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# letter

RRF Newsletter.

Dear Sisters,

Reference your note on P23 (RRF7) about the use of the word "cunt", others might also be writing in to say that there is evidence (M. Dames, the Silbury Treasure) that cunt linguistically is related to "ken" as in d'ye ken - do you know - the cunt is a place of knowledge - the source of knowledge; "cunning" in the early sense of intricate and skilled is related. (I have often thought of a really nice dual meaning of the biblical quotation "if I forget the... may my right hand lose its cunning" ).

Also there is some evidence that cunt, ken, cunning etc. may be linked to "canny" again in the no put-down sense of knowing; and on another tack, cunny the rabbit, in patriarchal folk song, the coney, is also the cunt.

I think we should reclaim all these words about ourselves that THEY use to put us down. Cunt especially, since it indicates our cunts as the power source - which is why they use it so viciously.

Incidentally Dames also suggests that the river Kennet, near Avebury, and Silbury Hill in Wiltshire is also derived from cunt - Silbury being the visual expression of a woman's body in the form of the Goddess.

In sisterhood

Asphodel

PS Are there any linguistics women who can comment?

I have always been struck by the fact that the oldest form of writing known, is CUNEFORM writing. That means cunt shaped. (Some dictionaries politely translate this as wedge shaped.) Nothing will convince me that men would have invented a form of writing based on that symbol ▲ though the cuneform writings we have indicate that society was a city state patriarchy.

I looked up ken in my Scottish dictionary and was well as meaning 'know' a second meaning was given 'brothel'. This supports Asphodel's theory, in a somewhat unpleasant fashion. We need to reclaim more than the word before I will feel happy using it.

In sisterhood,

Sandra McNeill 23/10/81



# LOVE YOUR SISTER?

## A Critique of Adrienne Rich's 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence'

(More about Political Lesbianism!)

Adrienne Rich's paper COMPULSORY HETEROSEXUALITY AND LESBIAN EXISTENCE challenges the assumption that heterosexuality is the natural sexuality for women. She calls our attention to the 'institution of heterosexuality' and to the dismissal of lesbianism as a form of deviance. She explains how men have silenced lesbians and how the fact of lesbianism and lesbian life/culture has been consistently ignored.

But I have several criticisms of COMPULSORY HETEROSEXUALITY and I think that Adrienne Rich's paper does not in the end get women much further in our struggle to end men's power over us.

First of all, why does she talk about 'compulsory' heterosexuality? According to Adrienne Rich, heterosexuality as we know it is forced on women - in lots of different ways. It is forced on us by various means which are themselves manifestations of male power. These are 'power-characteristics' and they enforce heterosexuality - which is thus at two removes from male power. Heterosexuality is not in itself, according to her, a form of male power - any more than lesbianism in itself is female power. And that is the heart of it. For me, **heterosexuality is male power** - and **lesbianism is power of women**, political power as much as anything else.

Her argument is that heterosexuality is enforced because that way the sexual enslavement of women is made much easier. 'Women have learned to accept male violation of our psychic and physical boundaries as the price of survival'... 'have been educated... to perceive ourselves as sexual prey' - and we are all 'victims' of sexual slavery.

This is not language I should choose to describe my life under male supremacy. I reject her statement that women have no real choices in our sexual relationships ('the absence of choice remains the great unacknowledged reality') and I deplore her presentation of women as slaves and victims because she offers us no solutions. Further, to argue that we have learned to survive by accepting male violence is to imply that we should not have survived without men. In fact, women without men survive better, just as Jews survive better in the absence of Nazis. And similarly, women know (and so not need to learn to know) that men violate and prey upon us - just as Jews knew what Nazis were doing to them, without having to be educated into knowing it.

But can there be a healthy, free heterosexuality? Can heterosexuality be voluntary as opposed to compulsory? Adrienne Rich does not want to rule out the possibility. The suppression and destruction of lesbian relationships has meant an incalculable



loss to the power of all women to change the social relations of the sexes, to liberate ourselves and each other" (emphasis hers). She asks that heterosexual discard the notion that heterosexual relationships result from a sexual preference. She does not ask women to abandon heterosexuality. She excuses women who stay within heterosexual relationships and does not say that it is better to be a lesbian. I think that lesbian feminists need to say that it is. And we need to say why.

Changing the social relations between the sexes is not, after all, the same as overthrowing male power. And although she does finally imply that women need to 'undo' male power Adrienne Rich does not suggest how to do it. Nor even whether it is women alone who should be doing this. All she tells us is that we shall need to work on understanding the institution of heterosexuality and develop a "complex kind of overview" in order to dismantle that institution.

And to heterosexual feminists she suggests that they "question heterosexuality" - and promises them a "freeing-up of thinking, the exploring of new paths, the shattering of another great silence, new clarity in personal relationships..."

It is true that Adrienne Rich's paper is of great value to feminist historians who want to place their uncoverings of relationships/friendships/bondings/associations between women in a feminist political context. But Adrienne Rich's romantic interpretation of women's history as being somehow an expression of lesbianism obscures the reality and confuses different kinds of female friendships with one another - in some cases no doubt women's relationships with one another took first place in their lives, as far as that was possible. In other cases there was ambiguity in women's loyalties. 'Women-identified' friendships do not always have the strength and force of friendships between women who are lesbians. There is a qualitative difference. Lesbian women put women first - 'woman-identified' heterosexual women put men first when it comes to the crunch.

It is a mistake for us to assume that, because there were women in the past who were forced into heterosexual relationships, women nowadays have as little control over their lives and bodies. This is not true, certainly in Europe and the USA. Women can make a choice not to be heterosexual, do have the choice to be lesbian - and women who choose to be lesbians get support from other women who have made and are making that choice. Our increasing power to choose runs alongside the current upsurge of the Women's Liberation Movement - and that is no coincidence.

The other side of the coin of compulsory heterosexuality seems to be innate lesbianism. And here again I disagree with Adrienne Rich. Her argument is that heterosexuality is not necessarily innate; it has become an institution and women can have no real choice in our sexual orientation. Heterosexuality, she says, is compulsory - lesbianism (or a sort of lesbianism) is natural to us. In order to put lesbianism on the map of women's history and experience, Adrienne Rich claims that women's primary relationships are with our mothers - and are lesbian. She proceeds to re-define the term LESBIAN in order to justify her assertion. She invents the concept of a LESBIAN CONTINUUM which will include a vast range of 'woman-identified experience'. And the phrase LESBIAN EXISTENCE, she explains, means more than the existence of lesbians - it means the meaning of that existence too ... presumably in terms of our affirmation of relationships with other women and our struggle not to be victims of men.



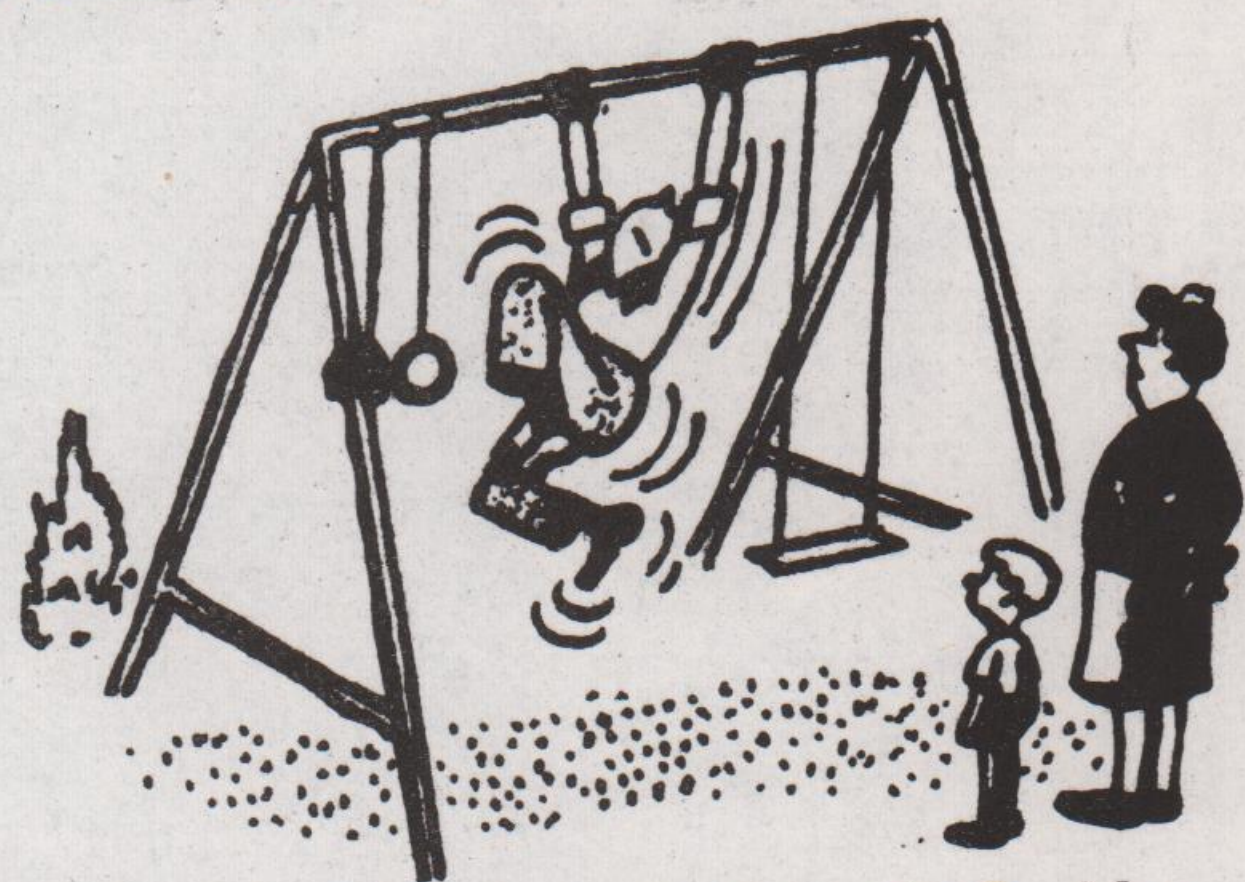
Adrienne Rich says that the word LESBIAN has "clinical associations". Yes, it is true, there is a precise and specifically sexual definition of the word. However, to broaden the definition of LESBIAN is to take away the force and impact of our self-naming. I shall here continue to use the word in its accepted meaning - otherwise I should have to invent a new word for the naming of women who join in genital sex with other women and who do not engage in sex with men. Adrienne Rich wants to "deepen and broaden the range of what we define as lesbian existence" and include female friendships, collectives, gatherings and groups - and individual resisters of men. In that case I shall have to invent a new term 'genital lesbian' with which to name myself. This hardly does away with the clinical and limiting ring to the word LESBIAN.

If, as Adrienne Rich tells us, women are forced into heterosexuality and have no choice in the matter, how is it that there are any lesbians in the world? Her answer is innate lesbianism. Her line is that women's original and primary erotic/emotional relationships are with other women. As we

grow up men use their power over us to force us to become heterosexual and male-identified (to give 'emotional, erotic loyalty and subservience to men'). The women who are lesbians - according to the usual definition - are those women who somehow escaped the universal enforcement of heterosexuality.



These ideas, at first sight, appear attractive. Adrienne Rich's lesbian continuum gives lesbians a place in the world - and a pre-eminent one: we no longer need to feel outsiders and freaks; we can now make links with heterosexual women on the basis that we share an underlying 'lesbian' identity. We can accept (graciously) too that some of us are on the genital end of the lesbian continuum and some of us aren't, all because of patriarchy which doesn't allow us freedom of choice: that heterosexuality has been used to shore up male power and the enslavement of women: that women under patriarchy "have no collective power to determine the meaning and place of sexuality in their lives", therefore lesbian feminists have no right to demand that



heterosexual women give up sex with men - because they don't have that choice: that heterosexuality is just one way in which men control us - and is not fundamental to our oppression as women and is not inextricably linked with male supremacy: that lesbians and heterosexual women are the same really and we are all sisters...



And we are left powerless. We can't break out of heterosexuality because we can't. Anyway, it seems that even if we are lesbians we may continue to identify with men - so lesbianism in itself doesn't figure as a refusal of men's power - I am sure this will placate heterosexual feminists but it is insulting to lesbians. Adrienne Rich implies throughout her paper that there is nothing political about being a lesbian. After all, she says that we have no freedom of choice about our sexual relationships - relationships just happen to us and it's all a matter of luck. But if we accept that it is



possible to make and maintain a choice not to be heterosexual then we can see lesbianism - and celibacy too - as political actions of central importance in our struggle for women's liberation.

