

July 1973

We do not want Equality

It's a common misconception, even among women, that women's liberation is directed at a conquest of the privileges of men in the patriarchy. For a long time I pursued the doomed attempt to be freer and more equal by adopting male habits, male ideas about sex, male striving, competition and overt toughness.

At first, of course, it was a matter of doing a lot of things which are not acceptable in women in our role-divided society, and being conscious of just where those boundaries are. At first it looked as if the meaning of those boundaries was my exclusion, women's exclusion, from the real world. On one level - good jobs, advancement, money; on another - freedom to fuck, drink, swear, and do as I pleased. One thing is absolutely clear - what I took, then, to be the real world is wholly defined in the terms of the men who live in it. I knew when I was about fourteen that I'd have to break with my family's values, and I tried to do that - but it never occurred to me (and how could it?) that I would have to go on and break with something that lies behind my particular family and also deeply inside my own mind.

And it's because of the patriarchal structure, the patriarchal values inside my own head (and everywhere else too) that I was silly enough (like most of us) to suppose that the boundaries stand for exclusion, that the battle was to get over into that "real" male world. Equality, I spoke their word. Casting a feminist glance at 'em, I can't help but be surprised that anyone would want equality with men - as men are.

The role division is given. It's a fact in most behaviour, private and public. It's a fact in the middle of fucking, it's a fact at breakfast in any family, it's a fact in every line of newsprint. It makes sense that women, aware of the deathlike qualities of their lives, should turn at first to the alternative role, the one that looks so much better in its own terms (which are the only terms it makes available).

And then the dawn. The realisation that no role is living, that every role is a subtraction from reality, a hiding away of ourselves, a disguise of the fact: that we are all just human beings, no more, no less. This realisation sure comes slow and hard in a society which sees no reality at all outside of roles.

It's not just that it isn't good enough to strive for entrance into the male role - it doesn't work. If we can get there at all, it's at the cost of precisely those qualities which have been denied men by their own conditioning. Equality with men means another role, a different incapacity to live honestly and freely.

Everything that is given is part of the patriarchy. It's only by weeding out what is given, and coming into contact with our many-sided, multi-lateral selves that we can hope to find a way to live. And that is what we need - not any of the things we have learned as necessary. Men learn that they have to make it in the public world of men; women learn that they have to make it in the private world of one man. It's just a con. If you make it,

you've had it, you've ceased to live. Making it is totally unreal. Making it is death against life.

I used to think patriarchal things were important (who didn't?) (what else does anyone tell you?). I used to think my achievements were important, and my reputation, and my empty responsibilities and I tried as well, being a woman, to fall in love with some man. For about twenty-six years, I was too busy measuring up to notice that what was important was the way I felt, the way I lived, the struggles in my mind, I could not acknowledge that this interior drama was the thing that mattered. It went on. And I was scarcely conscious of it at all. I thought it ought to be secondary. Secondary, when it all

boils down, to one role or another.

Instead of searching out a way to live I sought success, the outward appearance of virtue (however I defined it doesn't matter); I sought acceptance, approval, advancement - a great landscape of outward objects. Men too - without even knowing it, I sized them up - "maybe this one will do" - I lived in the barren unhappy climate of male values. In the end we have to challenge everything, not just the nuclear family, the couple, the discrimination against us etc. ad. inf. - but the way we ourselves have been taught to think.

Kerryn

Our roles and Ourselves

Division into roles is the division of human qualities into two basic sets, male and female. You have only to look carefully at any behaviour in any situation to see that everyone is involved in behaving according to the appropriate pattern. Male initiates, thinks, decides, acts. Female follows, feels, and acts only in support and in the home. Male controls the where, when and how. Female agrees - preferably without struggle. Power rests with the male, buttressed by the role expectations which we are all taught to share.

Women suffer the double-bind of expecting men to be in charge and expecting unworried agreement from themselves. When a woman finds herself unwilling to follow the male lead, she ends up asking: What's

wrong with me? NOT: What's wrong with him?

