

Catharine: It also has a lot to do with women's 'collaboration' in our own inequality, which cannot be left out of any serious discussion. It's not that women do nothing but give in to inequality; women fight against it all the time and everywhere. But no matter how much we've done that, we're still a part of it, and it's a part of us. We don't know if women everywhere fought against it at the same moment whether or not it would end; we've never even done that. That's one of things that Andrea Dworkin's book *Intercourse* is so brilliant on; she asks the question: Why aren't women free? and answers it: Not only through men's ways of envisioning sex but also through women's role in it.

War rape & international law

Joan: There have been references in the media to the fact that you are representing women seeking justice for atrocities committed against them by the Serbian forces, yet there has been little coverage of what you are actually doing. At the same time there's been a lot of frustration about the fact that nobody is doing anything. Could you tell us more about what exactly you are doing, how it began, how the cases of the Croatian and Muslim women you are representing are developing, and what you think the importance of it is more widely?

Catharine: Well, it began because they approached me. They had been informing me about the atrocities against them since the Serbian invasion of Croatia, talking about the mass rapes and murders of all non-Serbian women, by the Serbian fascist forces. There was nothing in the papers. They persisted and eventually got some people to believe them, and the story broke in public. Then when they asked me if I would represent them, it came completely out of the blue for me. They had a more creative idea about lawyering that I had at that time envisaged; usually if you are going to represent someone there's a court to go to and a possible legal claim. In some ways we had to create both. They identified me as someone who had stood up for the most abused women, meaning women in pornography, in prostitution, and who had taken a lot of heat for speaking out for women that no-one believed. They said they had noticed that I stuck by those women for years and years, and they figured that was what this was going to take. I agreed to represent them, and things went from there. They wanted international justice for the sexual atrocities committed against them in the Serbian genocide. We were working to help establish an international tribunal on war crimes, and canvassing our options, which for women acting on their own behalf are incredibly few, when Radovan Karadzic, the leader of the Bosnian Serb fascists, visited the United States supposedly to negotiate peace. One option we knew we had was a civil suit under the Alien Tort Claims Act, an old law that allows non-citizens to sue for violations of international law if the perpetrator of the injuries is found in the United States. So we brought it, with the help of NOWLDEF (National Organisation for Women Legal

Defence and Education Fund) for rape, genocide, torture, murder — the whole range of atrocities committed against Muslim and Croatian women by Karadzic's forces, under his command and orders. We are asking for an injunction, an order to stop the ethnic cleansing. This is what we can do. As to its larger importance, the suit recognizes rape as a violation of human rights, specifically as an act of genocide, which is what it is in this situation. We are waiting for a ruling on preliminary motions and continuing to cooperate with the UN, although it remains unclear whether the tribunal in the Hague will proceed against rapists or leaders as it should.

Joan: One of the repeated misunderstandings — or stumbling blocks to an engagement with what you are saying about all this — is the assumption that you are conflating rape with a film of a rape or any representation of a rape. Also that you are trivialising rape by introducing the issue of pornography. One of the things I have been baffled by is why, for example in letters to *Ms.* magazine following the publication of your article about the rape/death camps in former Yugoslavia, any woman would dispute the fact that a film or photographs of another woman's rape actually compound and perpetuate her abuse, when her torture and degradation become someone else's entertainment. Why do you think that misunderstanding keeps happening?

Catharine: Well, it's a willful misunderstanding, also based on things I have never said. I never said pornography is rape, for example, or anything like it. The article in *Ms.* was written because the survivors wanted it written. They wanted this piece of their abuse out in a way that was true and accountable to them. I never said the pornography was worse than the rape. It does continue the violation, where otherwise your rape really stays within yourself. One of the reasons for the psychological survival mechanisms women have, including actually not remembering some atrocities, is to be able to continue to live. When you know that the pornography isn't just in your own head but is out there in the world, it's unbearable. The women who had the pornography made of them wanted that confronted. It has been interesting to me, having worked on other issues also for a long time, that with pornography, one encoun-

ters almost nothing but lies about the facts, the analysis, and the arguments from the other side. I have finally come to the conclusion that our position can't be opposed without lying about it. If there were real arguments against what we are saying surely they would raise them. There are valid arguments, civil libertarian arguments, which address what we really are doing. But when you keep encountering responses to arguments we *aren't* making, you can tell you're dealing with bias, or vested interest (usually sexual), or willed ignorance, or being on the take.

Organised and ritual abuse

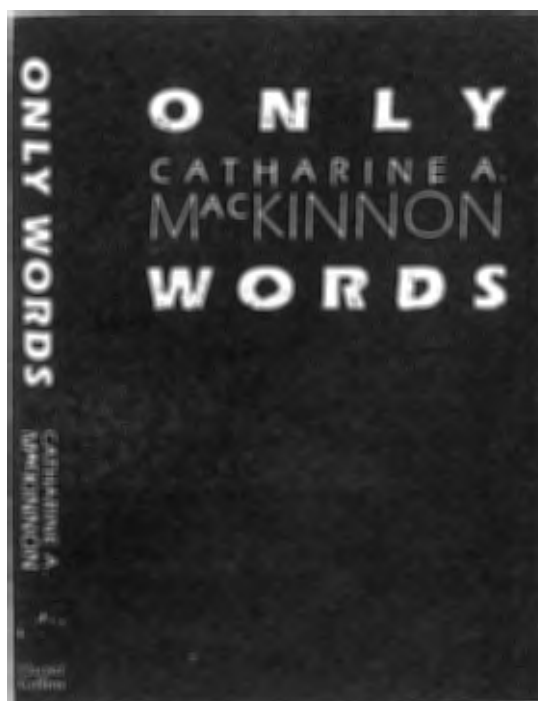
Joan: Another thing which is dogged by misinformation and disbelief is the issue of ritual abuse. We have just had a Department of Health report which states that satanic abuse doesn't exist — although there appears to be an acceptance that ritual abuse does take place in certain limited circumstances — and needless to say the media are focusing on the former. Since most people conflate the two it amounts to a total denial, not helped by the latest hype about "False Memory Syndrome". And yet rape crisis workers are dealing with this more and more, as more survivors begin to speak about their abuse. You mention in the book that you have been doing research into the production of porn in groups, and you talk about the relation between sex rings, organized crime, religious cults, and white supremacist organizations — or perhaps you were just listing different forms of organized abuse. Can you say anything more about it at this stage?

Catharine: There are criminal organizations that engage in group abuse of women and children. Terms like 'ritual abuse', 'satanic abuse', etc, are only partially descriptive and have taken on a life of their own in certain public discussions, but the reality is there. But it is a much broader reality of organized group abuse, sometimes with a religious cover, sometimes in relation to religious or political views. While that is of some interest, what is most crucial is the abuse, and that it is organized. We're talking about criminals, in family and extended family settings, sometimes church organizations, fraternal organizations, political organizations including white supremacist ones, who are abusing children and women on a mass scale, a good many of them making visual

recordings of it, some of which are sold.

Joan: One of the things that women here who have been trying to support survivors of organized abuse have encountered is the need to find different ways of working, adapting and even sometimes suspending the usual ways of working that have been learned from working with survivors of sexual violence.

Catharine: Most survivors of this extreme abuse have developed particular ways of dealing with it. As children they were abused in horrifically painful ways, in ways that almost no human being could ever survive, physically or mentally. A lot don't survive. They have died or gone crazy, those people who we have never heard from, and never will. Those who have survived to talk about it are those whose minds have this genius of survival, mechanisms which prove in a sense that this *is* what has happened to them, but are then used to destroy their credibility. You are dealing with people who have become many people, because no single person could live through it. And the fact that they are many people, and that you could at any moment, if the little ones trust you, be talking to a five year old in a thirty year old body, is taken as bizarre. Well, the unitary self can be a fundamental assumption of Western philosophy, in part because people haven't been listening very well for quite some time. If you listen up, there's more out there than you thought.



Re-writing feminism

Joan: Going back to your book, and given the latest rantings of Camille Paglia, Katie Roiphe and Naomi Wolf...

Catharine: I wouldn't put Naomi in the same category — still not.

Joan: Well, in relation to this particular question, I would — but tell me if you think I'm wrong to do so. Those of us who want to assert the reality of women's victimization are ourselves repeatedly accused of treating women only as victims — or even worse making women into victims...

Catharine: Yes, it's amazing that all of male supremacy can't make women into victims, but we can, feminists criticizing the victimization of women can. This is double-think and mind-rot, as well as politically perverse, opportunistically careerist and analytically desperate. And yet, in spite of everything, I continue to feel a strong sisterhood with those women who are into denying reality. I have less sympathy with them trying to get in the way of us doing something about reality, and with their participation in putting other women down, including violated women. But I have a lot of sympathy for their deeply rooted impulse to want to live in an equal world — which is where their position comes from. They want to live in a fantasy if they can't live in a reality they like, and while I have no sympathy at all for the choice, which is made at other women's expense, I have a lot of sympathy for the desire to live in a different reality. Their denial also works to their own advantage, because of the way they can be used to benefit male supremacy by maintaining the illusion that all this is really equality — we have it already, so what's *your* problem, honey? Being used as a weapon against us is something they don't seem to resent, and some of them, at least, should.

Joan: I wanted to ask you that because that accusation of treating women as victims comes up so often. If we are trying both to document the reality of women's oppression *and* acknowledge women as agents of change, creating a space for themselves to act, personally and collectively, what strategies best address that double aim? Your sexual harassment litigation, and the ordinance you drafted with Andrea Dworkin, not only recognise women's victimi-

zation, but also aim to give women the tools to remedy it. What do you see as the relationship between legal discourse and everyday language (for example in the naming of crimes such as rape and sexual harassment), and between legal strategies and other forms of activism?