But Adrienne Rich does not see it this way: we may seek to understand heterosexuality but not its abandonment. For in her view it is not the refusal of sex with men that gives us power but the "empowering joy" of erotic relations between women (erotic being defined in a broad sense after Audre Lord to mean "the sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic") - and the fact that some of these relations may be what I call lesbian is neither here nor there.

Lesbians know that 'relations' between women do give us power - but what use is that power if it gets drained away back into men? We shall only end up in a hopeless turmoil of contradictions unless we withdraw from men as far as possible at the same time as loving women.

There is another question which Adrienne Rich's paper raises. She supports Susan Cavin in her belief that "the original deep adult bonding is that of woman for woman"; that we lose our woman-orientation as we grow up and our emotional/erotic energies are forcibly re-directed onto men. Lesbianism (her definition) goes underground - heterosexuality becomes the norm, so that even if we were intrinsically 'lesbian' we grow up heterosexual. And even if we were intrinsically able to choose our sexual behaviour we can't now because our sexuality has been destructured and re-structured, deformed and re-formed - for men's use. But in that case how can Adrienne Rich talk about "the erotic in female terms"? Can there be a female erotic alongside heterosexuality? How can a woman begin to develop her own sexuality without breaking out of relations with men? Lesbians must also consider whether we can find our own sexuality at all under male supremacy. This is a pertinent question in the light of some women's claim that whatever we want to do we should do it (sado-masochism/role-play in relationships/'doing' our fantasies...) and in the context of a number of women searching for ways to express 'the feminist erotic' and 'the lesbian erotic' in film and in art.

I feel that Adrienne Rich's lesbian continuum, although appealing, does not face reality. She explains it as being the range of women's suppressed emotional/erotic feelings toward one another, and the expressions of those feelings in concrete ways - witches' covens, marriage-resisting sisterhoods in China, working partnerships between women, communities of Beguines, the school of Sappho - the lesbian possibility is a sort of submerged continent, like Atlantis. And like Atlantis we could go on for ever proving and disproving its existence.

And the reality is that lesbians are in a minority. We have to face this fact in order to understand the primary importance of heterosexuality in the control of women by men.

The suppression of lesbians is necessary to the continued power of men. A lesbian is a woman who refuses sex with men and embraces sex with women. Any other definition would be a dilution of the word lesbian and a weakening of the revolutionary power of lesbianism.

Altogether I feel that the lesbian continuum is a beguiling and an unhelpful concept. It is as unhelpful to propose that women are all innately lesbian as it is to say that a few women are. 'Born' lesbians do not accept the validity of lesbianism as political



choice - in the same way, the lesbian continuum model of female sexuality/experience denies the possibility of choosing lesbianism under male supremacy. It denies the revolutionary potential of choosing lesbianism. For according to Adrienne Rich we were all lesbians anyway ... and furthermore, genital sex with women isn't where it's at - that's a limited and male definition of woman-identification. What's important in her view is the sharing and creating of some sort of diffuse aura of female eroticism and the grasping of the meaning of the institution of heterosexuality.

The power of lesbianism, and of Political Lesbianism in particular, is defused and defeated, if we accept the 'innate lesbianism' argument.

The question we need to be asking is not whether all women are really lesbians at heart but whether all women should be lesbians. Aren't heterosexual relationships oppressive and destructive to all women? And even if some of us don't do sex with men, doesn't the fact of universal heterosexuality affect us too? Institutionalised heterosexuality' is a resounding phrase that obscures the reality of our lives: that heterosexual is men's power over women. We are all oppressed by heterosexuality whether we are ever fucked by men or not; but men's control of us is most effective when they get to fuck us - and the oftener the better. All forms of harassment by men are reminders of this fact and serve to reinforce men's power over us.

And although Adrienne Rich is right when she says that the self-powered prick is part of a mystique, the power of the prick is not. It is real and specific. It is both the instrument of our degradation and the implement of his power. He fucks and we are fucked. He impregnates and we are impregnated. And even if a woman has never been fucked, she knows what sex is all about because she is immersed in our heterosexual culture and is the target of all kinds of heterosexual propaganda.

Heterosexuality is surrounded with propaganda, including the propaganda of lies and omissions. The lies are called 'mystification' by feminists and include what we call 'romantic love'; also the lie that marriage is fulfillment; that we get protection from being attached to one man; that the male sex-drive is an overpowering urge; that female sexuality is a counterpart, a sort of mirror-image, of male sexuality, and finds its true and ecstatic expression in sexual activities with men.

There are lots more lies and silences. More and more money and energy is being deployed in the control of women through heterosexuality - there is 'sex education' and sex therapy, marriage guidance counselling and family therapy. More and more teenage and women's magazines are being promoted, all based on the assumption that we want heterosexuality. And if marriages don't work it's our fault, and if we are frigid we are unnatural, and if we get raped we were asking for it, and if our husband/boyfriend kills us we provoked him ... these are all lies, and it is another lie that we cannot choose to get out.

Heterosexuality causes hurt and suffering. Heterosexuality is a harmful and lethal occupation for women. The dangers can be both immediate and delayed - cervical cancer, gonorrhoea, syphilis, cystitis, physical damage due to the mechanics of excessive fucking. Pregnancy and childbirth cause death, so does abortion, so do the most 'reliable' forms of contraception. All forms of contraception have harmful side-effects and we do not yet know how widespread and how serious these are.



This is what 'sex' is about - and it is presented to us as joy. Men ensure that our models for genital sex are male models - sex without pricks and penetration doesn't really exist, isn't really real. What is real is the sex we know - the sex of being fucked. And every fuck reinforces his power, his ego, and reinforces our powerlessness, our namelessness.

That's 'the joy of sex'. And to choose (in contradiction to all that, and in outright rebellion against the claims of men over our bodies) a 'sex' which does not reinforce male power is to fight back against male power.

Once we realise that heterosexuality is central to our oppression we shall want to get out of it. Once we see that it harms, hurts and kills women we shall want to convey what we know to other women. Women do find comfort, friendship, companionship and sexual intimacy with other women. That way we can release ourselves from the contradiction of trying to become liberated at the same time as being heterosexual.

When Adrienne Rich says "the relations of the sexes are disordered and extremely problematic, if not disabling, for women" she is gravely understating the case. Women are being humiliated, degraded, assaulted, disfigured, injured, raped, killed, locked up, cut up .... and it's for men's benefit. Adrienne Rich's language is too mild and placatory, liberal and inclusive. And she does not leave us with any weapons with which to tackle our oppression. All she suggests is that we follow the directions of Kathleen Barry and get to know all we can about sexual violence and "learn to chart our course out of this oppression, by envisioning and creating a world which will preclude female sexual slavery".

I do not think heterosexuality is neutral ground in our struggle for women's liberation. I believe we have to advocate women's abandonment of heterosexual relationships.

My main criticism of Adrienne Rich's paper is that she does not bring back her interpretation of female sexuality and of lesbianism to any concrete discussion of struggle and tactics. She tells us there are no sexual choices for women. She avoids condemning heterosexuality. She places all women on a dazzling rainbow that spans centuries and links women of all social and sexual backgrounds. That rainbow of promise is the lesbian continuum. The trouble with it is that it doesn't match up with reality and it doesn't help us to work out how to fight. Anxious not to alienate heterosexual women, Adrienne Rich succeeds in taking the political out of lesbianism.... and in making Political Lesbianism seem impossible, irrelevant. Yes: heterosexuality IS - it exists. But we can change that: for lesbianism exists too. And every woman can be a lesbian; she can choose to be. That way the power of men can be undermined, and the power of women be freed for collective work and struggle to end male supremacy.

I am indebted to women with whom I have been discussing female sexuality and Political Lesbianism. Also to women who have written in various publications recently - such as the 2 issues of Scarlet Women on Sexuality. I have also developed ideas from the pamphlet LOVE YOUR ENEMY? (pub. by Onlywomen Press). COMPULSORY HETEROSEXUALITY AND LESBIAN EXISTENCE is also published by Onlywomen Press.

Danu



# SADO-MASOCHISM

## What is Sado-Masochism?

Sadism has been defined as obtaining (sexual) pleasure from dominating, humiliating someone or causing them pain. Masochism has been defined as obtaining (sexual) pleasure in being dominated, humiliated or treated cruelly.

Thus sado-masochism is an exaggerated form of normal heterosexuality in this culture. A normal sexuality that reinforces male dominance with each act of intercourse or reference to it - as the following story illustrates.

A friend of mine got a crossed line on the phone the other day. The man who interrupted her conversation ordered her off the line. She refused. 'Go to bed' he said and hung up.

How come the very mention of the word 'bed' is supposed to put a woman in her place? How come every reference to 'sex' boosts the male ego and puts women down? We have been taught to laugh at our Victorian grandmothers who would not allow any word connected with sex to be mentioned in their presence. They knew any reference to sex, by a man, put them down. This has not changed. I think some of us fell for the con of the 'sexual revolution' because we thought it would change it.

No act of intercourse under male supremacy can be free of connotations of winning (him) and losing (her).

## Can Women Be Sadists?

Women who are forced by men, as prostitutes, wives or girlfriends, to take the sadist role are NOT sadists. We are simply being forced to perform to men's desires, the real power is still in their hands.

This is clear from de Sade's life and from his writings. 'Although the aristocrats on top are not maimed, they are, at their own comand, whipped and sodomised. They remain entirely in control even when whipped or sodomised. Everything done to or by them is for the purpose of bringing them to orgasm on their own terms' 1/

is also clear from women who have worked as prostitutes descriptions of what they have to do. The masochist clients each demand elaborate rituals which the women must get exactly right, even if only working from hints. At the end the men say things like 'You're a slut, I don't know how you can do such filthy things'. 2/

That some women might learn to think they enjoy the sadist role is not impossible - we have learned to 'enjoy' many roles in sexuality that men have put upon us. But that does not mean women are sadists, men are still in control.

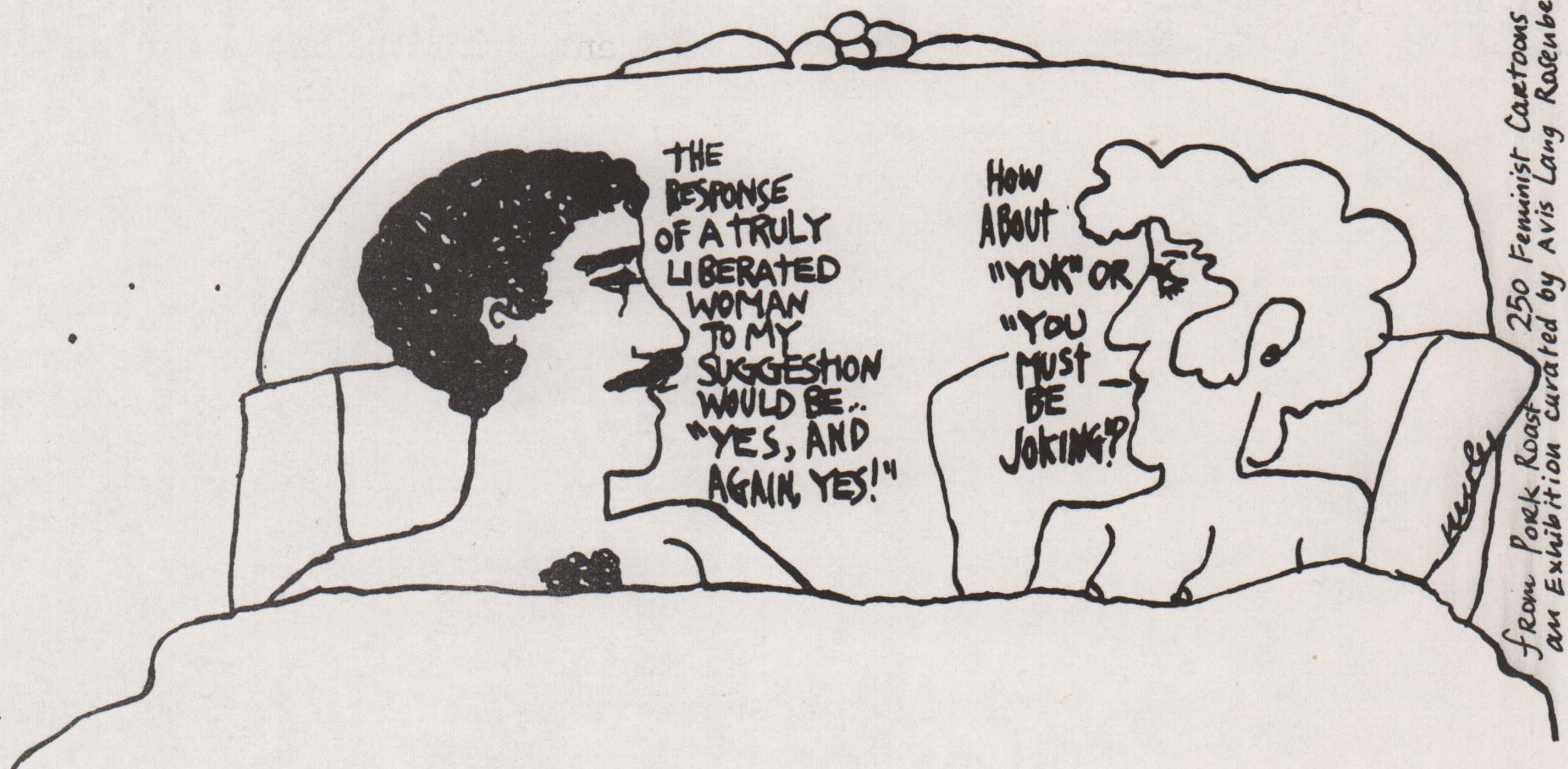
For women to BE sadists there would have to be a total power reversal in society, with us having power over men. And this is hardly what we mean when we talk about a self defined sexuality, we want a world free from such domination.