The uninterrupted role-teaching saturates us as we grow up; it's inside our minds; (it's meant to be); all of us have believed that we are limited by our gender - we say: women are irrational; women like to please; women like to have someone to lean on, to decide for them. We assume that what we observe in fact is inevitable in nature. We believe these things about other women and even about ourselves. How could we believe anything else? when nothing else is indicated to us? Failure to please, failure to be satisfied does not lead us to ask whether we should be satisfied, but leads us back to looking for the trouble in ourselves.

We confuse ourselves with our ingrained idea of how we ought to be. Years of striving to be what we ought is a hell of a training when we want to turn around and look at what we are. Exceptionally confusing when the idea of what we should be is an idea of a half-being, a role which blacks out our strong, creative, initiating impulses. It's not surprising that we often conceive of ourselves as being without these qualities.

With Jan, for example, I was never able to stop taking for granted: that he ought to make the sexual overtures; that his desires on small things like going to the pictures or staying home were more valid, more worthy of consideration; that when he gave up eating meat I ought not to eat it in front of him. I was never able to start: questioning his ideas on society, right action, homosexuality, women, anything; doing what I wanted; saying what I thought. If he indicated a disinclination for a glass of wine, I felt guilty opening the bottle.

I even thought, again and again: if I was a guy and he the woman, I would be in a totally different situation. My actions would look totally different, both to me and to everyone around us. In everyday action this didn't help me, only made me feel suffocated and trapped. When I tried to explain it to him, he frankly hadn't the faintest idea what was wrong (with me). It wasn't a lack of goodwill so much as a total inability to see me as another person, an inability so total that he had no way of knowing he had it. As if a blind person took blindness for the norm.

The freakiest thing of all was not knowing what I myself felt, thought and wanted. I identified for all I was worth with what he felt, thought and wanted. If he

said he loved me, I loved him; if he thought Henry Miller was the greatest, I could immediately see why; if he wanted to meet me at the pictures I was there, whether he got there or not - I understood that he did his best. When he wasn't round I would slowly locate some of the things I didn't agree with, didn't like, didn't want. His presence always alienated me from myself all over again. I had no feminist consciousness - only a pressing and suffocating sense of powerlessness. I accused myself of being inarticulate, being weak, being unreasonable. Sometimes I felt I had no will. And in relation to him this appeared quite true.

In short I hadn't the remotest equipment to take even the first step of knowing myself, seeing what I was. What I was always slipped away, disappeared in the context of my relationship with this civilised, politically radical and sexually gentle male. He seemed fine - I didn't have a clue what I was.

It's not as if we are consciously telling ourselves we should be this and that. It'd be a lot easier to fight if it was like that. We carry, rather, a whole internalised pattern of practical conformity to the woman's role. It was fed in ever since birth - of course we don't remember how it happened. It's all in our habits of relating. We are habituated to willing oppression. Everything we see and hear - ALL the input - reinforces these habits. And it's never called oppression either - it's not that easy. The pull to be what we ought to be is an unconscious demand - in the moment. I used often to feel discomfort, unease, unhappiness without any sharp idea of why.

Our first work is to understand the role-demand, to see the things pushing us to be "like a woman", to

ask ourselves why we can't do otherwise. We will find, we are finding, that much of what prevents us is in ourselves, our habits of relating, the inbuilt preference for pleasing others. The simple practice of questioning ourselves is enough to open our eyes and our paths.

Our next work is the painful business of disentangling ourselves from the demands of the role. (We will be told we're crazy, unnatural, abnormal, unfeminine - inevitable when the definition of sanity, naturalness, normality and femaleness in this society is in terms of just these roles we are challenging.)

In time we will be able to be indifferent to demands which make no sense to us, we will be able to be indifferent to male opinion, male approval and male put-down. In time we will learn to act for ourselves. Sisters! We can, every one of us, find the being inside us who is neither "masculine" nor "feminine", but a whole human being, the being who knows her own mind (is not bent by the need for male approval), the being who acts honestly according to what she knows, not because she should - but because, well, what else is there?

Sisterhood is the key. I first thought some of these things just before I came into close contact with some feminist sisters. It seemed a bleak and impossible task, in a world based entirely on appearances and roles, to even begin weeding out my own inculcated ways of thinking and acting. It was around then that I discovered my sisters. The revolution began. To relate to women on any level is to relate outside the power-game. Sister solidarity is a new world - the first I've known which wants to bring theory and practice back together, which wants to do away with roles, obligation, and putting a free front on oppressive realities, the first which wants to see things as they are and recognises that it won't work to pretend that things are not as they are.