Catharine: One interesting thing about law is that it provides the possibility of acknowledging how bad reality is in the process of doing something about it. So it isn't an abstract discussion, pillorying reality, but about facing reality where you can see it can change. Those who can't see it can change seem unable to face reality, and they're saying *we're* grim, when we're the optimists here, because we understand it can change — and that's partly because we're the ones who are working to change it. Women in general respond like that. You can discuss pornography as much as you like, and educate, and people will listen and think maybe. But the minute you propose a law that women can use to stop the pornographers, they are coming out of the woodwork to tell you how it has been hurting them all along. Then you know that up to that point they were silenced. Those who say women aren't hurt through pornography collaborate in that silence. If those women aren't speaking, it's because nothing is addressing their violations concretely. The minute you propose something like our law which could *do* something, you don't have enough hours in the day to listen to women's experience of how they have been violated by it. At the time we interpreted the sex discrimination law to stop sexual harassment, there had been no real studies of it. We had no idea how much there was of it; all there had to be was a few women to create a legal claim. If it's happened to one woman it's bad enough; you go to court to do something about it. Only when we had a law about sexual harassment were we able to document how much of it there was because it became conceivable that it didn't have to be that way. People think that first you have social change and then a law follows. I don't think it works that way; law is social, the kind of power we're up against means that you need to have some power on your side before the social process happens to make needed legal change possible. And then that legal change, which is itself a process, becomes part of a larger social change. Also, part of the social change we need

to get legal change comes through the process of fighting for it. That in turn gives more power to women to make the law work; women have got to have enough power to be able to get it *and* use it, and then be able to use it *and* win, and then sometimes lose *and* fight back against those losses. And that is all part of one long political process.

Visions of possibility

Joan: In *Feminism Unmodified* there's a passage which is quite utopian, arguing that we need not only to face the reality that is but to think beyond that and have a vision of what's possible, and to look for answers to questions we can scarcely formulate. Do you still see it the same way?

Catharine: I still think the most important questions are the ones we can't quite ask, not because they're hard but because we don't have the conditions we need to ask them. I still think the most invisible women know the most, and the women who are most silenced know what we most need to hear. I still think that the most powerful forces operate the least visibly. But I also think we are getting somewhere, and the organizations of formerly prostituted women against prostitution show that. Women organizing worldwide against this industry, including women in it, I never thought I would see in my lifetime, but we're seeing it.

Joan: Why I was asking that was because I think we need not only to imagine a world in which these things don't happen, but to try to imagine what that world would look like — in order to have something to work towards as well as against. In my view *Feminism Unmodified* embodied that balance between pragmatism and idealism. For me, the underpinning of that is a lesbian feminist politics. I completely agree with your analysis there of heterosexuality, and the way in which those patterns of domination and subordination can carry over into any sexual relationship...

Catharine: They can define a person's sexuality, whoever you're having sex with.

Joan: ...And I also agree that sex wouldn't generally be recognised as sex if it didn't

manifest that dynamic. But I think there is also an imperative — not a priority, but as part of a political process — to look for possibilities of change in personal relationships. And I think that it's within lesbian feminist relationships that there's a greater possibility for change at that level.

Catharine: I think there is a tremendous possibility for change there, and also a clear recognition of these issues and of women's attempt to have both personal integrity and a principled politics there. When you were talking earlier about the possibilities of sensual equality — a sexuality of equality — it is exactly that possibility that lesbian feminism has been most brilliant at envisioning, both in criticizing existing reality and in working towards a new one. It goes to the heart of the gender issue, and attempts — and I don't mean to make it into a construct of a thought, because it has more emotional integrity than being the lived-outness of a thought — but it poses the possibility of having a life, and opens onto a greater equality of women, for having a place in one's life that is not so up against male supremacy. There are precious few areas which offer that. It makes a lot of sense that it would be stigmatized, precisely because it opens that possibility for freedom.

Joan: But lesbianism needs to be underpinned by an absolutely uncompromising critique of heterosexuality, and a recognition that one doesn't automatically obviate those problems...

Catharine: That's all one has to say, I think, that it isn't complacent or superior. People bring it up all the time, but it has been my experience that lesbian feminism is much more ready to be self-critical than militant heterosexuality has ever been, for example in looking at its role in male dominance.

Joan: Is there anything else you want to say about the book, or in general, that I haven't asked?

Catharine: No, I don't think so — except that its such a relief to be talking about real ideas and real life. □

Statement by Catharine A. MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin regarding Canadian Customs and Legal Approaches to Pornography

Untrue reports have been circulating that our feminist work against pornography is responsible for the repression of feminist, gay, and lesbian materials in Canada. It is said that the anti-pornography civil rights law we coauthored was passed by the Canadians and that the first thing they did with it was censor gay books. It is said that Canada Customs recently seized feminist, gay and lesbian materials — including some books by Andrea Dworkin — under a 1992 Supreme Court decision called *Butler* that accepted our legal approach to pornography. It is said that in practice, Canadian court decisions using our anti-pornography legal theories are backfiring against liberating sexual literature. We want you to have real information about what has and has not happened.

The Anti-Pornography Civil Rights Law We Coauthored

Canada has not adopted our civil rights law against pornography. It has not adopted our statutory definition of pornography; it has not adopted our civil (as opposed to criminal) approach to pornography; nor has Canada adopted any of the five civil causes of action we proposed (coercion, assault, force, trafficking, defamation).¹ No such legislation has as yet even been introduced in Canada.

The Canadian Supreme Court's Butler Decision

In 1992, the Supreme Court of Canada unanimously adopted an equality approach to pornography's harms to women. This approach was argued by the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF), an organization of progressive Canadian women committed to advancing women's equality under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the new Canadian constitution. Unlike the US Constitution — which doesn't even have an Equal Rights Amendment — the Canadian Charter specifically guarantees sex equality and has been interpreted to require the government to

promote it.

Donald Victor Butler, a pornographer, had been prosecuted by authorities under Canada's existing law against 'obscenity', which is defined as 'the undue exploitation of sex, or of sex and any one or more of the following subjects, namely, crime, horror, cruelty, and violence'.² (This is very different from US and British obscenity definitions.) Butler argued that the obscenity law violated his rights to free speech under the new Charter. LEAF urged the Canadian Supreme Court to reject his argument and instead to reinterpret the existing obscenity law in 'sex equality' terms.

Previously, in a case called *Keegstra*, LEAF had successfully argued before the Canadian Supreme Court that racist and anti-Semitic hate propaganda violates equality and multiculturalism rights under the Charter, so criminalizing such expression is constitutional. LEAF sought to build on that argument, and other equality precedents, in *Butler*. Catharine MacKinnon, working with LEAF and LEAF counsel Kathleen Mahoney, participated in *Keegstra* and *Butler*. Andrea Dworkin, consulted by LEAF on the *Butler* case, opposed LEAF's position. Dworkin wrote a letter arguing that no criminal obscenity law should be supported.

The Supreme Court of Canada, in its decision in *Butler*, accepted the essentials of LEAF's equality argument. The court held that the obscenity law was unconstitutional if used to restrict materials on a moral basis, but constitutional if used to promote sex equality. The court interpreted the criminal 'obscenity' provision to prohibit materials that harm women.³

Canadian Customs Procedures

For years Canada Customs has stopped material at the border under its own law and guidelines, which allow employees discretion to block the importation of obscenity. As a sovereign state, Canada has every right to control its borders — especially given widespread resentment against

what is often viewed there as US cultural imperialism.

None of Canada's customs policies or practices has been officially revised to reflect or incorporate the *Butler* sex-equality decision. A Canadian newspaper columnist found this out simply by asking Customs directly.⁴ Canadian customs employees have been doing what they have been authorized to do for years before *Butler*. For example, in 1993 some books by Andrea Dworkin were detained at the border for inspection, then released shortly thereafter. Those who cite this episode to show that *Butler* is being used against Dworkin misrepresent long-standing Canada Customs practices.

Reports that Canada Customs is using *Butler* to crack down on importation of explicitly gay and lesbian material are also fabricated. If this was actually happening, it would be illegal and could be opposed under *Butler*, which made the restriction of material on the basis of a moral objection (such as homosexuality) conclusively unconstitutional for the first time. The ruling clearly states that material that harms women can constitutionally be stopped (and this would include women harming women), but *Butler* does not mention anything about men harming men. *Butler* is silent on the subject of same-sex materials as such.

The Real Result of Butler

Canada Customs has a long record of homophobic seizures, producing an equally long record of loud and justifiable outrage from the Canadian lesbian and gay community. There is no evidence that whatever is happening at the border now is different from what happened before the *Butler* decision — except that *Butler* has made moralizing, homophobic Customs seizures illegal. For instance, when one court issued an outrageously homophobic decision against some gay male material,⁵ another court, citing *Butler*, specifically repudiated the moralism of that decision.⁶

To date one indictment under *Butler* has been brought against lesbian sadomasochistic material, a magazine published in the US with a Canadian circulation of 40. If this magazine is proven to harm women, including by producing civil inequality, the case should result in a conviction. Meanwhile various indictments brought against sexually explicit materials that do not show violence have been dismissed under *Butler*.

Canada's criminal obscenity law since *Butler* — like all prior laws that put power in the hands of government prosecutors rather than harmed plaintiffs — has not actually been used effectively to stop the pornography industry. This we predicted. The pornography industry in Canada has in fact been expanding massively, trafficking openly in materials that do not show explicit violence, including some of the exact materials prosecuted in *Butler*.

Analysis

In the United States, our Anti-Pornography Civil Rights Ordinance — together with related legislative initiatives against the harms of racist hate speech — has helped to trigger an escalating constitutional conflict between 'speech' rights guaranteed by the First Amendment and 'equality' rights in the principles underlying the Fourteenth Amendment. In our neighbour nation to the north, Canada's Supreme Court has determined that racist hate expression is unconstitutional (*Keegstra*) and that society's interest in sex equality outweighs pornographers' speech rights (*Butler*). Taken together, these two rulings are a breakthrough in equality jurisprudence, representing major victories for women and all people targeted for race hate. We wish that US constitutional consciousness were so far along.

Although we recognize that the equality test adopted by *Butler* is an improvement on Canada's criminal obscenity law, we still do not advocate criminal obscenity approaches to pornography. They empower the state rather than the victims, with the result that little is done against the pornography industry.

We are encouraged, however, that the *Butler* decision under Canada's new Charter makes it likely that our civil rights law against pornography would be found constitutional if passed there. And we are continuing our work to empower victims to fight back against harm committed by pornographers.