## Can Women Be Masochists?

Much is made, especially in psychoanalytic literature, of the idea that sadism and masochism are two sides of the same coin. Maybe they are for men. Men after all created the categories sadism and masochism and defined them. They can choose which role to play - always being able to step out of the role if they want to switch.



Nicole Hollander, I'M IN TRAINING TO BE TALL AND BLONDE, 1979. (USA)



The masochist role is however culturally created in women by men, as it reflects the power structure of men over women and works to maintain it. So any promotion of sado-masochism will reinforce the masochist role in women.

Having forced women to accept the masochist role as our sexuality, men then talk of women being inherently masochistic. Women psychoanalysts from Helene Deutsch to modern feminist psychoanalysts have laboured with the problem: are women inherently masochistic?

Sadism and Masochism are male constructed concepts just like Masculinity and Femininity. Thus only men can really be sadists and only men can be really masculine, as when they play those roles they can draw on the real power of men over women. And men if they choose can be feminine (even transexuals and transvestites) and be masochists. But women have no choice.

We no longer ask 'are women inherently feminine' recognising it as a male construct.

We should be no more asking 'are women inherently masochistic?' than we should be asking 'are women inherently feminine?'

Sado-masochism is a male sexual construct. Constructed and promoted to be functional in the oppression of women, just as masculinity/femininity is. Of course women's actual behaviour - and fantasies - can be fitted into the male category of 'masochistic', its not surprising. We should not however be talking of female masochism. We need another term, something that means sexuality that has been constructed in women to fit in with male sexuality.

Sado-masochism highlights or reveals the normal form men have constructed sexuality to take. Some individual men might actually choose to let us play the sadist or dominant partner for a time - or a lifetime. But what choice is that for us?

Some women might 'choose' to have masochistic fantasies or live out the masochist role, like women 'choose' to be feminine. What choice is that for us? Its no choice.



## So What Are We Going To Do About It?

We can stop participating in any form of sexual activity with men. But this is not enough, men still control our lives, the structure of society and our sexuality.

We must get together with other women for strength to combat male defined sexuality. Part of that struggle must be against the pushing of more and more overt sado-masochism via hard core porn and sex manuals.

It's being pushed by men as it reinforces male dominance.

We can also use consciousness raising to fight the construction of so-called sado-masochism in us.

It is not a necessary component of our sexuality; it is part of male control.

Sandra McNeill 13/2/81.

After discussions in Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group and the Patriarchy Study Group.

1/ Dworkin (Andrea) The Prophet of Perversion, a study of the life and works of de Sade. Mother Jones Vol V no III April 1980 USA.

2/ C.... 'We take it for all women' in Prostitutes Our Life. eg Jaget (Claud) Falling Wall Press 1980 UK.

See Scarlet Woman 13 Part 2 Sexuality for further discussion of this and related topics.



"They say they're the Men Against Sexism come to do the creche."

WMC 8.10.81.



# WIDOWS

(a story)

The cell nucleus of a woman consists of two female halves. The cell nucleus of a man consists of a female and a male half. If we were able to roll all chromosomes of humankind into a ball, then half of the men would be included in the total-female genetic material, their other half, however, would fall out of femaleness for their own male genetic material.

It follows, that a viral flu infecting women could also infect men, but that there is a viral flu imaginable which threatens men only and spares women; that is, if the virus was specialised in destroying the male half of the cell nucleus. Then the men would lie down and the women would stay on their feet - they would have to. Let us imagine the consequences of such a viral flu. At first, the women would not care much about their moaning husbands who were crawling back into bed. They would not be alarmed either by the woman next door saying "My husband doesn't feel well either". Then suddenly all the lamps and sources of light would go out as if cut by an axe. There is no electricity in the whole country. Because the workers and employees of the power stations are men.

Aeroplanes would be in the air - without being able to land ever again; not even American planes with a female co-pilot. Because the men in the tower are men. Females being inferior - sorry! different - all strategic positions in industry and technology have to be occupied by men. But there is a female minister of the family.

Boats would be on the sea, unable forever to arrive somewhere again. For the hierarchy of seamen accepts female taxpayers\* whose money is used to build new boats, but it does not accept female steersmen\*\* on board of these boats. But there is a female minister of health.

It is surprising how many liberated women there are in the public health service. But most of them are inferior carriers of chamber-pots. The number of female doctors is just enough to doctor their male colleagues. There would be no power of medical women to help the mass of men and oppose the plague.

Lorries stop on the road. The drivers have opened the doors and fallen out. Women whose penis-envy had been strong enough to learn how to drive get out of their minis and vw's and into the cabins of the lorries and drive the heavy growlers with one or two trailers into town.

Actually women can't achieve all that. That's why they cannot get rid of the feeling that they are doing something wrong. But the kids have to be fed and the daily bread is in the lorries which get jammed in front of the non-working traffic-lights.

As women cannot think logically they waste a lot of time trying to ring male saviours on dead phones. Then again a lot of time passes while women are gathering in front of the lift hoping and praying that it may move in a mysterious way, at last.

\* = Steuerzahler

\*\* = Steuerleute



At last, the women start to work. They try to transport the men through the staircases of the skyscrapers. They get down to the 7th floor. Then the women from the 5th floor shout that everything is blocked. 36 men have to be taken to hospital at the same time. Some of them die on the steps. The women walk over them and return to their flats, not for hardheartedness but for desperation. There is one woman-specific activity which is ideally fitted to the capacity of female workers: looking out of the window. The women open the window and look down. Then they do the right thing. They throw their spouses and bosses out of the windows of the livingrooms and offices. The lorry-women - having become nicely tough in the meantime - patrol the streets and collect the dead bodies from the pavement.

Where there are men, there are building projects, and where there are building projects, there are mixing machines and cement. Women are highly-talented, unskilled construction workers. Now their talent is needed. They pile up the dead men in the building projects and cement them in.

As for the deadly breakdown of the men the underground will never move again, the underground-tunnels can serve as containers for the masses of dead bodies. Like this, millions of corpses can be removed without any smoke polluting the air nor chemicals poisoning the environment.

Now and then the women are overcome by fear and trembling, which they shake off quickly. It is true, there are no boy-friends and protectors any more, but there are also neither womanslaughterers nor violators any more. The bodies of the dead men create an atmosphere of security and peace which the bodies of the living men never were able to.

The women who had learned karate in order to ram their elbows into the loins of rapists, now wish that they had learned technical first aid. Because now the women who know anything about technology are the stars; let's hope that the principles of feminist democracy are sacred to them.

At night all work necessarily has to stop. The women light candles or make oil lamps. They get together in meetings. A feeling of bitterness is growing in the crowd. It seems like an arbitrary act of revenge by the men, to leave their widows in such a state of ignorance and impotence and helplessness.

But as the men really can't be blamed for perishing the women's bad humour eventually changes into good humour. They become gayer and gayer.

For the first time in their lives some women walk through a park at night on their own. The empty and cold streets of the big cities are not really as dark as it seems. A huge light rises. Many women know it from tele when the men flew there; it is the moon.

We do not want to deny that there is beating and plundering. But the bad ones are people of your own kind and strength opposes strength. No superior enemy squashes you on the ground. The possibility of opposition makes the women determined to fight, and the female rowdies are pensioned off.



Next morning an exodus starts from the cities into the country, where food grows out of the earth and the buckets of water do not have to be lifted up to the 12th floor. Some female students of medicine have stayed and want to get back to the agenda. They want to dissect a man. But the women have done their job perfectly. Where is there a man left for the dissection hall? They go to the hospital. The women doctors are cleaning the floors together with the cleaning women. They point down to the ground.

The students go into the basement. The corpse-carriers are just putting their stretchers, which have become biers, back to the walls and leave, shrugging their shoulders. Off-time!

The students walk along the streets. They meet a troop of housewives. They are unemployed and in a marvellous mood. They are still wearing the left-overs of their pink blouses, but the high-heeled shoes they have thrown away. Their feet show a crust of lime. Their hair is powdered with dust. They pass a bottle from hand to hand and are very noisy.

In fact, these women are in such a state of nervous breakdown, physical exhaustion and drunkenness, that each of these states would be able to knock them down. But all three of them keep their bodies in a balance like three tent poles carrying the roof of the tent.

The students talk to these housewives\* who are now building-women\*\* and express their absurd wish: they urgently need the corpse of a man.

The immense struggle for survival has cut the women off from the origin of their misery: that things changed overnight because there are no men any more. The students' question sobers the housewives, and watching the sobering the students experience an awakening. They awake in another world.

The building-women walk back with the students to the entrance of an underground station. The entrance has been completely closed by a wall. The cement has not dried yet. One woman hits the stones of the wall she has just built and says: "Do you know where there is anything to eat?"

Yes, that's the problem now.

\* = Hausfrauen

\*\* = Baufrauen

Translated by Elfriede from  
Christa Reinig's  
Der Wolf und die Witwen  
Erzählungen und Essays  
Düsseldorf 1980



"I spent years looking for the perfect husband, but in the end I settled for a goldfish"

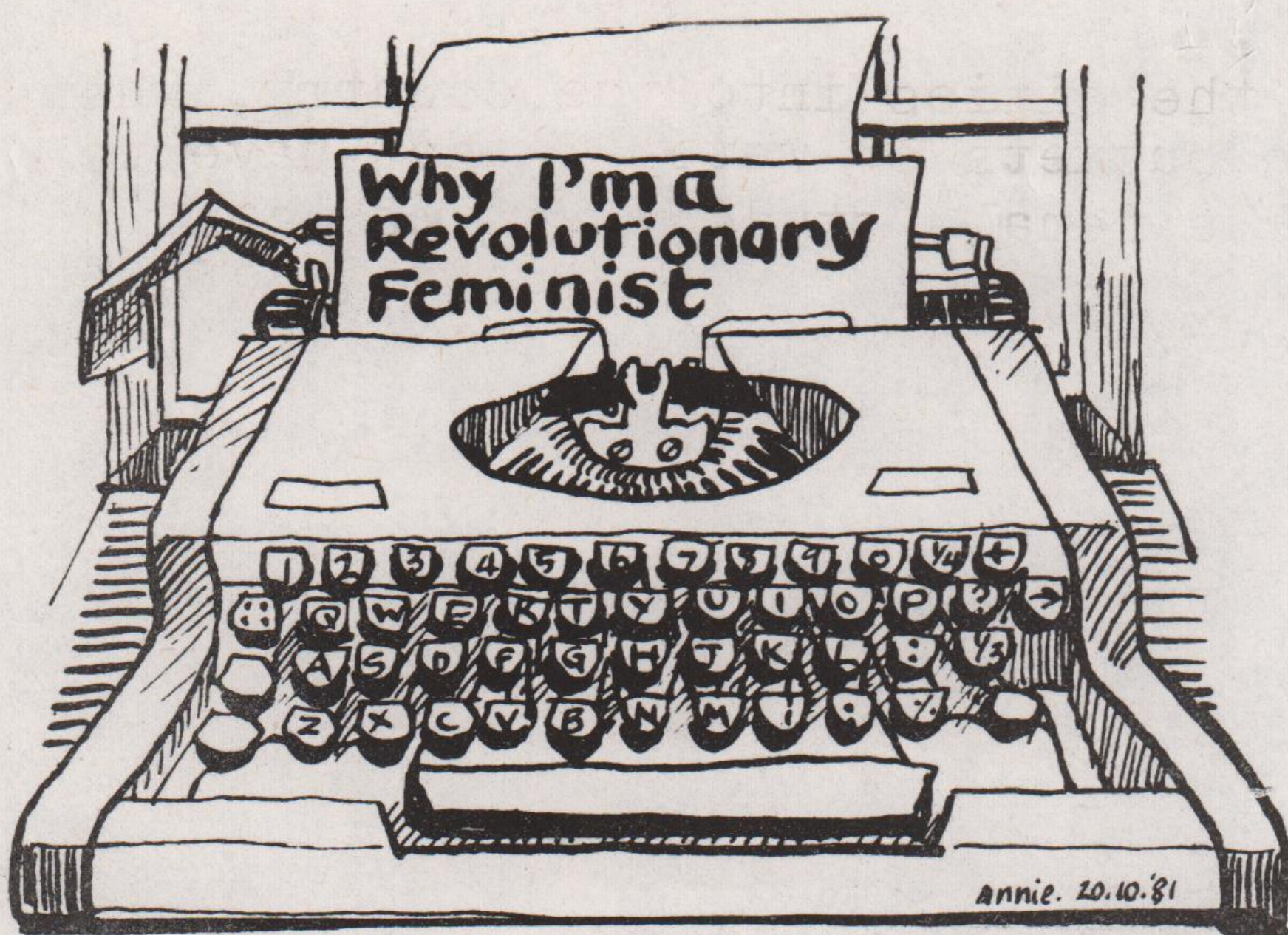
from Women's Liberation Newsletter



Low. Daily Star. 24.4.81.