Nobody's saying it's easy. I am often appalled at the gulf between my theory and my practice; I often find the old sexist, role-oriented thoughts drifting around in my head; I still mistake love for obligation. But it's started, sisters, with your help and mine. Feminism is life against death.

Epping Forest

Things are as they are
and the only virtue is
To perceive them as they are.

You are right, suddenly:
I have denied my power, my beauty, and myself,
apologising, blunted the attack
and all possible attacks
at all times.

Sex Roles

In a society which is based upon sexism, people are forced to enact a certain role based on sex. Sex roles deform people. They warp and twist the inner being into conforming to an image of what others consider normal. Women are forced to be subservient to men because that is how women are supposed to be. Women continually degrade themselves and other women. They dare not appear too confident, they believe and are taught that men are superior to themselves.

These roles that we are forced to play perform a certain function, that of re-inforcing the patriarchal state and nuclear family. These roles have also been accommodated by the capitalist society that we live in, e.g. by creating false consumer needs. A simplistic example of this is of women needing make-up to present a sexy, natural, or sophisticated image of themselves.

One of the most dangerous weapons that is used to keep roles surviving, is alienation. We don't relate to each other or ourselves fully because we have a role to enact. We don't communicate or know ourselves. We continue playing roles because at least we have something to shelter behind. Because we play roles we are alienated, because we are alienated we continue with our roles ... the circle has to be broken. And it is.

Homosexuality, with Gay consciousness, poses the greatest threat to the continuation of sex roles. Homosexuality means relating completely to a person of the same sex, no matter what level the

relating is done on - be it intellectual, physical or emotional. It means breaking through the strict coding of male "dominant" relating only to female "submissive."

Because women are refusing to act out their social role, which is to bend and mould themselves into what the male expects of them, to conform to the male image of woman, then we have women who are breaking down the isolation which separates us all, the isolation that forces us to play out our roles, and that means women refusing to accept that they can only relate and survive with men.

It means women relating to women.

A lesbian rebels against the traditional role of wife and mother, and the behaviour necessary to that role, the passive, weak submissive behaviour. The lesbian's existence poses a direct threat to the nuclear family. The unit which revolves around the authoritarian father, dependent mother, and the children with no identity.

Gay women must face each other as real people - we have no protective roles to hide behind, we must be honest with each other. And that is something we have been taught never to do... we have been taught to play our roles.

When women start relating to women, when we start discovering ourselves and other women, then patriarchy starts to crumble.

When women are not living in the oppressive conditions of the nuclear unit, they will start to live communally, and with each other, not false images.

The nuclear unit relies on there

being dominant and submissive roles. When women start relating honestly there can be no roles... there will be relationships.

One point that many people find bewildering is where do children fit into the homosexuals' liberation programme? If the analysis of society and oppression is taken far enough, it will include children - the class that does not even rate as being oppressed.

When we start seeing ourselves and others as people and not images, we will discover that children are people. Their needs may vary from ours, but so do all people's needs vary. Children are people.

When we start living communally it will be irrelevant whether the communes are made up of females or males or children... they will be made up of people, who support and care for each other.