We hope that this statement helps you correct the published record — and deal with the attacks, rumours, and disinformation — surrounding the relationship of our anti-pornography efforts to the Canadian Supreme Court's *Butler* decision.⁷ Please let us know if you have remaining questions. □

Catharine A. MacKinnon
& Andrea Dworkin

¹ See *Pornography and Civil Rights: A New Day for Women's Equality*, by Andrea Dworkin and Catharine A. MacKinnon (Minneapolis: Organizing Against Pornography, 1988; distributed by Southern Sisters, Inc., 411 Morris Str., Durham, NC 27701, 919-682-0739).

² Canadian Criminal Code section 163(8).

³ R. v. Butler, [1992] 1 S.C.R. 452 (Supreme Court of Canada).

⁴ Michele Landsberg, "Supreme Court Porn Ruling Is Ignored," *Toronto Star*, December 14, 1993.

⁵ Glad Day Bookshop Inc. v. Canada (Deputy Minister of National Revenue, Customs and Excise), Ontario Court of Justice, General Division (July 14, 1992, unreported).

⁶ R. v. Ronish, [1993] O.J. No. 608 (Ontario Court of Justice, Provincial Division, January 7, 1993).

⁷ Examples include *Censorship News* ("MacKinnon/Dworkin 'Theories' Flunk Reality Test," issue 4, number 50, 1993), *U.S. News & World Report* ("Censors on the Left," by John Leo, October 4, 1993), *San Francisco Bay Times* ("Canada's New Porn Wars," by Tim Kingston, November 4, 1993), *The New York Times* ("Censors' Helpers," by Leanne Katz, December 3, 1993), *Publishers Weekly* ("Canada Customs a Continuing Problem for Bookstores and Distributors; Trial Postponed," by John F. Baker, December 20, 1993), *Screw* magazine ("Censory Depravation," December 27, 1993), *Gaze* magazine ("The Canadian Government's Big Chill on Queer Culture," by Mickey Koivisto, April 1, 1994), *Playboy* magazine ("Northern Underexposure," by Ted C. Fishman, June 1994), and *Authors League Bulletin* ("The New Custom at Customs," by Jeffrey Narvil, Summer 1994).

FEMININE CHARMS AND OUTRAGEOUS ARMS

What might muscles on women have to do with strength? Fen Coles shows the lengths to which the bodybuilding industry is prepared to go to hide, excuse and sexualize these threatening muscular developments and to keep female bodybuilders feminine.

This article developed out of a course which looked at representations of the body, particularly the female body, within patriarchal culture. I decided to look closely at the female bodybuilder, the way the bodybuilding industry and patriarchal ideology in general tamper with her and her final contest appearance which is an odd mixture of muscle and make-up.

The female bodybuilder raises some important questions for feminists because of the ways in which she challenges traditional ideas about femininity. Patriarchal ideology depends on and enforces the idea that sex, gender and sexuality come together 'naturally' as a package, ie you are born female, therefore you must naturally be feminine and heterosexual. The female bodybuilder, however, particularly during her performance in competitions, challenges all these ideas together, demonstrating that femininity, heterosexuality and even the female body are constructs.

Taming The Beast

In a bid to apologise for and to soften female muscle, repeated strategies are employed to ensex, engender and heterosexualise the female bodybuilder's disturbing physique. This muscle is repeatedly adorned, restricted and confined. This very compulsion seems, however, to fail from the outset. Highly visible on the contest stage, pumped, flexed, and increasingly taking up space with each competition, the female bodybuilder is a threatening sight. Ironically, patriarchy's attempt to feminise her muscle makes her appearance all the more unusual and unsettling.

Laurie Schulze describes the domestication of the female bodybuilder as a repeated reining in of her, 'emphasising certain features, suppressing others, and papering over contradictions'. Danae Clark describes this 'taming' process again in a fascinating essay which compares lesbian style and female bodybuilders, demonstrating the ways in which patriarchal ideology strives to homogenise and collapse both into a non-threatening sameness fit for heterosexual society. This is carried out on the female bodybuilder's body by dressing her up in feminine markers and by dressing down her muscle.

Dressing Down/Up Muscle

If she complies with such dress codes, the female bodybuilder may be allowed to pass in heterosexual culture. Such 'passing strategies' include covering her muscles with long sleeves and declining to flex them in public. The undisplayed muscle is further promoted by women's magazines. Within these pages, the very women who appear to have surmounted the 'natural' body, reassure the female consumer that her biology, typically her lack of testosterone, will actually prevent her from developing an 'overly' muscular physique. Even were she to possess the 'unique super genes' (or, we might add, the steroids) required for competitive bodybuilding, she may be comforted in the knowledge that, unpumped and unflexed, she will appear as 'normal' as the girl next door. As Laurie Schulze says, the message is that 'these muscles are a difference that won't make a difference'.

**'Muscles Look
So Appalling
In Evening
Dress'**

(Miss Ogilvy
Finds Herself,
Radclyffe Hall)

Bodybuilding magazines, intent on a respectable public image, could not make this point clearer. On the cover of each magazine, the conflation of sex, gender and sexuality is confirmed and guaranteed. In almost every instance, a male bodybuilder grins at the consumer, flexed, erect, hard, oiled and pumped to full performance level. Dwarfed by this muscled monstrosity, often enfolded in his arms, stands what we are led to believe is a female bodybuilder. The woman featured is in fact usually a model. Always in profile, in a classic 'tits n' arse' shot, curving into the male's peak body, this woman performs her difference, setting off his supreme masculinity/maleness and stamping their heterosexuality.

When the overt display of muscle is called for at competition time and the near naked body staged, feminine props/apologies are called in to reinscribe and 'renaturalise' the female bodybuilder. Instructed to 'get feminine or get out of competitive bodybuilding' (a competition judge's own words), Bev Francis soon received plenty of beauty tips and went about her transformation (which included plastic surgery).

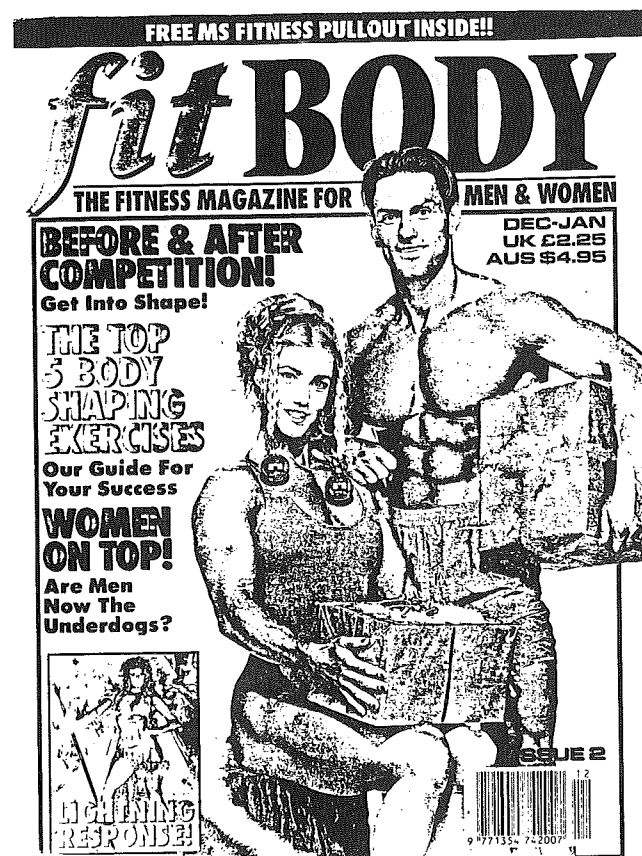
Feminising muscle places the greatest emphasis on that single part of the body which seems unmarked by muscle, the face. The female bodybuilder's makeover must compensate as much for the effects of pre-contest diuretics (the face appears pinched and overdrawn) and steroids (increased facial hair) as for her bulked-up body.

On such a body, a subtle hint of femininity would achieve nothing. Instead it must be high glamour, overdone and overplayed. Bright, heavy make up and abundant (preferably bouffant) hair all play their part in this. Although short hair highlights the shoulder width required to compete, competitive female bodybuilders almost always have long hair (tied back at competition time) with their power suits, echoing the eighties message that women in business shouldn't combine short hair with shoulder pads. The hair is also almost

invariably bleached blonde. (Out of the nine top winners at the 1988 Ms Olympia contest, seven were blonde.) Manuals for competitors are full of suggestions for bleaching, perming, tinting and complete makeovers. The overall display of the head combines whiteness and youthfulness, the supreme femme.

Fitting her into the feminine mould, the female bodybuilder is further fitted out at competition time in tiny, brightly coloured string bikinis. Materials include lycra and leather, adding to the body a superimposed fetishistic quirk. Photo shoots and posing routines are further camped up with outlandish props and costumes. Examples include Kimberly-Anne Jones, famous for her bondage poses (dressed up in leather and carrying a whip) and Andrulla Blanchette, repeatedly photographed in her ripped fishnet tights (and always with her boyfriend).

Lastly, feminine apologies are further extended when female bodybuilders refer in



interviews to their softer selves. A 1994 Options article reassures us that, despite external appearances, Kimberly-Anne enjoys her Garfield pyjamas and Beverly Hahn weeps at an animal in pain.

The female bodybuilder's proclamation of sexual difference and feminine identity is further problematised by the likely disappearance of her breasts. Help is at hand, however. Although working out body fat cancels out 'feminine curves', the breasts can at least be rescued in the form of breast implants. While calf implants are banned in bodybuilding, generous allowances are made for the return of the female breast. Ironically (although conveniently for her domesticators), the female bodybuilder's busting up compromises and couches some of the muscle groups (serratus/intercostal/abdominal) required for definition at a competitive level. By tacking breasts onto female muscle, the female bodybuilder might be seen to make a particularly forceful move towards reinscribing herself within the site of the male gaze and male fetishism.