"I keep getting little stabbing pains in the head, dear."





This is the fourth in a series of five papers on "Why we are Revolutionary Feminists".

"We are a group of seven Revolutionary Feminists who have been meeting since April this year. We wrote these papers in an attempt to trace for ourselves and for other women, how and why we came to our particular political perspective."

Linda, Maeve, Maria, Nicky, Robyn,  
Sharon, Val. July, 1980.

My early herstory doesn't seem to bear much relevance to the fact that I now identify as a Revolutionary Feminist. Suffice to say that my father was in the air force and until I was nineteen, I had never spent more than two years in any one town or city.

I suppose I was more concerned with making new friends and gaining some stability in my life than I was with what was happening in the wider world around me. I went to airforce schools, read airforce versions of the news and spent most of my time with other airforce kids, and it wasn't until I went to university that I began to discover that I was a person, had rights and choice (I didn't discover until later that I only had limited rights and limited choice) and a social and a political consciousness grew from that.

Dissatisfied with university life, I dropped out after six months and started training as a nurse. I came to within two months of marrying, but discarded that also as a complete waste of time and life.

My first contact with the W.L.M. came several years ago when I joined an International Womens Day March that happened to be going down the street where I was shopping. It seemed right. I fitted, and as far as I am concerned, I've never looked back since. I joined a C.R. group and a Radical Lesbian group whose politics were indistinguishable from that of the Rev/Fem group I'm currently involved with.

Soon after arriving in England, I joined Lesbian Left for basically two reasons - one being that they were the only group in London that I knew of who were exclusively lesbian and the second being that I knew very little about Socialist Feminism and was interested in finding out more. I enjoyed the meetings for the most part and I got a lot of energy and support from the women in the group.

The first crunch came during a discussion on male violence (the dreaded seventh demand) when I was surprised to discover that not all of the group agreed with the basic premise that all men were potential rapists.

The shit hit the fan from that point onwards, the "crunches" followed one another in rapid succession.

I know what it is and who it is that oppresses me most, each time I walk out of my front door. It's not capitalism, it's not class structure, it's not other women, it's men.

Why do we blame each other, blame lesbian women, Soc/Fems, Rev/Fems, middle-class women, white women or any woman for the structure of class, racism, sexism and ageism that no woman is to blame for because none of us has had the power to create those structures? They are patriarchal creations, not ours.

I may be paranoid but I have a gut feeling that the latest polarisations within the Women's Liberation Movement are yet again subtle and less subtle attempts by men to divide and rule - men in the left, men in our beds and men in our heads.

I am a Revolutionary Feminist because I believe :

- that all men are the enemy.
- that women's oppression predates and is the root cause of all others.
- that men, being men, will never relinquish their power without a violent struggle, and I am committed in the long term, to a women's Revolution which will see the overthrow of male power, dominance and privilege.
- that the personal is political and that failure to be a lesbian and a separatist would be both hypocritical and destructive towards the women with whom I struggle.



# THE GOAL OF A FEMINIST POLITICS..... THE DESTRUCTION OF MALE SUPREMACY OR THE PURSUIT OF PLEASURE?

a critique of the sex issue of Heresies.

## The attack on Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW)

The American feminist journal Heresies number 10 gives room to the kind of libertarian, pleasure-seeking sexual politics which justifies paedophilia, pornography, sado-masochism, trans-sexuality (female imitators) and the institution of heterosexuality. The sophisticated and relentless pushing of sexual pleasure which is to be found in the majority of the articles is coupled with a hostility to feminist anti-porn and anti-male violence groups in the States.

The accusation that feminists who campaign against or condemn anybody's chosen form of sexual expression and recreation are censorious and narrow-minded, is hardly new. What is new is the extent to which we are hearing these familiar male put-downs from within our own supposed ranks. The fierce debates taking place in the American Womens Liberation Movement about sexuality (see the on-going discussion in Off Our Backs) are beginning to find echoes and sequels in British feminist ideas. At the recent Communist University of London annual event\*, several women in both the "Sexual Identity" and the "WAVAW" workshops seemed to regard pleasure as politically unproblematic and good in and of itself. But I think we must challenge and oppose any feminists who seek to legitimate those sexual practices and preferences which are detrimental to all women. If the experience of C.U.L. is any indicator, we may soon have to contend with political attacks on WAVAW groups in this country. Therefore I think we should look very carefully at the dangerous implications of the pro-pleasure arguments and begin to state forcefully and clearly why we do not think feminists should adopt such a position.

## A Revolutionary Feminist Sexual Politics

I believe that a feminist sexual politics necessitates complete sexual withdrawal from men, and strategies for exposing and fighting the techniques and propaganda men employ in order to maintain their power over women. I cannot see this perspective as being synonymous or compatible with the pursuit of pleasure, given that we live under male supremacy and may have internalised male sexual values to the extent that we "enjoy" and gain pleasure from being humiliated. What gives us pleasure may not always be in our own best interests.

## The Politics of Heresies

The politics of Sex Issues are a curious and contradictory mixture. There are elements of freudianism, marxism, libertarianism, hedonism and anti-feminism all sitting uncomfortably together.

## Anti-Feminism

The editorial collective insist that "it is not necessarily true that women share a uniform relationship to sexuality, sexual identity, fantasy and sexual practice" without realising or acknowledging that this is a profoundly anti-feminist statement. This emphasis on the diversity and plurality of women's experience contradicts the basic first principle of feminism, i.e. that we are all sexually oppressed by men. It sees us as atomized individuals struggling towards a "self-generated" sexuality according to our particular choices and desires. Feminists spent years endeavouring to de-privatise sex and put it into the arena of feminist politics and these women wish to take it out again.



Some of the collective even "suggested that there was something intrinsically different about sex which might preclude it from being modified by the word 'feminist'. This something could be its privateness, its roots in infancy, its unique connection with repression". So sex is not political at all. Another aspect of the anti-feminism is the constant and savage attacks on feminists who do not wish to see every sexual fantasy and desire liberated. We are accused variously of being moralistic, anti-sex and uptight. (Does this sound suspiciously like the guilt-tripping rhetoric of the male sexual revolution?) and our politics are caricatured and misrepresented. Paula Webster in her article "Pornography and Pleasure" (which condones porn, needless to say) and Pat Califia in her piece "Feminism and Sado-masochism" (which condones S. and M.) both claim that their opponents are trying to celebrate and eternalise feminine virtues such as passivity but the alternative which they posit is no more than role reversal and playing men at their own game. As a rebellious alternative it looks remarkably conformist and non-threatening to the male status quo. It is simply perpetuating male sexuality amongst ourselves and can only serve to indirectly reinforce our oppression. But P. Califia and P. Webster do not seem to care much about women's oppression. Their anger and vitriol is reserved for feminists and not for men. Indeed none of the many articles analyse or attack male sexuality.

Vanilla\* people send flowers, poetry or candy, or they exchange rings. S/M people do all that, and may also lick boots, wear a locked collar, or build their loved ones a rack in the basement. There is little objective difference between a feminist who is offended by the fact that my lover kneels to me in public and sub-urbanites calling the cops because the gay boys next door are sunbathing in the nude. My sexual semiotics differ from the mainstream. So what? I didn't join the feminist movement to live inside a Hallmark greeting card.  
(\*Vanilla is to S/M what straight is to gay)

Pat Califia.

### Libertarianism and Marxism

Libertarian and gay male left attitudes to sex are promoted throughout Heresies. Apparently women are oppressed by conventional, bourgeois morality and not by men at all. The libertarian strand of thought focuses on the sexual freedom angle and the marxist on the revolutionary potential of sex. Libertarian politics tend to conflate the struggle for women's liberation with the struggle for sexual freedom. The main sentiment in Heresies is that it is sexuality that is repressed rather than women who are oppressed and therefore it is people's right to free sexual expression which must be defended even if this may prove antithetical to women's liberation.

We believe that all people, whatever their sexual preference and predilections, have an unalienable right to freedom of sexual association with a consenting partner, regardless of whether others approve of their behaviour. We therefore support the right of individuals to practice consensual sadomasochism and to use pornography for sexual gratification.

Rosalyn Baxandall, Barnie Bellow,  
Cynthia Carr, Karen Dunbar, Brett Harvey, M. Monk, Alix Kate Shulman,  
Ann Snitow, Katy Taylor, Ellen Willis (a group of 'feminist activists').

Pat Califia's belief in the inalienable rights of the individual lead her to support lowering the age of consent and legalising prostitution. Men must have the legalised right of access to girl children and paid sex. As Pat Califia (like the rest of the women writers in Heresies) does not have any concept of male supremacy, she cannot recognise that a liberalisation of the sexual climate can only increase men's sexual control of women. She switches to gay left arguments when it suits her and trots out the old chestnut about non-procreative forms of sexuality undermining the nuclear family and thus hastening Capitalism's decline. This line is also implicit in other articles, particularly Paula Webster's. There is a major contradiction in the simultaneous insistence on individual rights AND people's rights. I think marxist and libertarian arguments are introduced randomly because these women are quite desperate and hell bent



on justifying what they like best in whatever arbitrary political terms seem convenient. How they can reconcile the libertarian and freudian emphasis on an innate sexuality which is being repressed with the marxist belief in the social construction of sexual identity is a problem they leave unexplained.

### Sex Issue of Heresies - or Why Should Men have all the fun?

It seems ironic that I should have spent so many hours reassuring women that feminists do not want to be like men and along come the Heresies women insisting that that is precisely what we do want to be like. The kind of sexuality which is encouraged by these women separates sex from emotion, objectifies women in pornography, justifies power relationships which are based on the giving and receiving of pain (lesbian S. and M.) and supports the very male sexual minorities (transsexuals and paedophiles) who are most in the vanguard of oppressing women. The institution of heterosexuality is left unexamined and lesbianism is treated as no more than a sexual preference. Claiming to be moving towards a goal of sexual pleasure, what these women are really doing is sanctioning and abetting male sexual tyranny over women. I do not oppose these women because I am some sort of matriarchal, back-to-nature feminist who believes that women are naturally mothers or healers with a tender, nurturing and passive sexuality. I believe that women have been sexually controlled and colonised by men and that therefore we cannot celebrate our present sexual characteristics (with their predominant element of masochism) as essential and eternal. Similarly I don't attack male sexuality because it is nasty, crude and unfeminine in an unchanging and fixed way, but rather because it is the crucial instrument of our control, and has developed in ways suitable to this purpose. It is not a question of saying that men are bad and women are good and I feel sure that the Heresies women realise that anti-porn and male violence feminists for the most part are not claiming this. But it is easier for them to attack us if they represent our politics as reasserting victorian and conservative morality.

Dogmatism, moralising, and censorial mystifying tended to dominate the anti-porn campaign.....