Because we challenge our roles we force every person to think

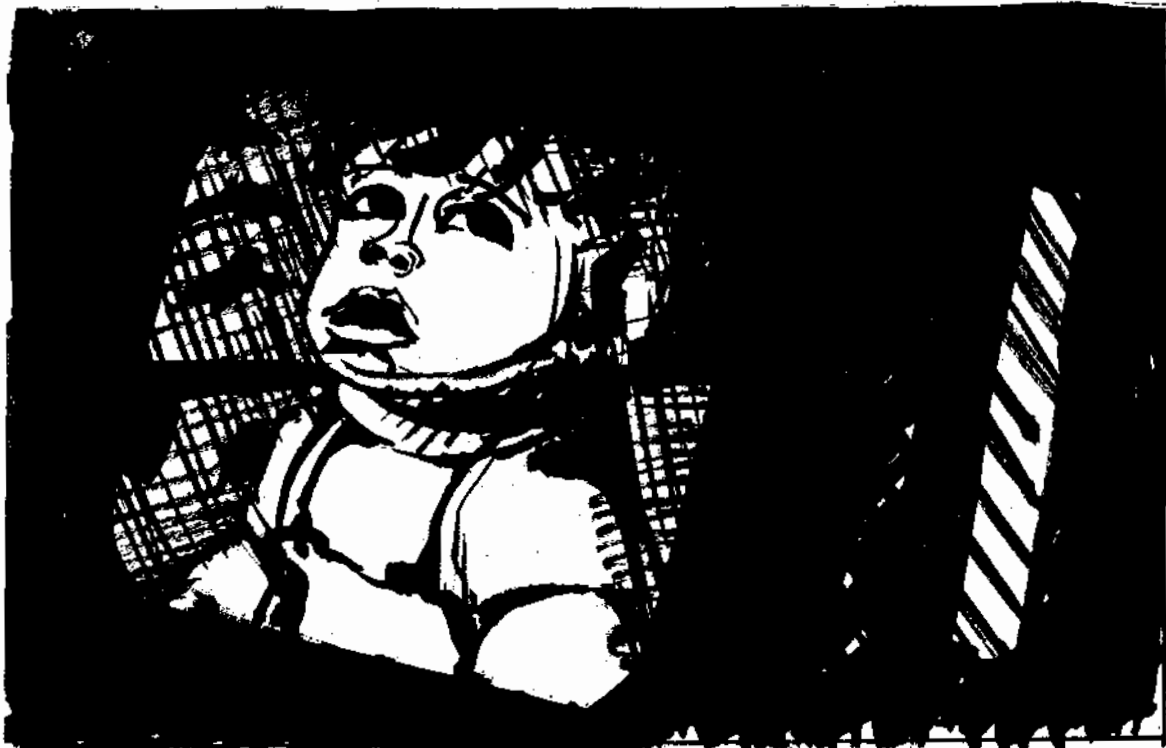
about, acknowledge, reject or accept their roles.

Because capitalism depends on people staying in their roles - the roles of mother, daughter, worker, intellectual, father, husband, oppressor, oppressed, when we start to challenge our roles, we then challenge the economic set-up of this society.

And that is why Gay Women's Liberation will horrify and threaten so many people and institutions, because we are not asking for equality, for the right to get married or set up our own nuclear units... we are demanding liberation.

We will fight for our liberation and that means war against those that oppress us... and we are preparing for the fight.

Sharon



Destruction of the Family

The quality of life for all members of the nuclear family is generally acknowledged by any thinking person to be a very mediocre brand of life at best, and at its worst to be a degrading parody of any life at all.

The evils inherent in the family structure are being slowly exposed by women who live their whole lives enmeshed in its restricting coils, and by young people as they seek to escape from the blight it too often puts on their lives.

Meanwhile we play around with the same tired old ideas that communal living, or socialism will be some kind of answer to the problem, and for some people, some of these far from new forms do seem to work, at least for a little while.

But where are fresh concepts going to come from? Why do we continue to shift emphasis slightly to the left and put patches on a broken down system? Where do commune members go when their commune dissolves? Do they return to the traditional family unit? Drop out for awhile? Look for a new commune? What is innovative or radical in these old themes, none of them developed by women? What is the hitch that keeps us from approaching this agonizing problem in any new way?

I believe we are afraid of the fundamental necessity of total destruction of the family. I believe we are afraid to start from square one.

Our social traditions have conditioned us to accept that "destruction" is a bad word which denotes base action or nihilistic behaviour.

Destruction, we are convinced, is a smashing beyond repair, a negative action to be abhorred by all civilized people. Therefore to avoid thinking about the possibilities of a systematic de-struction appears to be preferable because to do otherwise would be too disturbing to our pre-conditioned minds.

Harbouring fears about de-struction infers that traditional ideas or traditional principles must have already been thoroughly examined by some brilliant mind who then pronounced a judgement. This judgement then becomes binding, to stand for all time as if it had been carved in rock. To question a rule so laboriously chiseled in rock becomes a sacrilege and is relegated to the realm of the "unthinkable".

Society in the grip of such a strong belief, especially of long duration, is bound to treat with condemnation anyone who dares to reject an atrophied notion of an "eternal" truth. Vigilante groups are always at the ready to pillory anyone fearless enough to tamper with the workings of entrenched rules.