Sexualising Muscle

Perhaps more than any other sport, women's bodybuilding has been subjected to media 'dyke-baiting'. As Laurie Schulze comments, 'patriarchy and homophobia combine in complex ways to link female bodybuilders with lesbianism'. Indeed the ways in which the muscular woman and the lesbian distress the heterosexual system are closely linked, and they therefore receive similar responses from the dominant culture. Both the muscular woman and the butch lesbian are scorned for wanting to look like men or wanting to be men. Both are therefore often perceived to distort traditional gender appearances as well as gendered behaviour (they are seen as 'inappropriately' aggressive, for example). Accused of wanting to look like a man, and therefore necessarily of lesbianism, the female bodybuilder's sexuality is marked as excessive, disruptive and, worse, indifferent to men.

Such charges have resulted in a sustained move to sexualise and wedge female muscle within a heterosexual frame. Her muscle is sold as sexy accoutrement and her heterosexuality confirmed to the point of exhaustion. This obsession is apparent in bodybuilding magazines in which women and men are repeatedly shown training in couples and marketing products with

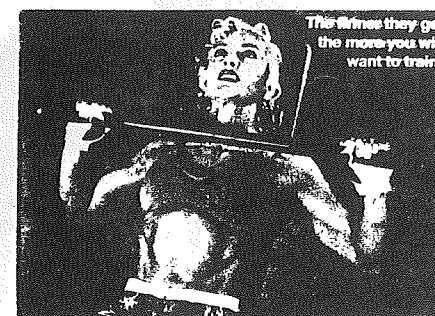
their arms entwined. Again, magazine covers typically feature couples enjoying each other's well oiled bodies.

As if to finally guarantee the female bodybuilder's successful performance within heterosexuality, adverts for the 'Kegelcisor' or vaginal barbell crop up regularly in these magazines, promising to 'intensify sensation during intercourse' and to 'restore vaginal tightness'. This is itself a rather extreme example of bodybuilding's general promotion which links improved sexual stamina to weight training. It is, however, largely male performance which is highlighted. Any increased sexual endurance in the female bodybuilder is clearly tailored, 'tightened', 'restored' for his sexual enjoyment.

Making the female bodybuilder sexy, translates her into 'molten beauty', 'rosy-cheeked cutie' and 'blond bombshell'. Her workouts sell as '10 steps to a sexy waist' and tips on 'sexy shoulders' (all quotes from *Muscle and Fitness* and *BodyPower*). Above all, her body has a more traditional function within the merging discourses of sexuality, femininity and consumerism (although it should be emphasised that like any other woman, she is commodified both within and outside of the market). Her entry into the sport industry over the last decade has prompted her use as spectacle, her body capitalised on and commodified to sell a range of products. Within this advertising, her body is tightly monitored in order that the sex which sells is unmistakably female. Consequently, although they may appear under the caption of female bodybuilder, the women who demonstrate gym equipment by mounting or straddling it in a white lace bodysuit, are usually models. Likewise, it is this vital-statistics muscleless figure which is turned out in the astounding array of pornographic videos and posters on offer in bodybuilding magazines. Again, posing as female bodybuilders, these curvaceous women perform *Nude Boxing*, *Cindy V Chris*, *Mistress of Muscle*, *Muscle Melons* and *Steel Innocence* (examples from *MuscleMag*).

Straining The Hour-Glass

Struggling with all these attempts to recast female muscle within patriarchal regulations, the industry's governing bodies and judges continue to be locked in confusing contradictions. In a bid for mass appeal and in a panic that female mass might swamp vital sex/gender



signs, female bodybuilding competitions have often been judged along lines of conventional attractiveness rather than of size. The sport is singular in that the achievement of maximum strength may be rewarded with minimum gain in terms of ranking.

Uncertainties and anxieties abound at competition time: whether to opt for the glamour, grace and showbiz style of the beauty contest (in which many see female bodybuilding's origins), or the 'pure' bodybuilding contest; whether to rank maximum beefiness highest or to praise a basic hour-glass shape joined with shapely 'feminine' muscles, thereby maintaining a 'feminine mystique' (competitor's words).

Female bodybuilders appear no more decided. Thus while one woman is typically heard explaining 'why my muscles had to go' in order to feel 'normal' (quoted in *MuscleMag*), there are a growing number of female competitors who have not only no interest in pandering to conventions (in terms of muscle size), but who actively enjoy the confusion that their bulk provokes.

What is clear from this constant squeezing of muscle into a feminine package is that the limits of this package are constantly being strained. As Robert Duff and Lawrence Hong comment, 'the concept of muscularity is relative and is rapidly changing as the sport progresses'. Moreover, there is a definite rebellious whisper in the ranks which continues to demand attention: 'We are saying, who are you to tell us what we should look like? We're saying it with our bodies.' (Kimberly-Anne Jones)

Im/Proper Muscle

The increasing number of women entering the bodybuilding industry and their expanding body mass suggest that the female bodybuilder is not a passing phenomenon despite the confusion she engenders. For in spite of (and, indeed, because of) every endeavour to adorn and contort her, her sabotage of gender norms has simply meant that she 'clamours harder to be looked at, to be evaluated and to be discussed'. (Drorbaugh)



That her domestication continues to fail is evidenced by the perpetual labelling of her by the public. She has been called grotesque, perverse, obscene; disparaged for not being a 'real' woman, looking like a man/dyke. More commonly, she has been branded freak, hermaphrodite, transvestite, gender impersonator (butch in a frock?). Ironically it is the very means by which her muscles are dressed down/up which guarantees her disturbing potential as cross-gendered: 'within these passing strategies are the very seeds of resistance'. (Clark) In other words, as we shall see, attempts to feminise the female bodybuilder — the strategies which allow her to 'pass' in patriarchal culture — become instead the means by which she resists any traditional reading of her as 'feminine'. 'The average person cannot understand why any woman would want to look like a man' (*Options* 1994).

What is it about muscle which insists on its bearer being irrevocably male? Taken into the cultural arena, muscle is highly gendered, the embodiment of a discourse which states that 'to be an adult male is distinctly to occupy space, to have a physical presence in the world'. (Morgan) This space is secured by men by viewing muscle as legitimately theirs. Muscle is therefore 'naturally' taken on/given to the male. As Richard Dyer says, muscles have been traditionally understood as symbolic of male power and just as patriarchy forces us to see power as something which belongs 'naturally' to men, so muscle is seen to be a biological given in men. Natural and real only to him, the representation of muscle is reducible only to him, ratifying the conflation of sex and gender.

The discussions around steroid use amongst bodybuilders is similarly gendered. Within the bodybuilding industry, the potentially fatal damage caused by steroid use is downplayed. Instead, the view of such chemicals as 'true gender benders' (*Muscle & Fitness*) is promoted. Overwhelmingly, however, it is women users who are scolded for 'gender bending' (even though steroid use by men can result in testicular atrophy and the development of breasts, these side effects are almost invariably hushed up). A discourse of appropriateness/inappropriateness abounds again. Testosterone is popularly and incorrectly understood to be the male sex hormone and is therefore (in both its natural and synthetic form) deemed proper only to the male. He is seen to add on/take on further

that which was always conferred on him, both testosterone and its effects, bulk muscle. The female bodybuilder's use, by contrast, is deemed improper and monstrous.

Within this discourse of naturalised sex and gender, not only muscles and 'femininity' but muscles and woman are exclusive categories. The female bodybuilder would seem then to be an impossible term. Nearly naked on the contest stage, she offers up her natural body dressed up in someone else's sex signs, not taken on, not added on, but put on. Ultimately, the female bodybuilder's muscles constitute a kind of drag.

Female Male Impersonators/ Male Female Impersonators

It is precisely through the ideas of drag and cross-dressing that the female bodybuilder's subversiveness can be measured. Many of the ideas we receive about the categories of male/female, masculine/feminine, set up the male/masculine as the real in our culture: 'Men are real. Women are "made up"'. (MacCannell and MacCannell) If men and masculinity are seen as natural and authentic categories, then the idea of 'performing' masculinity would seem to be a contradiction in terms.

When we see men impersonating women in drag acts, the audience interprets this act as one which exposes women/femininity as artifice or



construction. We are less used to seeing this act in reverse. What happens when we see a woman impersonating men/masculinity, categories which patriarchy has taught us are real? We must surely, as Elizabeth Drorbaugh has argued, interpret men/masculinity similarly as constructions. The effect of this is that 'faith in the real may begin to break down'. (Drorbaugh)

The female male impersonator shows us then that the 'real' is in fact a lie. This demonstration is undoubtedly subversive for, as Alisa Solomon says, 'what confers male privilege if not some intangible aura of masculinity — and how potent, how sure is that quality when women can put it on as easily as hats and tails?' This act of impersonation is even more subversive when it is performed by the female bodybuilder.

Certainly when the female bodybuilder appears at competition time, we do indeed see something resembling an actual stage performance. Glammed up, oiled and engaged in a posing routine, her display takes on an air of high theatricality. Flexing, she camps up and puts on male muscle. Crucially, however, her cross-dress does not disappear once she is off stage. It may be covered or played down, but it isn't an instantly removable power suit. For this reason, the female bodybuilder performs the transgressive potential of cross-dressing in a particularly radical way — her challenge to traditional ideas of sex and gender is not a costume (like hats and tails) which she can take off after the show; this challenge appears on her body.

The female bodybuilder's challenge does not rest here, however, for, were she simply to perform masculinity, she could once again be returned to the familiar, returned to 'wanting to look like a man'. Indeed it is the very strategies which seek to make her more comfortable, less 'like a man' which further constitute her disturbance. As Yvonne Tasker observes, 'it is precisely the femininity of the female bodybuilder that destabilises her relationship to the supposedly secure categories of sex, sexuality and gender.'