One viewer for example asked why the photo of a young girl about to have anal intercourse was described (by Women Against Pornography) as "the violent rape of a child". The reply was that she was obviously under age, so at least it was statutory rape. The lecturer added that anal intercourse was "very painful"; therefore it was unlikely that this "tiny young girl" could have been anything but brutally injured. I thought this reply indicated certain biases about pain and pleasure and preferred positions.

Paula Webster.

What is sad, but perhaps inevitable, about the direction the pursuit of pleasure has lead these women into is that for all its claims to be innovative and daring it really only demonstrates the extent to which some women have internalised male supremacist values. All the so-called alternatives are, in fact, modelled on the dominant male sexuality. But we cannot select aspects of male sexuality (i.e. the need to dominate and objectify sexual partners) and somehow neutralise or subvert them. They cannot be used for feminist purposes because their sole function is to oppress women. Reproducing and emulating the forms male sexuality has taken can only facilitate its development as the instrument of our oppression.

In the process of fighting male power the extent to which we can speak of an authentic, self-defined female sexuality is limited, although I do believe lesbianism as a political strategy and sexual practice to be the beginning of this self-definition. Our needs, desires and preferences have all been constructed under male supremacy and our subjective responses to our powerlessness and subordination cannot be prioritised if they further enslave us. The logical conclusion to arguments in favour of the pursuit of pleasure is best and most frighteningly expressed in a letter I read in Off our Backs. The woman writes "I would like to see the end of violence, especially violence towards women and children, but I am not ready to see it at the cost of my own freedom".

Personally, if I had to choose between sexual "liberation" and women's liberation I would choose the latter every time.

Jayne Egerton. September, 1981.

(after many hours of discussion with the London Revolutionary Feminist Sexuality Group).



# The personal is political

Political means characterised by policy. It is in this context that women's problems in relations with (or relations to) men are to be considered political. Such problems are not personal - in the sense of individual and unique - but political, resulting from a culture-wide attitude toward women - misogyny. Here the emphasis is not on the personal, but on the political. That is, the commonality of each woman's personal experiences reveals the underlying policy of how men relate to women.

At the same time, one's personal life is also in itself a statement and demonstration of one's politics. It is 'characterised by policy'. Thus my decisions to forego Nestles products, intimate relationships with men, and job opportunities with corporate law firms, are political ones. I don't see my position as being particularly more 'pure' than anyone else's - my life is not without contradictions - but I do see it as an attempt at consistency, an attempt to be aware of the contradictions and a continual struggle to reconcile them.

In a simplified form, my position is that I believe that all men, whether or not they choose to exercise it, have power. I believe that the power imbalance between men and womyn is reflected in and maintained by a vast network of social institutions (not the least of which is marriage/ nuclear family). I believe that the system was set up this way by men, and that its continuance is in no small part assured by the consent, however coercively obtained, of women. Two implications of this are: (1) the system works as it does because the men want it that way. The benefits they enjoy are many, and neither the blatant nor the insidious injustices bother them. Thus (2) as long as women continue to support the system by supporting the men, the men will have no reason to change.

One can say that as long as we continue to support oppressive institutions they will have no reason to change - but this manner of speaking hides the identity of those who are doing the oppressing. Oppression is not accomplished by abstract entities, but by the men who make the decisions, and the men and (dare I say it) women who willingly or unthinkingly, without reflection as to the implications of their actions, decide to carry them out. An essential part of feminism is, and will continue to be, the examination of our lives. The personal application of our political beliefs, however, is equally important and necessary. Not only do 'actions speak louder than words' but ultimately it is action that is needed to result in change.

Co-optation is a growing problem. It seems to me that one of the reasons for its prevalence is the hazy definition of the 'radical' in radical feminism. 'Radical' used to mean any woman who refuses to allow blame for the oppression of womyn to be placed on 'society' or this or that 'institution' but who (like the child in the story of the emperor's clothes) says out loud 'but it's the MEN'. This is in some ways THE difference between radical feminists and those who think feminism is in itself 'radical', the latter are usually unwilling to place responsibility where it properly belongs. In fact, seemingly the blame belongs nowhere, for no person seems to be responsible. Men are unfortunate products of their cultural



upbringing, as presumably incapable of thinking/deciding for themselves as they are of crying and controlling their violent impulses. Thus, men are just as oppressed as womyn, just as much in need of 'liberation'. The oppression of 'people' is a malfunctioning of the system. Like a neglected (poorly designed?) engine, it just needs a little fine tuning in order to be running smoothly.

Radical feminists, on the other hand, usually not in the most tactful of terms, point out that this is garbage. The present system was expressly constructed so as to oppress womyn and 'fine tuning' cannot hope to do more than (at the whim - they call it 'discretion' - of men) elevate the positions of a few womyn. It does not touch let alone attack the 'right' of male authority to choose whether to make decisions for us, or to magnanimously allow us to make them for ourselves. Radical feminism points out the difference between having the men allow us to touch the reins, and taking the reins into our own hands.

But, the difference between feminism and radical feminism runs deeper than this. It is the difference between reformism and revolution. Radical feminists do not care about the Equal Rights Amendment; radical feminists do not want womyn to become vice-presidents of General Motors or the Supreme Court Justices. Such womyn may be 'of women born' but they are 'man made'. Womyn with the discomfiting habit of pointing out unpleasant realities - such as that welfare mothers cannot live on what amounts to one-third below national poverty line (to use one of the milder examples) are not appointed, elected, promoted, or hired into positions where they could give effect to their dangerous, heretical notions.

Radical feminism is a way of looking at the world, of seeing a certain reality, the reality of womyn's lives, that men would prefer to believe (and would prefer us to believe) does not exist. Radical Feminism sees women as unpaid domestics, as unconsenting guinea pigs for medical experimentation, as battered and raped, as humiliated and degraded in the street, in print, in movies, offices, courts of law, their homes. Radical Feminism thus sees clearly how men see womyn - as chattel, as objects of violence, as performers of shitwork. Radical Feminism sees too that even those men who claim to regard women as 'fellow' human beings, are none the less unwilling to give up their male privileges, or to encourage men to do so.

Radical Feminism means realising the source of womyn's oppression is men, and the culture men have constructed for the enhancement of their own power and for their own self-aggrandizement. Radical Feminism means rejecting men's philosophy of power, hierarchy and coercion. In order to reject these we need to be able to recognise their forms. This means seeing the inherently oppressive nature of institutions - from the legal system to marriage and the nuclear family - and working to give ourselves alternatives. We do this not because it makes our lives any easier (although it rarely might, usually the reverse is true) but because to do otherwise is to perpetuate these institutions and the oppression of ourselves and others.

Radical Feminism therefore is another way of seeing not only the



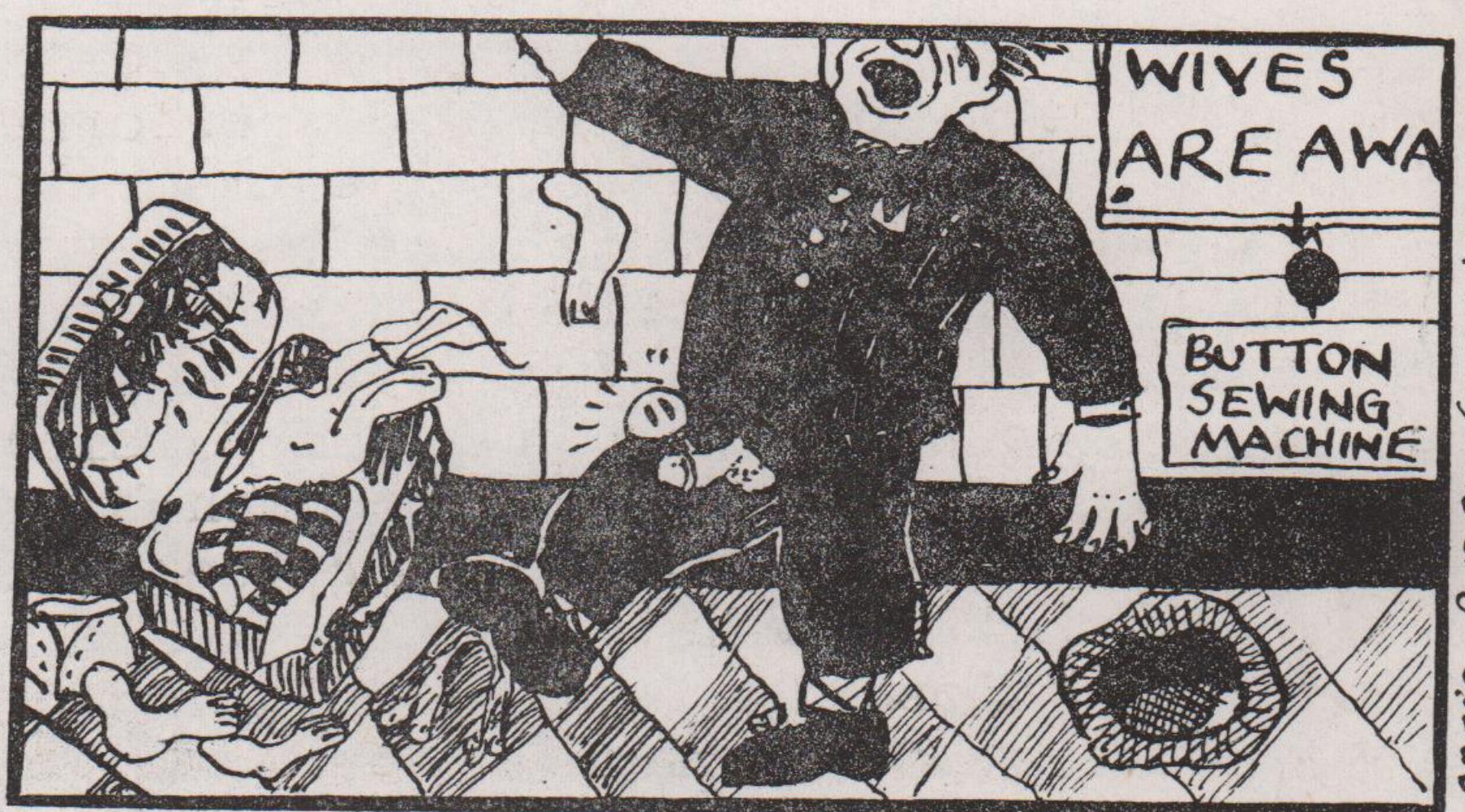
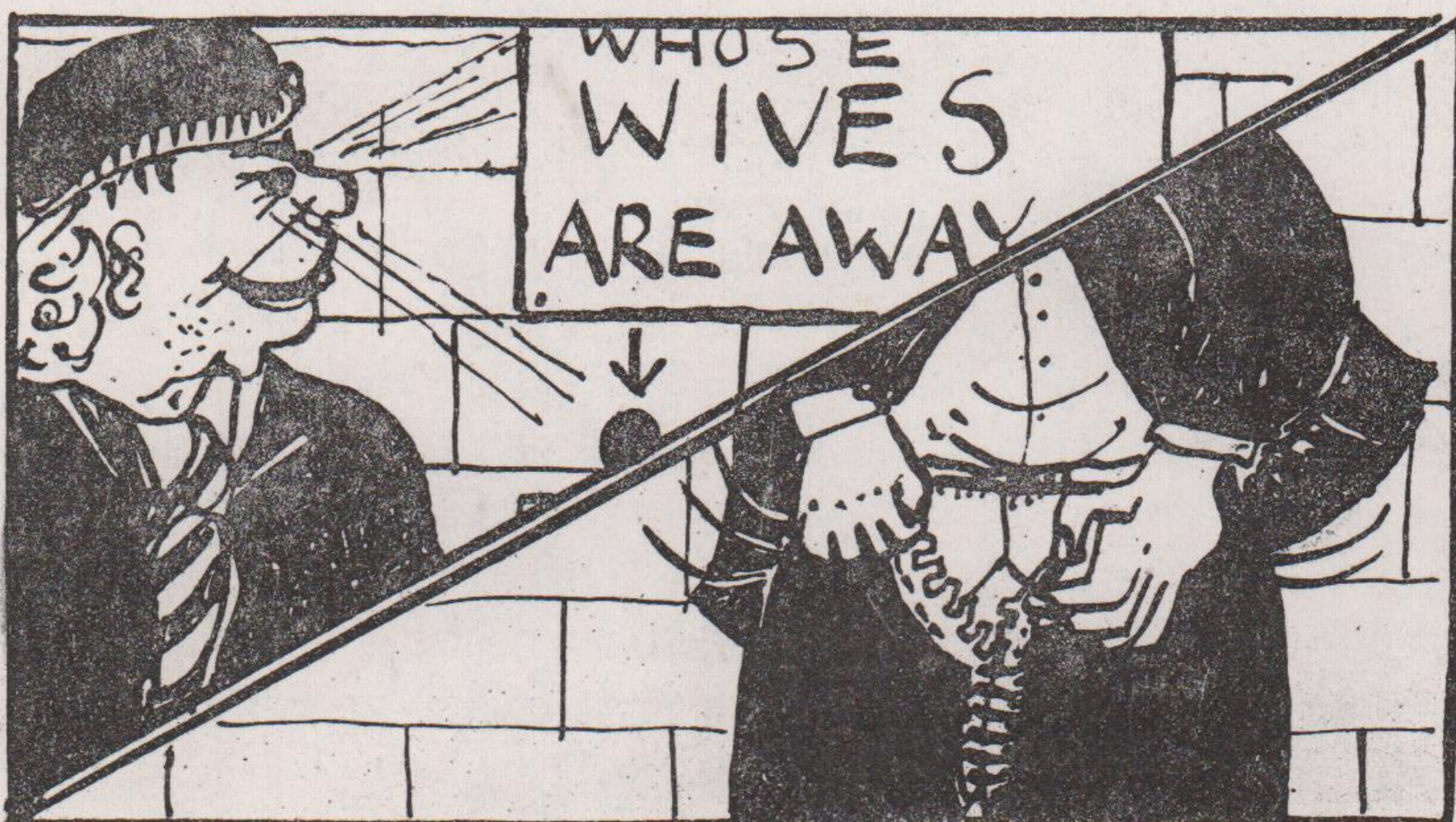
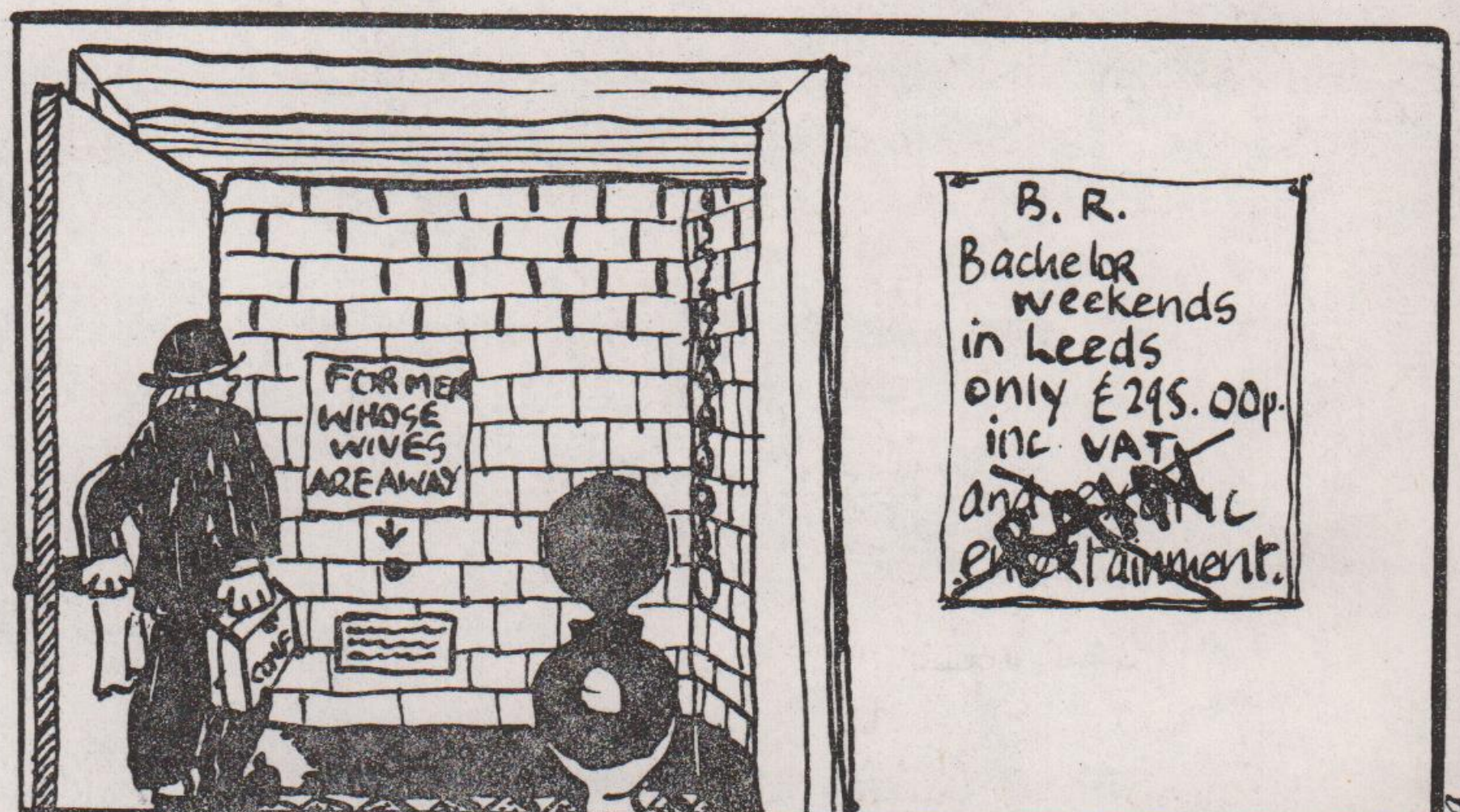
reality but of seeing the possibilities, the alternatives. Radical Feminism means a revolutionary change, a complete change, a change in the way we live our lives, and in the way we relate to one another that goes to the root.