It is our fear of the aggressiveness of destruction that causes avoidance of this basic step toward any revolutionary concept of restructuring the family. The complete rehabilitation of a worn out, dis-functional unit necessarily demands that it first be taken apart, broken down completely to all its essential parts in a ruthless act of de-struction.

Until every facet of its operation is questioned and examined by taking it apart in our minds, re-

structuring can never begin. Until the entire concept of the family is taken apart, a new unity can never be arrived at. Only when this essential step is taken by enough women in a serious way can the bits and pieces be recombined in experimental forms until some totally new and workable structure emerges.

Simply because the family as it is now constituted contains so many flaws in its function, most of them appallingly detrimental to women, the very process of imaginatively destroying it can have a healing effect on the woman who attempts an aggressively destructive attack upon it.

The actualities of this century should be a forcing agent for women toward a re-structuring of the family that will at the very least be adequate to women's requirements which have always been totally ignored.

I refuse to believe that women must remain so stilted and hide-bound in their thinking that they cannot create fresh principles for living with their families rather

than merely existing for their families.

Women are constantly being accused of lacking creativity and the abilities required to enlarge the world's horizons. I refuse to accept this as anything more than a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is time women stopped accepting this humiliating myth.

Females are never going to be encouraged in any way by society to forge ahead with imaginative or creative solutions to any of the earth's problems. No one is ever going to give any of us real opportunities to experiment in the realm of ideas. Whatever we get we will have to take, and take boldly before it can be snatched away by a fearful and threatened system.

We can do anything we want to do right now, if we are not afraid to broaden our thinking to include destruction. Or must we wait for our granddaughters to begin the process?

May

Possession

When you said you loved me,
You meant possession,
A lesbian ragdoll
To keep in the cupboard,
And play with on rainy days
When the teddy bear was tired.

You wanted to tickle my cunt
Until I flopped and sighed,
And said I was yours.

I'll be locked in nobody's wardrobe -
Emily needs sun and air,
She's afraid of your close clammy cupboard.

Emily

Sexual Liberation?

Sexual liberation is much more than learning to fuck joyfully and freely. Freeing yourself from fear and shame of your own body is terribly important, it's fundamental... but it's not something you can achieve in a vacuum. Or maybe you can if you're young, beautiful and male. The rest of us have to perceive our sexual existence as inextricably meshed with the fabric of our overall struggle.

I know a lot of people who value their sexual freedom very highly. They have struggled to achieve it, some of them. Others take it as a God-given right. But there is a danger that there will develop an elite in the area of sexual liberation. One person's freedom often rests on the subjection of someone else. This elite says in effect, "I've broken what I see as my bonds... now I'm free, and I renounce all responsibility towards you; if you're not as free as I am, that's your problem." To them, that's wisdom.

The people who don't make it into this sexually free elite are the ones who are restricted by factors unaffected by whether or not they've freed themselves from sexual guilt and fear, factors like whether they're married or committed to someone before they've thought the matter through; whether they've got children; whether they're still plagued by feelings of jealousy and possessiveness.

I've observed that people who value sexual freedom also place immense value on mobility - the ability to float socially. If you want to be mobile, to float, to

live spontaneously, then to have a child or to be committed to another person is, quite simply, unthinkable.

Bringing up a child on your own - without a partner, and not in a communal situation, and specially if you haven't got much money - reduces your mobility to almost zero. Demands made on you exclusively, by the child, cause frightful conflicts in which there is no intermediary. You are on your own.

To live a sexually free life - fucking with your friends because you love them, not binding yourself to one sexual partner - becomes immensely difficult if you are bringing up a child. Living on your own means you have no-one to support you when your strength collapses. You start to demand a lot more from any lover you might have, more than a childless person would demand. You feel so assaulted by your child's need of you that you slip easily into the condition of wanting to be number one for someone.

If the person you love is one of the sexually free elite, then your child marks out the perimeters of your relationship with that person. Impasse.

Someone I know has an image for the way he wants to live: rather than seeing people you love in a kind of ranking order - the top one being number one, the person you feel most emotionally involved with and with whom you fuck most or spend most of your time with - you can see yourself and people you love as a series of overlapping circles, the amount of overlap

indicating the amount of concern you feel for each other at any given time - this is a shifting image, not a rigid one like the ranking order.