Again, as the other, the non-man, the non-real, women are 'made up', lending itself to the suggestion that 'femininity is always drag, no matter who paints on the nail varnish and mascara'. (Solomon) Female bodybuilders in particular are made to 'dramatise their sexuality' (MacCannell/MacCannell), and adopt

Judith Butler 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination' in Diana Fuss, ed. *inside/out: Lesbian theories, gay theories*, (Routledge, 1993)

Elizabeth Drorbaugh, 'Sliding Scales: Notes on Storme DeLarverie and the Jewel Box Revue, the cross-dressed woman on the contemporary stage, and the invert' in Lesley Ferris, ed. *Crossing The Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing*, (Routledge 1993)

Richard Dyer 'Don't Look Now' in *Screen* (23:3/4 1982)

Robert Duff & Lawrence Hong, 'Self-Images of Women Bodybuilders', in *Sociology of Sport Journal* (1984 1,4)

Lesley Ferris, ed. *Crossing The Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing*, (Routledge 1993)

Dean MacCannell & Juliet Flower MacCannell 'The Beauty System' in Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, eds. *The Ideology of Conduct* (Methuen 1987)

Barbara MacGinn & Alan Mansfield 'Pumping Irony: The Muscular and the Feminine' in Sue Scott and David Morgan, eds. *Body Matters: Essays on the Sociology of the Body* (Falmer 1993)

David Morgan 'You Too Can Have A Body Like Mine: Reflections on the Male Body and Masculinities' in Sue Scott and David Morgan, eds. *Body Matters: Essays on the Sociology of the Body* (Falmer 1993)

Laurie Schulze, 'On The Muscle', in Jane Gaines & Charlotte Herzog, eds. *Fabrication* (Routledge 1990)

Sue Scott and David Morgan, eds. *Body Matters: Essays on the Sociology of the Body* (Falmer 1993)

Alisa Solomon 'It's never Too Late To Switch: Crossing Towards Power' in Lesley Ferris, ed. *Crossing The Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing*, (Routledge 1993)

Yvonne Tasker *Spectacular Bodies: gender, genre and the action cinema* (Routledge 1993)

extreme trappings of the artificial sex: 'The female muscled body is so dangerous that the proclamation of gender must be made very loudly indeed.' (McGinn) Lavish and theatrical make up, bloneness, fetishistic garb and the occasionally tacked on breasts are all part of this noisy announcement: 'the artificial nature of femininity... most... grotesquely demonstrated'. (Solomon)

The final result resembles in many ways a feminine caricature or, more precisely, a male female impersonator. Accordingly, as both the Options article and Laurie Schulze point out, the female bodybuilder has frequently been read by her spectator as a male transvestite.

Seeing Is Disbelieving

Both as male female impersonator and female male impersonator, the female bodybuilder disrupts clear gender norms. According to Judith Butler, dressing up in gender trappings can expose that whatever has been deemed appropriate/proper to one sex, has only been 'improperly installed as the effect of a compulsory system'.

In other words, while certain things have traditionally been seen to belong 'naturally' to one sex or the other, drag shows us that the allocation of these things has less to do with what is 'naturally appropriate' and more to do with the effect of a system, in this case patriarchal ideology, which has ruled from the outset

what is 'properly' male/female, masculine/feminine. To take this further, Judith Butler suggests that drag reveals that there is nothing inherently natural about gender. Instead, gender is a kind of impersonation/imitation. If we see gender as an imitation, then drag cannot be seen to imitate any original or 'authentic' gender. For example, we might understand a drag act as one which copies masculinity or femininity. But we know that masculinity and femininity are themselves artificial constructions. We can therefore take our understanding further and see drag as an imitation of an imitation.

Drag can therefore radically undo traditional ideas of a natural gender/natural sex. Through drag, the supposedly fixed binaries of masculinity/femininity, male/female overlap and fall apart. All categories are exposed as false, artificial.

It is precisely this disruption which is undertaken by the female bodybuilder. Spectacular on her stage, seeing her is disbelieving, for finally she cannot be accommodated on either side of any binary. Enacting a double impersonation, her 'female' body fills out a masculine body drag, laced with super-feminine embellishments. The spectator cannot resolve what she 'ought' to be — a woman — and what she appears to be: the impossible juxtaposition of feminine/masculine, female/male, femme/butch, female impersonator/male impersonator. □

Bikini Wars



From Sexual Politics to Body Politics

Susanne Kappeler explores the consequences of academic feminism's borrowed enthusiasm for the body. She reminds us what the term 'sexual politics' originally meant and argues that a key concern within feminist politics has been to challenge the identification of women with their bodies.

Given the extraordinary vagaries of the term 'sexual politics' in recent times — from the centre of feminist politics into the background of women's studies, into oblivion in gender studies, only to re-emerge as a field of sexual technology in Queer studies — it seems worth tracing this development in more detail. In particular, I want to ask how feminism — a politics of women's liberation — is meant simultaneously to participate in an academic (post-structuralist) discourse which is centred around pleasure and the body.

As is well known, feminism — what is known today rather contemptuously as the feminism of the seventies — put its emphasis squarely on sexual politics. Kate Millett's renowned book of the same title for many women signalled a new clarity about how the social inequality of women is to be analysed and understood. The personal is political — ie the sexual/sexuality is where women individually experience women's collective oppression by men, enforced by individual men. While the relations of power between men and women as social groups are analytically comparable to those of other systems of oppressions, such as class or race, the oppression of women by men is characterised by the fact that individual members of the opposing groups most intimately live together — the way a capitalist and a worker rarely do, and a master and slave only do, precisely, if the master is a man and the slave is a woman whom he also sexually exploits, that is, specifically as a woman. That is to say, the oppression of women is characterised by the fact that the power relations at the same time define sexuality: men not only have power

over women, they also desire them. Or to put it differently, the gender relationship is characterised by the fact that sexuality determines the power relation and defines the sexes: women are the group of people required for male sexuality to realise itself. They are the collective sex object of men's collective sexual subjectivity. This says nothing as yet, of course, about the sexual practice and experience of individuals; it is an analysis of the collective relations between the sexes in the system we call patriarchy and which Adrienne Rich has specifically called 'compulsory heterosexuality'.

Catharine MacKinnon (1989) has perhaps most radically — because most consistently and clearly — articulated the implications of this analysis:

feminist critique identifies not just a sexuality that is shaped under conditions of gender inequality but reveals this sexuality itself to be the dynamic of the inequality of the sexes. (p 130)

Sexuality is not something which we happen to know, taking place in a society under the conditions of gender inequality and which may somehow be affected by it, but on the contrary, sexuality is what effects gender inequality and what defines the 'sexes' or 'genders', just as racism is what defines races, capitalism what defines classes — ie differentiations between 'kinds' of people that are the result of social and political practices of oppression. It is another way of saying that gender is a social construction and not an essential or natural category.

However, the term 'gender' — which was created precisely in order to render this social construction visible and contrast it to notions of biological essentialism — has nevertheless itself

contributed to the survival of a notion of the sexual as natural or biological. For while everyone agrees that *gender* is socially constructed — leading to cultural notions of femininity, a gender-specific division of labour, a gender-specific family arrangement etc — distinguishing gender from sex has meant that sex continued to constitute the repository of the natural, the given and biological, something which is different from, but underlying 'gender'. Which is why MacKinnon (1983) early on challenged the distinction between sex and gender, arguing that really they are the same and that distinguishing them only replicates the nature/culture distinction.

Feminist critique, in other words, like the critique of racism, is committed to exposing the political nature of biological essentialism and what we perceive to be 'biology', which in the modern and sexual age has replaced the ideological function of the God-given. Since we can no longer argue that God wanted man to have dominion over woman and the rest of the universe, or that God created white men to rule over Black people, it has fallen to biology to establish the supremacy of men as a sex and the supremacy of whites as a race as somehow 'given' and therefore unchangeable.

It is significant, therefore, that in the early eighties and especially in academic practice, feminist or women's studies began to give way to gender studies, while the concept of 'sexual politics' was increasingly replaced by the concept of 'sexual difference'. What used to be the familiar grouping of 'race, class and sex' became 'race, class and sexual difference'. Sexual difference is the conventional term, used in psychoanalysis, medicine and biology, denoting a given biological difference between the sexes, whose pervasive influence on culture and people's physiology structuralism and post-structuralism made it their task to chart and explore. Most of those who speak of sexual difference of course never had talked of sexual politics, since psychoanalysis, like other dominant discourses, is firmly grounded in patriarchal ideology. What is interesting, however, is that women — who *had* been speaking of sexual politics — took over this analysis of sexual difference, trying to mix feminism and post-structuralism, ie to participate in both malestream academicism and feminism.

Refusing intellectual fashions

It has been our view, of course, that feminism cannot be married to patriarchal discourses, to intellectual fashions deriving from ideologies which are committed to maintaining the gendered social order — or the same will happen to feminism as happens to any woman marrying a member of the dominant class. Or to put it differently, it seems a contradiction in terms to want to integrate a critique into the thing it is a critique of, to uphold a dominant discourse and simultaneously its critique. Intellectual discourses are neither neutral nor ungendered, and are as much a matter of politics as anything else. Yet it is common to regard intellectual fashions as if they were simply the latest state of the art, neutral instruments and sophisticated tools which the times oblige us to learn to deploy. Like ordinary fashions, however, they are *made*, produced and disseminated by interest groups in society with the power to do so. The academy, too, is an institution, with political and social dimension, and above all with interest of its own, crucially dependent moreover on the publishing industry. Hence we need to analyse intellectual discourses both in terms of their cultural-historical significance and their provenance, that is to say, in terms of a politics of discourse.

Thus the academic discourse of sexual difference made its concerted reentry at a time when feminism and the political movement for women's liberation had begun to gain some public ground. Just so, a discourse of cultural difference, of otherness and the Other, is reappearing at a time when the critique of racism is beginning to have some weight on the level of public, that is to say, white-dominated discourse.

I will now focus on a few of the key concepts of the discourse of sexual difference, to analyse their significance from the point of view of feminist critique and in particular, their implication in relation to the politics that used to be called sexual politics, or a politics of women's *liberation*. From the point of view of a politics of discourse, 'concepts', terminology and discursive habits are not just a matter of stylistic choice, but of analytical, ie theoretical and political significance. Yet the social nature of discourse is such that we may acquire discursive habits and adopt particular terminologies and expressions, not because we are persuaded of their theoretical appropriateness,

but because they seem the terms currently most available.