Radical feminists need to work on a detailed analysis (and are!) not only for dealing with problems of the present, but as a guide for transition to, and an outline of, our vision for the future. This analysis includes a standard of behaviour to which we hold ourselves - to keep us honest, to alert us to signs of cooptation, to let us know what to expect from one another.

Radical Feminism is an analysis, an approach to problem recognition and problem solving; Radical Feminism is a standard to which we hold ourselves; Radical Feminism is a plan of action; Radical Feminism is a vision - our inspiration, our hope.

Roxanne Marychild Claire. Geneva, Switzerland.

reprinted from the USA radical feminism mailing March 1981, with permission, and a couple of changes, from Roxanne.



arr. 8.10.81. from a joke related by Sandra

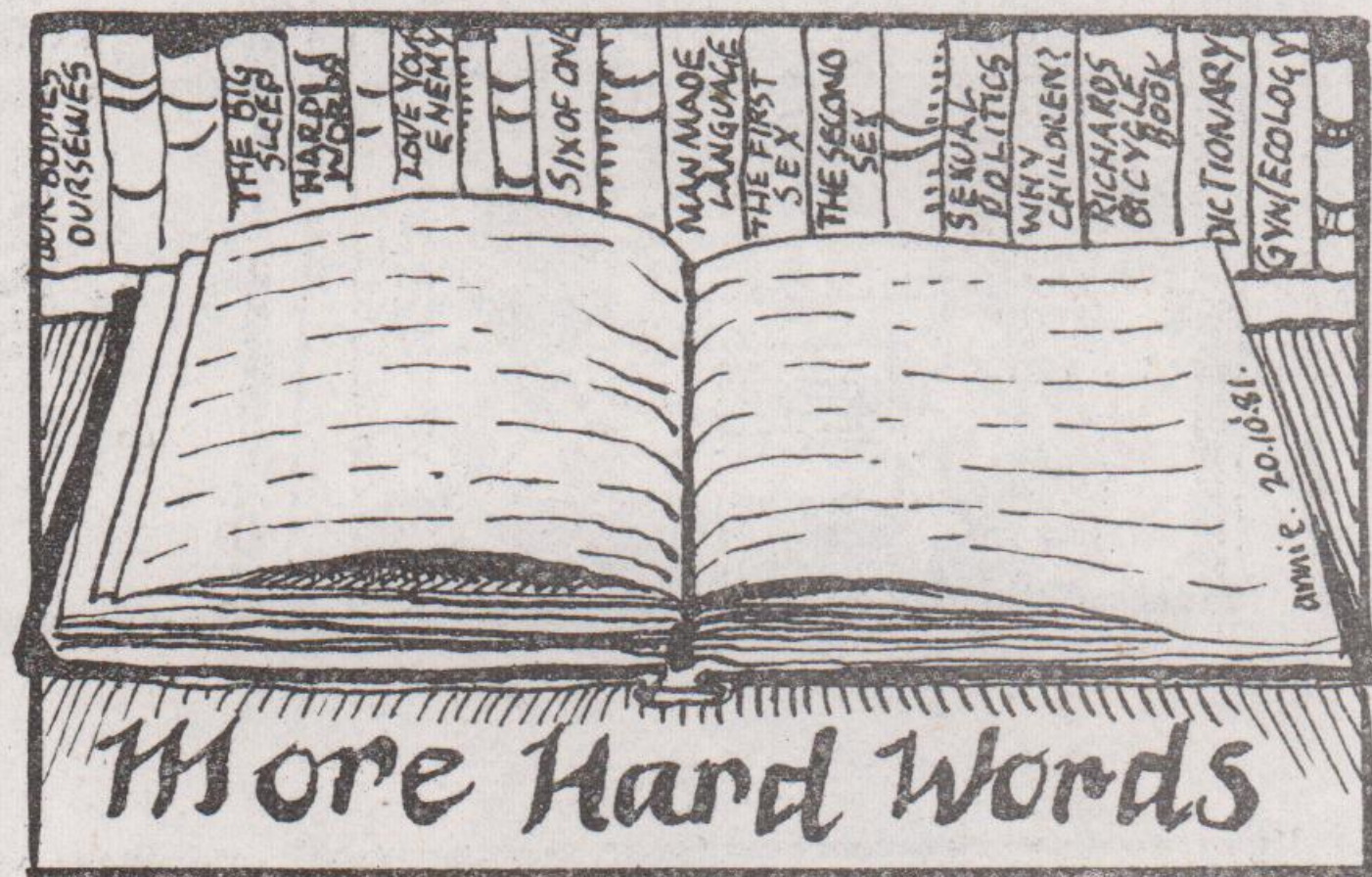


"More Hard Words" is a reply to Beatrix Campbell's article "A Feminist Sexual Politics: Now you see it, now you don't", in Feminist Review 5. I have been asked to say something about the article as a lead in for RRF readers who may not have seen what Bea wrote. I refer to her as Bea advisedly, as I have "known" her since the early Movement days when, among other things, she gave a talk at my teacher training college on Radical Feminism from her perspective as a member of the C.P. (Communist Party), of which she is still a member.

My article quotes at length and should give you a feel, and you can always refer to Feminist Review for the original. I'll just add that I think Campbell's most contentious statement is "a feminist sexual politics was defeated indirectly by the hegemony of radical feminism." p.14. She then goes on to insult "political lesbianism". She also refers specifically to the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group.

I'd like to point out a few brief things about the structure of Campbell's article - beginning with the list of references at the end. Aside from a few Women's Liberation classics like Anne Koedt's article on the orgasm and other sources drawn from women-only journals, almost the entire bibliography is by men, and not one single item is published by any of the women's presses in this country or elsewhere. The article is sixteen closely typed Feminist Review pages, but it is gloriously illustrated by Jo Nesbitt, who manages to keep you laughing rather than crying as you struggle through this piece. Another notable structural point is that over half of Campbell's article is devoted to "sexual reform in the twentieth century" which is all very boring sociological stuff to do with Kinsey, Havelock Ellis and other researchers.

The final point I'd like to make about structure is that it was the lead article in the issue, and its last section was subtitled "crisis of sisterhood." Bea Campbell has been in the Women's Liberation Movement many years and is considered by many to be a strong feminist. As the saying goes; "She's no fool". As extremists we are always vulnerable to attack, and here is another one. It just made me so angry I had to answer it. Feminist Review refused to print it, saying among other things that my article is "too emotional". I hope I have made myself clear to you.



The Women's Liberation Movement is well known to be about the liberation of all women. The process of political development of this movement has shown that the concept of patriarchy - a male supremacist culture - is fundamental to understanding the nature of women's oppression and to devising the strategies and tactics necessary to achieve our liberation. From the beginning in the late 1960's the W.L.M. has maintained a united, and, to a certain extent, monolithic stance, founded in the beliefs that all women are sisters, and that we are all more oppressed, if less exploited, than any man or group of men. Though this latter assertion is sometimes questioned by socialist feminists, the autonomy of the movement which has existed since its inception has never been "cracked", contrary to Campbell's assertion. The course taken by the W.L.M. has been determined by the women within it, arising from the necessities of our situation, including the need for all women to feel it is indeed our movement, in which we are at last able to work for and in our own interests. It was some time before socialist sisters recognised that an autonomous W.L.M. was more directly in their own political interests as women than a movement subsumed within the male left, but this awareness is present now. Since Birmingham (National W.L.M. Conference 1978) it has been specifically agreed within the W.L.M. that it is in women's interests to define our own sexuality.