This seems fine, a lovely image. But what if the other people in your picture don't see the same amount of overlap between their circles and yours? There's the rub. People need to be loved. And when you feel you love someone more than they love you, that's where the pain starts. The overlapping circles image starts to look like a rationalisation of something like emotional irresponsibility.

Jealousy and possessiveness are the hardest emotions to handle, when you're trying to free yourself and thus the people you love. It's often not the thought of the physical fact of fucking, between the person you love and someone else, that hurts... rather it's the fear that their gain is your loss, that the new intimacy your lover experiences means less for you. You feel less sure of yourself and your own worth.

There are three ways you react to this situation:

- you rage, you grieve, you lay heavy trips, you give vent to your jealousy, all stops out.

- you stew in silent misery, faking it on the outside: "He'll never know how bad I feel."

- or you work at thinking it through, trying to be strong enough and calm enough to still be yourself although part of yourself, the love you need from the other person, has been withdrawn from you.

Now, there's a very fine, almost imperceptible line between faking it and working at it.

If you fake it, you're doing this for the other person's comfort. People always want someone they are hurting to be cheerful. Seeing the

hurt on someone's face is a naked accusation.

Maybe you fake it for ideological reasons: women find themselves bludgeoned by their own convictions. It's another facet of the great '60s ripoff known as the sexual revolution: it's uncool not to fuck around, it's uncool - a heavy trip - to display any feelings that might be construed as sexual commitment. And sometimes when you're faking it, you kid yourself you're not feeling these things. Take a good look at yourself next time you're kept waiting for four hours for a guy who says he's coming round and rolls in at midnight stoned and cheerful... shit, sister, you've got to stop taking it sometime. Why pretend you're not furious and miserable? Is it a heavy trip to ask for courtesy?

If with your mind you reject jealousy as unproductive and damaging, this doesn't mean your heart is as robust as it needs to be to withstand the pervasive influence of socialisation. You find yourself in a double bind: having spoken out against possessiveness, you find yourself in no position to make judgments when you're being exploited by a man who wants to keep his mobility.

Effortlessly faithful/I wax towards curves he charts himself/for straying. (Robin Morgan)

I'm not saying that working at it isn't painful. It hurts like hell. But if you don't do it, you'll be miserable. The difficulty in working at a relationship is that the man may not (probably won't) feel like putting as much energy into it as you do. Socially mobile people are in danger of becoming chameleons. If something goes wrong in the scene they're in, if someone tries to hold them or ask them to give something in the way of time or commitment, they

slip out of it and float off to a replica, or a replacement. You and your child start to look like a trap, even to you. Once that happens, you'd better think fast ... because you've begun to internalise the attitudes of your oppressor.

You can get strong in yourself. This is hard for women, because they've been taught to see their lives as re-action rather than action - response to the initiative of men - which of course is a directly sexual as well as emotional problem. Women often feel incomplete without a man. Women wait. There's a space in your heart that stands empty until the person you love is with you. You can change this. Look, you have to change it, if you want to battle along in this rough milieu.

But to do it you have to be whole.

This is the hardest thing a woman can try to do. Something I forget regularly, learn again almost in spite of myself, is the

strength you can get from the company of women. Whenever I go to the women's centre, or to my CR group, I set out in a state of self-mockery: going out to get a re-charge, eh? But I come home feeling unanxious, strong, whole again.

Some women (and by no means all of them gay) reject the company of men, out of despair that they'll ever change. But if you like men, and work with them, and love some of them, there has to be a way for them not to kill you. (Robin Morgan knows about that kind of death. And Sylvia Plath.) Finding this way will bring you closer to women, and divide you irrevocably from a lot of men. Once you reach a certain stage of consciousness, I don't see that there's any other way you can go. You have to find the strongest part of yourself, and make it enough to live with. Strength to your heart.