Sexual difference transforms sexual politics into body politics. White male academics, following Foucault and co, had started to foreground the body. This emphasis on the body also began to exert pressure on the language of feminists. We can see this happen for instance in Maria Mies' book, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, published in 1986. Although in its feminist politics it is certainly not bending to any intellectual fashions, Mies calls one of her chapters 'Body politics', even though what she discusses are in fact the central points of the sexual politics of the feminist movement: campaigns against abortion laws, the critique of the family and family law, the campaign against sexual violence, projects of building refuges/shelters for battered women, rape crisis centres, safe houses for children who have been sexually assaulted etc. All the more curious to call these, as Mies does, 'issues which were all in one way or the other connected with the *female body*' (24). You might equally say that they are all in one way or another connected with *women*; you might even say that they are connected, not just in one way or another, but in specific ways, to men, concerning men's laws, politics and practices in relation to women — and not just their bodies either. Generally, in feminist theory, it has become more common to say that something is 'violence against women's bodies', rather than violence against women.

If it is already a problem to call these issues 'women's issues', since there would be no women's issues if they were not men's issues, it is even more problematical to call them issues concerning the female body, for there is no living body of a woman without the woman. What men apparently do to women's bodies they are doing to women. And while many women may learn to bear what is done to their bodies, they do not learn to bear what is being done to *them*. You may learn to bear the injury to your body — supported by the body's remarkable capacity to heal, though its capacity to heal injury does not match men's capacity to cause injury. So a person may learn to bear the violence done to their body, but a person cannot bear the violation of their person. Which is why feminism is not a branch of medicine, healing the female body, but a politics in the interests of women, fighting for women's human rights,

their rights to personhood. This is not just a linguistic quibble, a question of stylistic choice: it is the very crux of women's history in patriarchy.

Women in our culture have been seen primarily as bodies — sexual bodies designed for sex and reproduction (though very useful in productive labour too). The nineteenth century called women simply 'the Sex' and every religious and later medical theory asserted women's primary function as wives, mothers and prostitutes, ie as reproducers, raisers of children and providers of sex. The disenfranchised status of women, their status as chattel, ie as the legal property of fathers, husbands or guardians, without political or legal rights of their own, was the material basis for this cultural understanding of women. What women thought, what women wanted or felt, was neither here nor there. So long as they had no legal and political status, no opportunity to act publicly, it was of no consequence. That is to say, women were culturally, politically and legally objects rather than subjects.

The reduction of people to object status — be it women in patriarchy, or Black people in slavery — means their reduction to their materiality, their bodies. Their significance, their presence in the social world, is *as* bodies. As bodies, they can be objects of commerce and private possession, commodities and private property, and means of production and reproduction. Hence the political struggle of women — as of slaves — has been for their emancipation to human status, emancipation from their status as subjectless bodies to the status of political and legal subject. In cultural terms, this has also meant a struggle for public self-expression — the insertion of the voices of women, of Black people, of the dispossessed working classes — into a culture that so far had been the exclusive product of white, educated men. It is the very reason why cultural politics — the public expression of subjectivity on the part of oppressed groups — continues to play such a central role in their struggle for equality.

Body over mind, mind over body

The culture of men, or rather white men — patriarchal culture as we know it — has in its obsessive dualism not only opposed mind to body and hierarchised mind *over* body, it has also attributed mind to male and body to female and similarly to Black. Since women signified

body, men (who were doing the signifying) meant mind, culture, reason. This allocation of dualisms — Nature/culture, mind/body, male/female, white/black, light and darkness etc — is a commonplace: it is the very basis of our system of symbolism which we so aptly deploy in our literary analyses.

It is only very recently in the history of culture that — in the wake of psychoanalysis, sexology and structural anthropology and their creative appropriation through structuralism and post-structuralism — men have apparently discovered their own bodies, and became unduly fascinated by them. After centuries of suppression, that is to say of relegating body exclusively to women, Blacks and animals, the body has held its triumphant entry into male intellectual culture, spearheaded, as is also known, by French intellectuals like Foucault, Lacan and the semiologists. The body, of course, henceforth is the male body, thus needing no special qualification.

Seen from a cultural-historical perspective, this is no mean achievement, and as we know, it has been singularly fruitful. The intellectual pleasures of writing, of the visual arts, of cinema, or music, indeed of science and thought of every kind, are newly being analysed as sensual and sexual pleasures, as expressions of a person who is not all mind. The inscription of the body on to these practices has stood at the centre of this project: *le plaisir du texte*, the pleasure of the text, under Roland Barthes' virtuosity transforming into *jouissance*, sexual ecstasy, orgasm.

While this discovery of the body may be exciting and new in the culture of educated white men, it turns into a massive irony when educated women try to appropriate it for women. For it is nothing new for women to return to the body — we never have got away from being identified with it. Men may well be captivated by the metaphor that a writer writes with his penis, that his creative effusions are a kind of ejaculation, that his work is informed by his body as well as his mind — after centuries of opposition between the 'lower animal drives' and the 'higher mental stirrings', the self-imposed choice between 'art' and 'life', pen and penis. But there are all too familiar echoes in the notion that women write with their wombs, their lips and their breasts, that they undulate without closure, write in milk and blood, or restore the chaotic, the sensual, and the mother-

ly to the orderly but abstract system of signification, either based on or known as 'the law of the father'. We never have been credited with anything else that we *could* write and think with.

We should therefore recognise men's newly found fascination with bodily pleasure for what it is: a delayed recognition of the mortal encasings of their own minds. As women, with a cultural history at the opposite end of their dualistic stick, we should have a very different perspective on this development. We may welcome men's recognition of their own corporeality, less as a discovery of their bodies than as one step towards a recognition of the fallaciousness of the mind-body opposition.

The work cut out, then, is rather to reflect what the world will look like without this mind-body split. How do we reconceptualise what has been conceived of as either body or mind, as not divisible in this manner? How much of our thinking, our thought system, our values, not to speak of our symbolic systems, has been influenced by this conception? What is the significance, for instance, of the concept of pleasure so central in contemporary thought? What sort of pleasure is it, and what is its function?

A test case

The academic debate on pornography may serve as an excellent test case for these questions, since in many ways it exemplifies the development I am describing. For pornography has been the very site of the male culture's repression of the body on the one hand — its very relegation to the very pit of the cultural trash can, as its obsessive resuscitation in the representation of women on the other hand. Hence it is what now most needs to be raised to the top, to where mankind's highest mental stirring have been going on. Thus it is professors of the highest rank and renown who today are ploughing the field of academic pornographology, proving that we have overcome not just the mind-body split, but the split between high culture and low culture, higher stirrings and lower stirrings. I shall skip the male professors, revealing as they may be, and concentrate on what female professors are doing in their wake.

The feminist campaign against pornography, as is well known, has met with strong opposition not only from men, pornographers, the publishing industry, the professionals of culture

and lawyers, who all have an obvious stake in the issue, but also from women and specifically from academic feminists. There is no room to enter into the specifics of this clash, except insofar as it touches on our topic — the function of pleasure in intellectual argument. Where feminist critics of pornography have argued that pornography is gendered, produced by men for men and to an overwhelming extent about women — that it is gendered, in other words, like all culture is gendered, but much more visibly so due to its sexual explicitness — the opposition, what is known as pro-pornography feminism, has based its argument squarely on pleasure. Not that pleasure even is the argument, rather it is the natural standard, the obvious criterion, the implicit norm on which the argument is built.

So it is noted by one researcher, for example, and apparently with surprise, that 'Pornography can also produce physical sensations of sexual arousal in women as well as men.' (Bower p 41) Research conducted among themselves as well as other women is ponderously presented as counter-evidence allegedly disproving the feminist case: 'The women I spoke to enjoy and seek out pornography' (Loach Sexexp. p 268). Hence a plethora of books and articles are devoted to proving that women, too, may enjoy watching and even producing pornography. Yet we know that women may even enjoy reading Milton or Melville, Shakespeare or Joyce, and that they even enjoy writing literature where the reader is also positioned fundamentally as male.

Or as Toni Morrison has put it in the preface to her Willam E Massey Sr lectures, published as *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the literary imagination*: 'For reasons that should not need explanation there, until very recently ... the readers of virtually all of American fiction have been positioned as white.' (xiv) This has not prevented Black readers from enjoying American fiction, indeed, from being moved by it, as Morrison herself eloquently proves. Saying that the literary imagination has positioned the reader as white — as the cultural imagination in general positions the cultural subject also as male — says nothing about what Black people or women may do, and it most certainly does not say, either, that they do not read, or that they may not enjoy what they are reading. It is an argument not about individuals and their social identity but about the subjectivity of reading and

viewing, and how such cultural subjectivity is structured by fictions or images.

As feminists we started from the assumption that women as much as men are being socialised by this culture — the very reason why women too have internalised sexism. As subjects of culture and education, we are all of us socialised to assume an androcentric, sexist, or as we may say metaphorically, a 'male' point of view, just as we are all socialised to a racist, eurocentric or 'white' point of view. But point of view, cultural subjectivity or literary perspective is not what pro-pornography feminists are interested in: their interest is in physical response, bodily arousal, the stirrings of physiology. While there would be nothing particularly bad about this, the problem is its exclusive conception as bodily expression, as the expression of a body in the old and familiar opposition to a mind. Far from being an exploration of how the body is part of a person's whole person, indivisible from their subjectivity or mind, it turns into an exploration not only of the autonomy of the body, but its supremacy over the 'mind'.

New age sadism

Although patriarchal culture has treated women as bodies, supposedly without a mind, it nevertheless has long applied itself to the surreptitious knowledge that however much objectified, women are not objects but persons endowed with 'subjectivity'. Contradictory as this project may appear, it is the very seam, the tell-tale sign of where ideology attempts to fudge its contradictions. Thus while straightforward, traditional sadism might be said to ignore the victim's feelings, it actually presupposes that the victim objects to her victimisation: it is the very thrill of sadism to violate the victim's will. While sadism is the genre that goes with the historical legal bondage of women, their outright subjection and disenfranchisement which allows them no subjective expression, ours is the age of sado-masochism.