The tactics for liberating our sexuality have, as with most issues, been derived from our practical situations. When lesbians first asserted their presence within the W.L.M., most women were unable to conceive of loving women with their bodies, and therefore took the opportunity to have such an experience in order to dissolve their ignorance of sexual possibilities with women and to overcome their conditioned fear of lesbians by narrowing the gap that separated them. Having done this with a degree of success, heterosexual women are now acknowledging their primary sexual desires as nonetheless remaining with men. The breaking down of prejudice against lesbians and more importantly the 'gay and proud' stance that has led to lesbians asserting ourselves, has meant more women have acknowledged themselves as lesbians and find their identity as lesbian feminists/feminist lesbians and their political home within the W.L.M. These women are not interested in heterosexual sexual practices and it is important that they are not forced to get involved in a discussion of them through a tyranny of the majority. There are also now a number of women who engage in lesbian sexual practices because of men, who are committed first of all to fighting men, and therefore are interested in the debate on heterosexual sexual practice. It was this debate which animated the 'political lesbianism' paper, referred to by Campbell, which put forward some important ideas, although it, in itself, was merely an exploratory document.

So we are currently in a stage of development in which the divergent cultural priorities of feminists is forcing itself to our attention, and it is again necessity which will determine our response. We are agreed that wymmmin will not allow themselves to be divided by men (or their female agents) and that unity in diversity is the source of our strength. We must acknowledge the different priorities amongst us and accommodate them. This cannot be done in a social vacuum. Remembering that men can go anywhere, we created women only centres as places to gather in. There are still too few of these, and the ones that exist are currently under pressure from many sides. In beginning the debate on sexual practice, it is equally important to remember that heterosexuals are everywhere, and that part of the commitment of Women's Liberation is to maintain the space carved out by feminist lesbians in which to begin to have the possibility of leading whole lives. To live in such a social, political, spiritual and material space is not and need not be the choice of every woman. But even if the nurturing of such space is the responsibility of the wymmmin who choose to live in it, it is nonetheless a political obligation of all women to defend the existence of such space. This is an aspect of the meaning of the sixth demand for an end to all discrimination against lesbians.

#### Self Determination.

The hegemony of Radical Feminism as asserted by Campbell was, if it existed at all, brought about by the agreement on the part of women in the movement with the radical feminist philosophy. It was certainly not "imposed from above" as Campbell implies, as the Movement has been vigilant, especially since the second Women's Liberation Conference 1971 at Skegness (as referred to by Trish McCabe - RRF6), and rapid in exposing any such moves and so diffusing them. But Campbell is not alone in claiming that some group or situation has led the Movement astray. This kind of interpretation of the past reveals the still-lingering perception of women as victim and a lack of faith in women to successfully conduct the struggle for our own liberation. It is easy to understand that we must overcome our conditioning, but it is a difficult and prolonged process, rooted in continual consciousness raising. We are constantly bombarded by political analyses, sociological perspectives, and psychological interpretations which try to tell us that what we are doing is bound to fail. But all of these theories have been produced by patriarchy, its agents and slaves, to undermine our confidence and our will to carry on. We must keep faith with our intention and maintain our belief in our own ability to find ourselves and create the future for ourselves. It is a frightening business, with many real dangers, and the temptation to retreat to slavery in the heterosexual world is great. Many women will succumb to it or consent to be its agents in return for material rewards, putting even more pressure on those of us who remain firm.

It is out of this reality that the "cult of woman" as Campbell snidely refers to it, developed. The celebration of woman as woman, or of woman without men, or of woman equal to men, or even of women over men, has been very positive to all of us in the creation of our identity. We have also in this way made more space for women everywhere, and this is part of what gives Women's Liberation a cutting edge in the struggle to create change. None of these approaches is rigidly defined, but constantly modified by experience, by the changing environment, and other factors. All of these orientations are important to our understanding. Consciousness raising requires maintaining



communication in a spirit of goodwill so that we can commend and criticise ourselves and our sisters in the ongoing course of this "permanent" revolution.

I feel the tone of some of Campbell's remarks creates a disparaging atmosphere which undermines rather than supports our struggle for freedom. We will have a vast number of points of view as we will experience authenticity in a variety of ways; we must avoid asserting a hierarchy of correctness in this matter, something which will require a great deal of good will as well as awareness and discipline as, since our very lives are at stake, feelings run high.

The Women's Liberation Movement belongs to women, all women, as autonomous beings. Some of us are more encumbered by patriarchy than others, and may for emotional reasons wish to build a future within it, with some of its agents, or within a community of slaves. Women are free to commit their energy where they choose, but those in Women's Liberation have a responsibility to see that energy is not used against other women. Because of the emotional component of much sexual activity, and the fear of most men of autonomous women, women engaging with men must be very careful of not being used against their sisters as well as struggling to preserve their autonomy. Though such women may find one another within Women's Liberation, and meet under its protection, they must not attempt to dominate the Movement, nor to eradicate minorities with differing viewpoints. A feminist who denies that the Women's Liberation Movement is a united sisterhood by insisting that all women must love men and/or boys, is not working in women's interests. Each woman will define her own interests, and she may choose to be involved with males, but her interests lie in fact with other women so involved. The challenge to avoid absorbing men's interests as their own is something of which Revolutionary Feminists and others will constantly remind them. As male supremacy maintains itself by keeping women divided, such women will have great difficulty maintaining their solidarity with one another. Lesbian Feminists involved in raising A.I.D.\*boys may be the strongest women in this area, as they have been 'forced' as it were to be involved with biologically determined males.

There are also those women trying to rebirth a woman's culture, to create a future for wimmyn. These people have been called Radical Feminists, Separatists, Revolutionary Feminists, Culturalists and other names. Because part of their reality is the absence of labels, this group cannot be pinned down. While many consider them naive, impractical, aggressive, mad, etc., the vision of liberation which directs them must not be denied. It is this group which is looking at lesbian relationships and trying to overcome our conditioning; to understand our true natures so that we can begin to be truly free. For the possibility of feminist lesbian relationships was only conceived of within the recent decade. It is too much to expect that first attempts would be completely successful, and it is only with the empirical evidence of our experience that we can now begin to consider such things as sentimentality, jealousy, possessiveness, romanticism, lust, and other emotions together with our ideas about life in patriarchy, conditioning and oppression, in order to try to liberate our behaviour. We do not feel these efforts are "to prepare women for intervention in society, social relations with both men and women, and in politics." Our lifestyle is the result of our cry for FREEDOM NOW. Though we have a lot of changes to make, and are still compromising, we have at least set our sights on our true goal. We agree that "It (the W.L.M.) is not a sanctuary from society". It is our vehicle for creating a new world. Without our energy the Movement would be very different. Campbell is advocating a tactic which would force feminist lesbians/lesbian feminists to strike against the Movement or accept oppression within it, a choice which many of us are agonisingly trying to avoid.

There are many concepts which appear in Campbell's article which need more careful attention. Most basic, perhaps, is the word "lesbian". Campbell defines this mostly in negative terms, saying, "Lesbianism is a specific sexual practice between women, with its own history and culture; it is not the same as sexual expression between women, political rejection of men, or a historically specific sexual liberation movement". This definition falls into the patriarchal trap of defining lesbians in exclusively sexual terms, while clarifying that lesbianism is not the same as sexual expression between women. This leaves the question of "what is sexual" more confused than ever.

\* Artificial insemination by donor.



Furthermore, lesbians are lesbians twenty-four hours a day and some never have sex with anyone. Lesbianism is in fact an orientation of perception which conditions every aspect of one's life. In this sense it is an emotional reality that may or may not be the same as one's sexual practice, and will be given more or less scope for expression in each lesbian's life, depending on her resources for living with her oppression in heterosexual society. As emotions and the bonds they create are not material, we are handicapped by our inability to analyse them. But this does not mean they are not real, and hopefully we are all getting more skilled in recognising our true emotions. Over the years, as I have come to understand more fully the emotional nature of lesbian identity, I have been forced to admit that not every woman can be a lesbian, even if she can consciously prioritise women. Every woman can have sex with another, but this does not make a lesbian from the inside, even if, viewed from without, such sexual practice puts her in the club. In political terms, of course, not all lesbians are women identified and some heterosexual feminists are very conscious that their interests lie with women, even if they find their sexual pleasure with men. The strength of the lesbian feminists is from the bringing together of emotional priorities and political interests into a whole that gives off such power it is often said to dominate the W.L.M. Perhaps it is well that it should, for it takes such dynamism to provide the cutting edge for change in a hostile world, each gain being a gain for all women, whatever her politics, sexual practice, emotional leanings, or religious or spiritual beliefs. It is the political responsibility of women with different lifestyles to resist intimidation, both real and imagined. The tendency to feel intimidated stems from our conditioning in hierarchies, which says only one can be dominant and everyone else must be weak. Thus the strength of wimmin is seen as a threat to women, rather than as one possibility in a continuum of realities.

### Power

It should be clear from this that what we are now beginning to touch on is the question of power. Power and its generation and distribution are basic to any revolutionary change. Sex is a major generator of power and an area of severe repression in our society. Gay liberation began to approach the issues involved here, but was plagued by sexism. Thus it is that the W.L.M. is the first political movement (and let us be clear that it is a political movement) to develop a theory of sexuality which can lead to strategy and tactics around gender, sexual practice, social structure, and cultural belief which can liberate us. I do believe that everyone will be liberated by this radical change, but some in the short term have a good deal to lose and many people will continue to actually die. Each group must legitimate itself within the context of an autonomous movement of autonomous women who constitute a sisterhood. There may be women who choose to remain outside this sisterhood while nonetheless acknowledging common oppression in many areas. Alliances can be made in specific campaigns while we practice respecting one another. The desire to teach, convert, influence or waken individuals to our view of reality must not blind any of us to the right to difference. It is the difficulties of living in a truly pluralist world that we must confront, distributing power equally so that no group dominates. The politics of ecology are making us more aware of the need, as Campbell states, for a politics of personal life, a concept introduced by the W.L.M. which has reached "the masses" through the material reality of radiation. Some people will of course choose death and try to force others to make that choice. We must contain them so they lose their hegemony while allowing them to choose their own demise if they so wish. It is those people who wish to have power over others who need the greatest political re-education, based on the awareness that the only person one can rightly control is oneself and that one has a political responsibility to do so. It is in this context that a major tenet of feminist politics, "workers' control of reproduction" was formulated. Campbell's belittling treatment of this idea must be a reflection of her continuing perceptual entrapment in the snares of male-dominant thinking. A.I.D. mothers have hardly begun to learn from their mistakes, they nonetheless have taken a most courageous first step in this direction. Lesbian mothers in general are raising the issue of child rearing as a right not a heterosexual privilege and are beginning to create situations in which non-breeders, should they wish to, can become involved with children. Menstrual extraction is an issue stemming from this awareness as is the use of herbs and other food to regulate menses. Awareness of our reproductive capacities has also helped us to begin to understand our relationship to the moon and our ability to give birth to a new spirituality. Again Campbell has touched on the crucial issue but has been frightened off by the power of its implications and turned instead to the trick every sectarian hack knows so well of trying to destroy the credibility of a non-conformist viewpoint. In the same vein,



her call to "safeguard specifically lesbian culture and sex" could be a call for enforced ghettoisation. For the "space" I referred to as being created by feminist lesbians and lesbian feminists is as much an emotional, perceptual and cultural space as it is a material one and as such is very different from the traditional "lesbian culture and sex" which members of the Feminist Review collective claim W.L.M. lesbians are too naive to discuss. I believe this culture and sex is basically an integral part of our oppression and, far from being safeguarded, needs to be smashed, along with guilt. We must rebirth ourselves in a true spirit of compassionate sisterhood. In trying to restrict lesbianism to "a place within feminism" Campbell may ossify the lesbian lifestyle and so trap it forever within the role dominated sub-culture that has been undergoing transformation since the inception of gay liberation and before. Gay conditioning also needs to be overcome, and is typically a tedious and lengthy commitment. Such confinement would also restrict the possibilities of wider change.