Helen Garner



one day i went away
by myself
no children, no husband, no guilt
i felt, and i responded
after three weeks i came back
and looked at you and saw all the fear
and it frightened me
and made me think

you are all so young
and you need me as well as want me
not just me, but i've been there all the time
it's o.k.
i'm staying with you
cos i want to
when i can be with you
each of you open my head to so much
so many beautiful feelings
i'd forgotten all that
i was putting limits on myself by closing you out
i hope i can stop doing that

Ruth

Dependence

Words don't have a fixed meaning. Even dictionary definitions don't fix the meanings of words. Everyone has a subjective sense of a word - even if we accept the same dictionary definition we feel good or bad vibes about it, and this alters the way we use the word.

Dependence can seem good or bad. It can be based on needing or on wanting. We can depend for support, or we can depend totally. But the word has, at first, anyway, more bad overtones than good. Dependence is something to be wary of. A dependent person is one who takes no responsibility for her actions. In this sense dependence is something inherent in a woman's con-

ditioning. We've all been taught early, in our families and at school, to rely on approval. As our sense of ourselves becomes surer, dependence ceases to become a problem.

A dependent relationship. We feel we know what that is. It's insidious. Hard to recognize until we're out of it. We don't see the tell-tale signs - adopting the other person's opinions and attitudes, needing them to be there - until we look back on them from a point where we've liberated ourselves from those pressures. When we express fear of another person's dependency, we may in fact be scared of our own wish to rely

he
bi
de
wh
th
ju

pe
in
fe
to
re
de
pe
It
ju
Al
de
in
we
th
in
in
hav
- e
sti
one
for
thi
con
ou

dep
ble
int
and
the
whi
ces
fro
mou
get
to
ton
dep
con
a r
sol
wor
the
fut

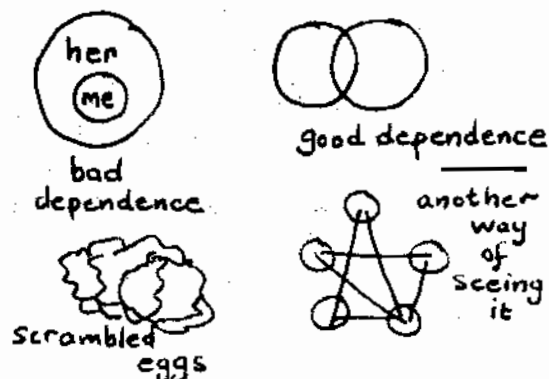
heavily on the other. It's a double bind. We can be too scared of being dependent, and get into a syndrome where avoidance seems the same thing as independence, which is just a dodge.

When does support become dependence? If you say you're becoming dependent because you start to feel a fool, then that's as much as to say that your sense of dependence relies on your being seen as dependent, so that your sense of independence has been equally dependent. It figures that dependence isn't just a one way thing, of course. All role playing is a mutual dependence. And we often end up staying in an outgrown relationship because we have come to need each other, in this way or in others. Maybe we get involved because we see something in another person that we don't have, that we want to identify with - either their weakness or their strength. This is a dodge too. No one else can ever be responsible for us. We need people for a lot of things, for warmth, companionship, comfort, fucking, but not to prove our own worth to us.

Nonetheless the whole concept of dependence can at times seem like a blanket excuse. We fool ourselves into relationships, they break up and we have to have a rationale for that, so we call them dependent, which is to say no more than unsuccessful. Certainly running away from dependence is no more autonomous than seeking it out. We can get to the stage when willingness to become involved has bad overtones. Does involvement mean dependence? Should we use the word commitment when we're talking about a relationship that's concerned solely with the present, and the word dependence for a relationship that's making promises about the future?

Generalisations can become a

hassle. We're thinking all the time about individual cases, which often makes it hard to agree with what another person is saying. Yet if we accept that the personal is the political the idea of individual cases takes on a new meaning. It should be possible to work through to a language we can all speak without misunderstanding, because we are all experiencing as individuals our common condition. But we don't speak that language now. So—



Even that's not enough to express another idea, though. What if we do need to depend totally on someone else at certain times? Then we need more than a diagram, we need a mobile where the circles swing in and out of each other.

There's a kind of paranoia in the idea of dependence. Dependence develops under the fear of dependence. For example, freak outs. One of the signs of a "dependent relationship" is when one of the two people starts freaking, and yet one of the reasons that this leads to the breakdown of the relationship is that we're conditioned to be afraid of freaking. So we get such extremes as someone attempting to break their dependence by freaking (showing dependence) in order to alienate the other and escape that way. If our idea of dependence was more flexible, then freak-outs wouldn't be seen as such a total disaster. But in fact the last

person we'd talk to about dependence is the person we're dependent on.