For the advanced sadism of the modern age aims at the subordination not only of the victim's body, but also of her will, since her will — women's will — now has become of consequence. Women may publicly express themselves, give voice to what they think and feel and how they interpret what they experience. Hence the subordination of women's will can only be achieved through control over its expression — that is to say, if the sadist himself

invents, dramatises and represents it. Masochism is not, as is popularly thought, an attitude of the victim, it is the sadist's invention of an attitude *for* the victim. Author of the sadistic scenario, he is author and interpreter of the victim's response. The age of sado-masochism puts all the importance on the alleged pleasure of the victim: her acceptance of the sadistic rule of force used against her, her supposed pleasure in it. The distinctive feature of contemporary pornography is the lascivious smile on the represented woman's face, saying how she welcomes, how she likes and desires her sexual subordination and exploitation. Here, the pleasure of sadism no longer just derives from the victim's cries of pain under torture, but from her cries of lust under the same vexation. As Roland Barthes put it years ago:

The scream is the victim's mark; she makes herself a victim because she chooses to scream; if under the same vexation she were to ejaculate, she would cease to be a victim, would be transformed into a libertine: *to scream/to discharge*, this paradigm is the beginning of choice, ie of Sadian meaning. (Sade, Fourier, Loyola, p 147)

It remains sadism, however, because it is her scream of lust and her bodily discharge in response to the vexation of violation, which we understand as force used against her will. Only her body is now being mobilised against herself, against her will. While this is nothing new in the realm of sado-masochism, indeed, nothing new in the experience of women, what is new is the concerted intellectual effort to declare the body as the site of truth. While women's bodies are being played off against their minds — as we know them to played off in every romance, we, as the watching umpires of this drama, judge where the woman truly resides: in her body rather than her mind. Once her body has spoken through its discharge, expressed its 'pleasure' as physiological reaction, we proceed to read this as the woman's will, her consent to the vexation which produced it.

Locating truth in the body

Thus women's collective political objection to pornography as a practice in society dwindles to a lie, at best a self-deception, in the face of physiological response. Even where a woman may report having experienced a physiological reaction against her will — for example in being raped — a reaction which distresses and upsets her, all her expressions as a conscious thinking intelligent and political being are deemed

irrelevant compared to what is defined as her — or her body's — 'pleasure'. The expression of the body, its apparently marvellous autonomy has become the ultimate truth, as if it had nothing to do with culture, as if it put the lie to the mind. In particular, it has become the locus where the true self resides.

Thus Carol J Clover writes in her introduction to the anthology *Dirty Looks: Women, Pornography, Power*:

There is something awesome about the way that pornography can move our bodies, even when we don't want it to and even if we don't approve of the images that make it happen. (3)

And she adds in parentheses:

If the unconscious were a politically correct place, it would not need to be unconscious.

The unconscious apparently *is* the body, or the body its direct expression, which comes down to the same thing. For just before, she argued that 'we are in general suspicious of forms (including music and dance forms) that aim themselves so directly at the body'. There is no theory here about any interaction between consciousness and the unconscious, of any dialectic between the physical and the psychological: there is only a direct aim at the body, bypassing the mind. What a person may think on reflection, on political and intellectual grounds concerning, for instance, pornography is of no consequence when their body speaks. Their body is a case which their mind inhabits, a mind which had better learn to think as its body dictates. This is the very message pornography and pro-pornography theory puts across. Hence we are hardly surprised that the public performer, Annie Sprinkle, is said to have 'stayed with, and unabashedly [to inhabit] her own pornographic body' (3). Not only could she apparently have chosen to leave it, refusing to stay with it, but it is not just her own body she thus inhabits, it is her own 'pornographic' body.

Thus academic feminists advocating pornography not only advocate the old dualistic positivism of a mind in the encasings of a body, they also uphold all the other patriarchal dualisms — insisting on the dirtiness of sex, on the badness of 'girls' devoted to it, evidenced in the abundance of titles about 'Dirty Looks' and 'Bad Girls'. Bad girls is also what researcher Loretta Loach calls the women she spoke to who enjoy pornography: 'they are the hidden participants in the porn controversy, the transgressors, the bad girls who refuse to be repressed by politics' (268). The only difference

to the patriarchy of the nineteenth century is that today, it counts as the peak of radical chic to be 'bad' and to talk 'dirty'. While this has the ring of adolescent rebellion against the stern moral authorities of parents and church fathers, it nevertheless has more serious political implications than such rebellion might suggest.

The body in fascism

For the body plays a crucial role also in the thinking of the new Right, especially their theorising of ethnicity and culture as being inscribed in the body (not to mention their unregenerate theorising of sex as biological). Thus we may read in 'The Republican', the party organ of the German ultra-right Republicans:

The intuitive and emotional bond to one's own people, however, can develop only if we are born into that people, raised among that people, thus being able from the beginning to identify with it. In other words, if one has imbibed belonging to that people, as it were, with the mother's milk ... A Turk or a Nigerian does not simply become a German by being given a German passport. Because of the effectiveness of this inner bond he remains at heart what he always was: a Turk or a Nigerian. Only in exceptional cases may he detach himself — and even then only certain parts of his being — to become a German. (cit Hellfeld, p 46)

In other words, his body, saturated with the mother's milk of his culture and ethnicity, raised among his people and on their territory, remains the true repository of his ethnicity, no matter what he does, learns, acquires in his life as a person. He may even get to know German culture better than a German who was raised in it, having consciously acquired and studied it — yet what is of interest and consequence is his 'being', that is, his body. A body which is the repository of culture and ethnicity, as the gendered body in the examples above is the repository of the sexual unconscious and the self.

Not that one would want to argue that someone studying German culture would

thereby become a German, come to *be* a German. The point is, rather, that there is no concept of humans other than as originary ethnic beings. Thus a further theoretician of the ultra-right explains the 'nature' of ethnic species:

Everybody knows that a birch tree cannot be explained by the desert. If anything, it is date palms which grow there. The birch tree is a tree of the North, 'explicable' only on the basis of the environment there. Goethe has shown ... how the indigenous plant has developed quite differently depending on the soil, the climate and other environmental influences ... should it be different in the world of humans? ... Natural scientists speaking the language of our times talk of races and types, tribes and peoples. Like the species of plants and animals, they are a fact of nature, which it is not for us to judge, but to accept. (Werner Haverbeck, in *Europa*, cit Hellfeld 55)

In other words, there is a concerted intellectual effort under way that attempts to locate the self back in the body — in the body as biological or bio-cultural fact. Everything else is but the superficial trimmings of a mind trying to disguise the truth of the body — an acquired foreign culture belying the truth of ethnicity, a conscious mind negating the body's truth. Its purpose is to deal with bodies according to their nature, deporting them to where nature grew them, deploying them as nature designed them: Turks to Turkey, Nigerians to Nigeria, native women for the sexual purposes for which Nature has so aptly equipped them.

Primo Levi writes in his account of being a prisoner in Auschwitz: 'there we learnt that our personality is fragile, that it is in much greater danger than our life.' (*Ist das in Mensch?* p 63). We may learn to bear injuries to our bodies, but what is being done to us as persons — the violation of our person — is a peril different from the physical threat to kill our body. It is a danger which once again is being made invisible by a theory which insists on equating self with body, reducing the self to the body, a self to whom can happen only what happens to their body. □

Roland Barthes *Sade, Fourier and Loyola* (Paris 1971)

Marion Bower 'Daring to Speak Its Name: The Relationship of Women to Pornography' *Feminist Review*, 24 (1986)

Carol Clover, Introduction to *Dirty Looks: Women, Pornography, Power*, edited by Pamela Church Gibson and Roma Gibson (British Film Institute 1993)

Matthias von Hellfeld *Die Nation erwacht* (Köln 1993)

Primo Levi 'Ist das ein Mensch?' (Munich 1991)

Loretta Loach 'Bad Girls: Women who use Pornography' in *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate* edited by Lynne Segal and Mary Mackintosh (Virago 1992)

Catharine MacKinnon *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Harvard University Press 1984)

Catharine MacKinnon 'Feminism, Maxism, Method and the State: Toward a Feminist Jurisprudence' *Signs*, Vol 8, No 4 (1983)

Maria Mies *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* (Zed Books 1986)

Toni Morrison *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Picador 1993)

Banned for Blasphemy: The Rape of Sita

Last year, Lindsey Collen's novel The Rape of Sita was banned by the government in Mauritius, and she has since been subject to threats of death and public rape. There has however been a considerable response from the international feminist community, and the book has also been awarded the Commonwealth Literature Award 'Best Book for Africa 1994'. Tess Rumble & Joan Scanlon met her when she was in London recently at a meeting hosted by the Asian Women Writer's Collective, and asked her to respond to some questions in writing.



Joan Scanlon: Could you say a little about the general context in which you are working, and the political and economic situation in Mauritius?

Lindsey Collen: Mauritius has been built up by the IMF and the World Bank, from 1979-1980 onwards, as a kind of showpiece to demonstrate the 'success' of these banks' loan strategies and structural adjustment programmes. There is today full employment to 'prove' the 'success' which is often boasted of as being 'the Mauritian miracle'.

The myth of the Mauritian 'miracle'

There are all sorts of ironies involved. Firstly, of course, Mauritius is no 'miracle' as is claimed. To give an example: government housing programmes for workers — which permitted the poor a form of dignity in the lean years of the one-crop sugar cane economy — have been scrapped in these times of the supposed 'miracle'. After the last cyclone on 10 February 1994, instead of the government providing housing as it has since 1960 onwards after every cyclone, it failed to provide housing for the poorest families hundreds of whom were left homeless, later to be hounded out of refugee centres. Subsidies on basic foods have been completely removed, leaving prices to 'market forces', and now the government is talking about introducing fees for some of the health

services, of not paying pensions until people are 65 years old (instead of 60) and of means-testing these pensions.

New forms of slavery

Secondly, the entire country has become one big free zone factory area, where a high level of exploitation of workers is 'freely' permitted, and where hours are long, overtime is compulsory, factory closures are frequent and freedoms for workers severely curbed. For example, quite often workers are made to sign an undertaking (which, incidentally, is illegal) to the effect that they will not join a union. Casual employment has become rife. Workers often refer to the new forms of exploitation as being equivalent to a new kind of slavery and indenture, to replace the old forms under French and British colonial rule, respectively.

The 'privilege' of protectionism

Thirdly, to make a mockery of the propaganda about the 'miracle of liberalism', all the appearances of success, and even all the genuine economic activity, are a direct result not of the liberalization they pretend to result from, but of protectionist measures that Mauritius has been privileged by: a guaranteed sugar quota and minimum sugar price, quotas for textiles into EEC and US markets, as well as a host of projects of all kinds to support the 'miracle', so that it can be used as a showpiece. In addition, Mauritius has benefitted a great deal from capital leaving Hong Kong when the British colonial set up is about to close down, and coming to Mauritius — a conjunctural boon, to say the least.