As Campbell says, almost in passing, historically lesbianism has been about an erotic affirmation of women. Historically it has been an attempt to love women untainted by the self-hatred inspired by phallogocentric energies which produce so much pornography at the expense of women in general and lesbians in particular. This attempt has mostly failed and accounts for the popularity of some feminist ideas with so many lesbians. In speaking of erotic artifacts, Campbell says "There's some contemporary lesbian erotica, though much of it, in my view, tends to be maudlin, complacent or didactic rather than erotic. It still seems difficult to produce an erotica that isn't easily happy or halcyon". Phyllis Lyon, one of the founders of Daughters of Bilitis in the U.S.A. has such a collection of erotica and we might do well to ask her to share it with us. The creation of erotica, or simply the enjoyment of pleasure, is something many people still find ideologically suspect. It is this tendency which leads so many women to side with Mary Whitehouse. But although the media try to tell us that the sexual revolution is finished and has failed, in fact a major impetus of the W.L.M. was provided by women who were dissatisfied with their personal sexual reality in the 1960's. That heterosexual women still feel their sexual practice to be a guilty secret, as Campbell asserts, may be just another expression of the self image and consequent behaviour which grows from participation in an inherently oppressive relationship, particularly one which deals so directly with power.

The celebration of sexuality as a pleasurable and therefore creative source of energy is one of the major contributions of sexual liberation movements to our post-Christian age. It is in the process of making this shift that the conditioned nature of gender will change, moving well beyond the "simple inversion" mentioned by Campbell, in which she implies that enervation and a celebration of passivity and lack of energy are representative of femininity. Such concepts are seen to be utter nonsense by women who have together been exploring themselves in search of their true natures. Changing moods and differing cycles unfettered by expectations lead to great diversity of expression. The agreement with Kinsey that there is no essential technical difference between infant and adult orgasm has created the possibility of allowing children to experience pleasure more widely throughout their lives. People living with such concepts about reality, if they can also be free of sexist prejudice, will be capable of a clearer understanding of power and stronger means of generating it in themselves for the benefit of the community. Whether or not we are directly involved with children, the contribution we each make to dissolving the perceptual and experiential boundaries, enabling us to move into a new Space Time will benefit those living in the future who are, most likely and among others, today's children.

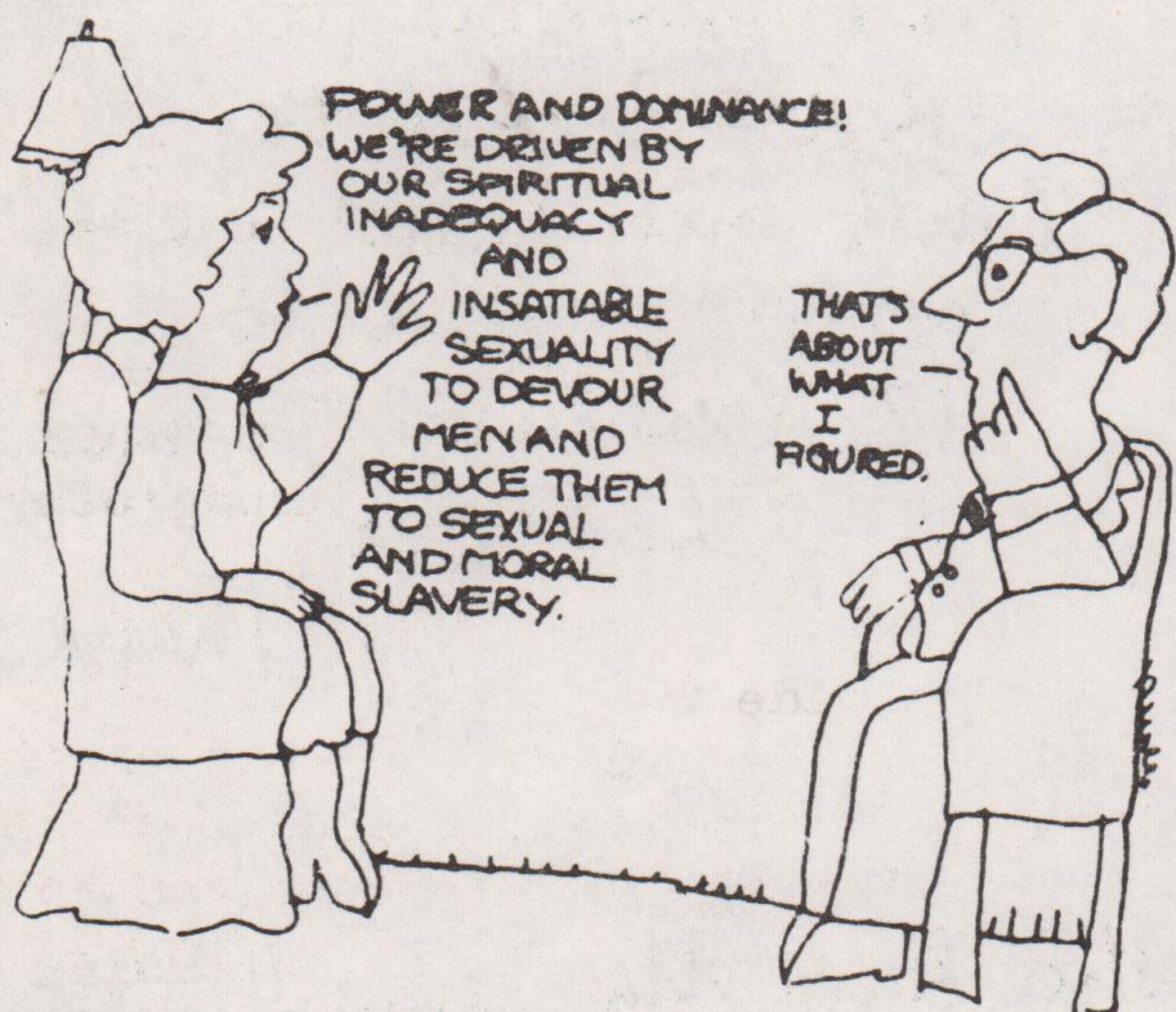
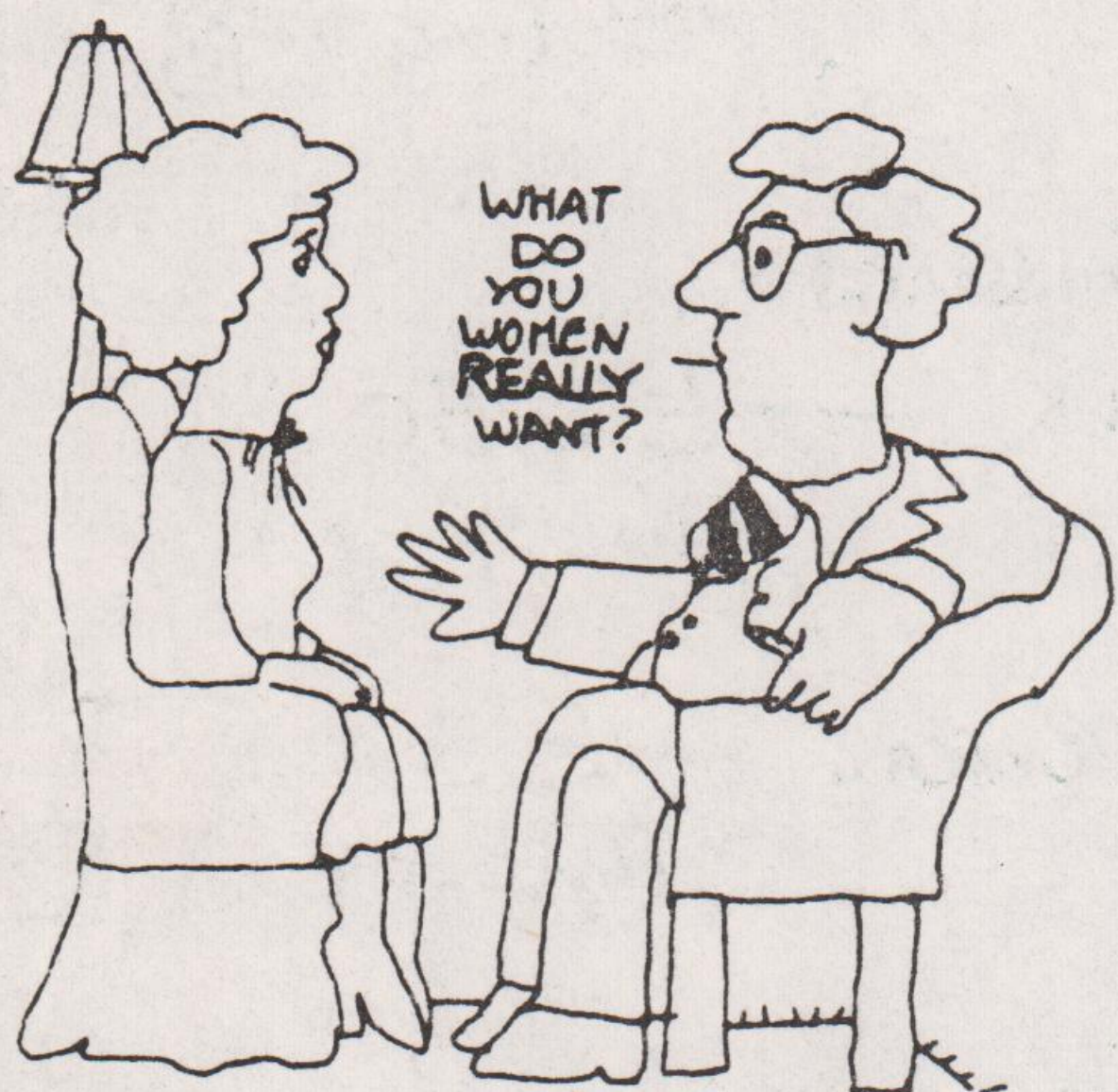
As penetration is displaced as The Sexual Act, a phenomenon made much of by Campbell, two main considerations become clear. One is that The Sexual Act is one of the most energy-intensive experiences available to people. Thus its importance in creating social change is re-affirmed, as is the necessity of liberating it from conditioned expectations and stereotyped limits. This work is being actively engaged in by many people, including now-practising heterosexuals. That some women find heterosexual practices distasteful is a reality with which heterosexuals must live, not using it as an excuse to stop struggling with The Sexual Act and to turn against their sisters instead. Pluralism truly begins with a multiplicity of sexual practices, the acceptance of which will make most of us face our prejudices as we search for consensus in which to base a new morality. This new morality must in my view be incompatible with hierarchy, oppression, exploitation and abuse if it is to be the basis of a truly liberated society.



The "lesbian experience" enjoyed by so many women in and around the W.L.M. in recent years has enabled women to experience orgasm without having to deal at the same moment with the sexual politic of male supremacy coming at them from their partner (as most sexual practice is still confined to pairs, only partly due to the restrictions of our anatomy). Additionally this allowed for more honesty about vaginal response, an important if not crucial area for understanding. In a misogynist society, controlled by rape, the emotional experience of being penetrable makes one exceedingly vulnerable. It is possible to experience vaginal stimulation without feeling penetrated, depending on one's identification with one's vagina, the atmosphere of the encounter and similar factors. It is because the crucial element is how you feel that it cannot be legislated or judged. It is because we are out of touch with our feelings due to centuries of being brutalised by patriarchy, that it is so difficult to have informed discussion on this question. It is because some of us feel it is dangerous for any woman to allow any man to penetrate her in any way in today's world, that we want our sisters to join us in our world. But of course every woman must choose her own path and it is inevitable that feminists who now see they are unable, unwilling or unlikely to give up heterosexual practice should be engaged in creating a politic of intervention in this area to transform its reality so that it ceases to be a source of colonisation for them. It is important that the efforts of another section of the Movement to resist the penetration of such concerns into their life space is acknowledged and respected. For some women the development of our erotic selves in a context entirely woman-oriented is an essential element of liberation. The need in people for physical and emotional closeness in an atmosphere of safety and freedom is the motivation in all of us to examine our sexual lives with honesty, the courage to admit our weaknesses, the strength to overcome them, and the commitment to carry on the struggle.

With sisterlove,

Carol Lee.



from Pork Roast.



"Oh, what a lovely packet of cornflakes."

### Pure magic

SPINSTER Ellen Boyall celebrated her 103rd birthday at a Notts. old folks home. She said her secret of long life was—no men. (Mirror 10.7.81).

### Slave

After reading your story about slave brides being bought for £95 abroad I wish to reveal that my husband got one in England 35 years ago for 7s 6d—the cost of our wedding licence. "HOUSE SLAVE"

Bolton.

(News of the World: 16.10.81).



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