The war on wages

Fourthly, it is also clear that in a country like Mauritius, which has no indigenous population on any of its islands, and no history of a peasantry, we are all condemned to the cash nexus, and have no illusion of being able to 'return' to a real or even imaginary 'rural area' that we 'came from' somewhere, sometime in the past. This has tended to make it easier for the capitalist classes to exploit us through the free zone method. But of course, with full employment, workers have more bargaining power — which has had an effect, even though this has been used more on an individual basis (shopping around for a higher wage) than

through joining the union movement — and wages have gone up. As soon as wages increased, workers from abroad (from China, Sri Lanka, India, South Africa and Madagascar) have been brought in to work here on a contract basis, often under draconian contracts, and capital has been moved out to places where wages are lower.

I work in a context where there have been very few voices to criticize the kind of 'development' that has represented this 'miracle'. My voice is amongst these few voices.

A modern-day Sita

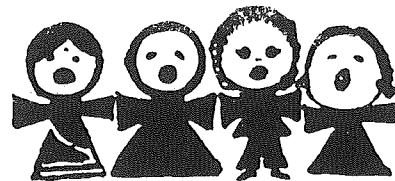
Tess Rumble: Could you tell us something about your book? What is the story of *The Rape of Sita*?

Lindsey: I think it's one story but with lots of stories in it — leaning heavily on the oral tradition of the story-teller having to respond to questions from the audience. These questions provoke narratives, which are meant both to distract from, and enhance, the main narrative. The main story is that of Sita, a modern day woman, remembering the rape she suffered eight years previously.

Joan: When was it banned and what were the 'official' reasons for that? What do you think the real reasons were?

Lindsey: The book was attacked by the Prime Minister in the National Assembly on 7th December 1993, exactly four days after publication. He called on the police to take action against the book. The official reason he gave was that the novel is, if judged by its cover, supposedly blasphemous. In fact there are no anti-blasphemy laws in Mauritius. The Prime Minister also said that the novel may constitute an outrage against public and religious morality. If it were found to be so it would be illegal, because it is an offense under section 206 of the Criminal Code. The *real* reason is probably that the government thought it could make some political mileage by getting some support from the fundamentalists who were being hysterical about the book; or at least that the Prime Minister was preventing the Opposition from getting mileage from his silence.

Tess: Was there hostility towards the book before it was banned that led to the government taking this action?



The victim's crime

Lindsey: The fundamentalists who opposed the book put a lot of emphasis on the title, claiming that the title itself was offensive. Their conception of rape as the victim's crime would obviously make it potentially offensive when the victim's name is the same as that of a Hindu deity. Sita is in fact considered by some Hindus to be of full deity stature for being the heroine of the *Ramayana*, while other Hindus maintain firmly that she is only a main character in a story originally told as a story in the *Mahabharata*, and then later developed into the moral tale, the *Ramayana*. In any case, my novel is not about the Sita of the *Ramayana* at all. The main character of my novel is clearly contrasted with the Sita of the *Ramayana*, because modern day women like us do not have the protection either of prophecies that they will not be raped or of armies that gods send to rescue us.

When I was faced with violent and open threats of death and 'public rape' from fundamentalists (either painted on walls, by telephone or by letter), threatening articles in the small communalist press — and also having anticipated that the government would seize all the books — my publisher and I decided to withdraw all the books from public circulation, so that we would get the chance to distribute the 250 copies we had already sold in advance of publication. This withdrawal meant two things: we could get the book read by over 250 people, who could then comment on its merit, and not find ourselves stuck in the irrational realm of the title; we could also show a proof of our rational and non-provocative intentions. From the beginning, with the help of my lawyer, every time there is a threat against me, I have gone and given a formal declaration to the police, and got them to paint over the threats on the walls, or formally requested them to go and give formal warnings to the editors of the communalist press who had published threatening articles against me. In fact, when the police came to seize the books, we pointed out to them that they had no right to, as the books were already withdrawn — and so they went away.

Joan: What has happened since? What resistance is there to this kind of censorship? Are there campaigns against such legislation?

Fighting for free speech

Lindsey: Since the attack by the government against the book, a very broad-based support has built up for the right to freedom of expression, and I have been constantly touched by and, more importantly, protected from physical violence by, increasingly open support for me. In Mauritius, other than the Chief Editors, who were themselves silent in their editorials, almost every single journalist in a position to take a position, has supported me. Almost every woman in the country supports me, and in addition to the women's group I'm in myself (Muvman Liberasyon Fam) which actually looked after me on a day to day basis whenever necessary, other women's organisations and individual women have again and again stood by me when I am under attack. Writers of all kinds have been openly supportive, literally creating occasions to take a stand in favour of freedom of expression. In the trade union movement there has been clear solidarity. Politically I am in a party called LALIT (which means 'Struggle'), which has constantly worked towards gaining ground and not losing any, in the battle we have on our hands against the double enemy: the fundamentalists and the state.

Language hierarchy

Joan: What is the significance of your book being written in English, and who was your intended readership?

Lindsey: The language situation in Mauritius is unusual. The official language and the language of schooling is English, but French is the language of the elite and also of the press. The language that everyone speaks is Kreol. Kreol is an efficient language that has continued to grow and become by far the most important language of the country. But it is not written much. It has been written for over a hundred years, but colonial prejudice to the effect that it is not a language persists, and the authorities actively discourage Kreol in education and the media.

I am active in a movement to promote Kreol, and I write a lot in Kreol. I have not written a novel in Kreol, though. It would take immense powers of imagination — to create at one and the same time a whole novel and a readership in a language. But I'd like to be able to do it one day. Both of my novels are in English; I thought

I was writing for anyone in Mauritius who can understand English, that is all literate people in the country — but I also bore in mind English-language readers everywhere else in the world.

Tess: What is likely to happen in relation to the book?

Lindsey: At the moment we are waiting for a reply from the Director of Public Prosecutions to a letter from me asking whether there are prosecutions in store for me, and asking whether there will be if the book is brought out onto the shelves again. At the same time *The Rape of Sita* will, in all probability, be published internationally in 1995, and then be available everywhere in the world — maybe even in Mauritius too.

Joan: What kind of women's liberation movement activism is there in Mauritius? How much international networking/support is there for women activists in Mauritius? How does what's happened to your book relate to this?

Lindsey: Mauritius has a vibrant women's movement — over 500 associations, all with feminist ideas, all active enough to be a constant pressure on government to improve legislation. The association I am a member of (and this year president of) is the oldest national women's organisation, and is very militant on all subjects of concern to women. In particular, we have constantly fought for improved laws and attitudes on violence against women, including rape (and since the appearance of the book, and the controversy about it, rape has for the first time been outlawed within marriage); we have always fought for legal abortion and this has often meant open confrontations with the Catholic church hierarchy; we have opposed very thoroughly the so-called 'personal law' which allows anti-woman marriage and divorce laws for people marrying under Muslim law; we have fought for demilitarization, especially in the context of the US base on Diego Garcia, and for the retrocession of the entire archipelago which the British and USA 'depopulated' and severed from the rest of Mauritius as an illegal pre-Independence 'deal' before turning it into a military base.

International solidarity

Over the banning of *The Rape of Sita* we have received massive support from women's groups and women's organisations the world over — Africa, Latin America, USA, Germany, France, Switzerland, Scandinavia, the Middle East, Australia, India and Pakistan and the Caribbean. (Curiously we seem so far to be in networks worldwide not including UK women's groups; however I have been clearly, openly and efficiently supported by PEN, Article XIX and Index on Censorship, all of which are UK-based. And during my recent visit, and through women in PEN, I have met and started links with some women's groups in London, which we will hopefully develop together.)

Tess: What kind of change do you think is possible, and how do you think this can be achieved?

Lindsey: I think that the battle against fundamentalism and repression is a long, hard one that has to be won. There are not many shortcuts really, and the political struggle for enlightenment, for equality and for real democracy in all aspects of life, including at the place of work, are of course, what we need to organise towards. □

Muvman Liberasyon Fam

Celicourt Antelme Street (Lakaz Ros), Forest-Side, MAURITIUS.

August 10, 1994

Women Living Under Muslim Laws
Boite Postale 23 - 34790 Grabels
Montpellier, France

Dear M.A. H  lie Lucas,

Thank you very much for your letter of 13th July 1994. Lindsey Collen has written to Maria Suarez of FIRE of Costa Rica. We have sent them a copy of *The Rape of Sita*.

The campaign to unban the book *The Rape of Sita* continues. There has been a lot of response to the appeal launched in Women Living Under Muslim Laws' ALERT FOR ACTION. We have been receiving and are still receiving letters of support from all over the world. Response are mainly from women's organisations, women's networks, and individuals. The international support campaign has been of great help to our local campaign.

The current status of the book. On 15th of May, Lindsey and her lawyer wrote to the Commissioner of Police to ask what the outcome of his enquiries were into the "case". As a reminder, when the Prime Minister made his declaration to ban the book in Parliament on 7th December, 1993, he also asked the Police Commissioner to take action under Section 206 of the Criminal Code for supposed "outrage against public and religious morality". The Commissioner of Police did not reply. In July 1994, Lindsey wrote a second letter to the Commissioner of Police to ask if he has completed his enquiry and if yes, what are the findings of his enquiry. In a letter dated August 4th addressed to Lindsey, the Commissioner of Police advised her that the police has completed his enquiry and have submitted his findings to the Director of Public Prosecutions since the 5th of January 1994, 6 months ago! We have not heard anything from the Director of Public Prosecutions yet. Now Lindsey and her lawyers are going to write to the Director of Public Prosecutions to ask what is the stand of the DPP on the police findings: Is the DPP going to file charges against Lindsey Collen?

We will keep you informed.

Yours sincerely,

Ragini Kistnasamy
Ragini Kistnasamy
Muvman Liberasyon Fam



P.S. Find attached International Press Release: *The Rape of Sita* has been awarded the Commonwealth Regional Prize for Africa.



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