This is the sign of bad dependence. Lack of honesty. The idea of good dependence, of dependence that is support and involvement, rather than submerging of identity, doesn't exclude honesty, but rather relies on honesty. The reason that we have this fear word dependence is because we have expectations. Because someone leans on us, they will always want to lean on us. Because we lean on someone, they must always be there to lean on. Thinking this way, we falsify things. Relationships don't start and finish. We relate all the time. Expectations fuck things up, because we start to divide things into phases. This relationship is dependent therefore it must stop. Really, relationships aren't so much good or bad as existing at different times on different levels; but it's hard for us to be that flexible in our thinking, though obviously we are in our practice.

The question of dependence is tied up with the question of couples. Think of the mutual dependence of a couple and you have the good and the bad of it before you. But can we simply accept the idea of a couple even for the purposes of this kind of discussion? Are couples inherently dependent? To put it another way, is a group a more independent structure? Group pressure, in fact, can be more

subtle than pressure from one person. Groups can be jealous. It is possible to be dependent on a group. Nor are couples necessarily a closed unit - spending all their time together, only fucking each other, having rules of their own. And yet we find it difficult to relate to one person in a so-called couple. There's an obligation to relate to the other person which has nothing to do with her as an individual. Some of these problems are done away with by seeing a couple not as a monogamous unit, but as a primary relationship. Though if it remains important to us that our primary relationship approves of all our secondary relationships, all kinds of paranoia are still possible.

So to the end there remain two possible uses of the word. Dependence can mean support, involvement and it can go along with honest discussion of our situation. And, hoping for all this, we can still fall into a dependence on approval, become unable to act without reassurance, lose touch with what we really want for ourselves. Even these experiences help in a way. Our theory can be soundproof, but there's a point where it clicks in our personal experience, and that's the point at which it becomes real.

Radicalesbians

A Unique CR Experience

A WEEKEND AT SORRENTO WITH "STRAIGHT" AND "LESBIAN" SISTERS.

On leaving home I had no qualms or guilt whatsoever; I have long since overcome hang-ups of housework, cooking being my responsibility. I felt great freedom physically and psychologically. I had some worries regarding my sons coming to real physical harm, so made some arrangements in this respect - so I still feel total responsibility for them.

When I arrived at the Women's Centre, the room was cold and five young women I hadn't met apart from Helen were having a discussion (about getting some pot). I had such a strong feeling of alienation - all the differences, age, clothes, class, culture (pot-smoking) were there. I made an apologetic remark about how much luggage I had brought with me, and Helen knowingly said, "I suppose you've got a red suede suitcase" (symbolic of the middle class blue-rinse set). I might just as well have had, the way I felt. Helen has such perception and a beautiful way of saying something so profound that fits a situation perfectly, with so few words. She often doesn't even finish the sentence but just tapers off with "Yeah... yeah..." My, what marvellous communication we sisters have!

I thought, "Shit, what am I doing here?" All the security of heterosexual, suburban, so-called normal living suddenly seemed preferable to the unknown.

When Katy and Jane arrived and Katy smiled and I knew she was really pleased to see me there, all the feeling of alienation vanished. I came out of the cupboard where I am so used to hiding. (Christ, what schizophrenics we are.) And the weekend began. Six of us set off with a guitar and a Lab puppy. The sisters call the car "the lounge" - an apt description. The discussion we had on the way down made what has usually been a boring trip a real pleasure.

Carol, Glenda and Barbara had arrived before us. That night I sat listening to the singing of feminist songs, the reading of Robin Morgan's poetry - identifying so strongly with her writings. It seemed she was relating my own experiences (which of course she is). Feeling the warmth of common cause and thinking, questioning, "I've been through this before at socialist camps in my youth, and then I was convinced of the rightness of the ideals of class struggle. How come twenty years later I'm having the same experience with feminist ideals?"

I still agree with the ideals of socialism as a necessary change in system, but it is only part of it - the economic. I think Marx idealistically thought that a change in economic structure would automatically change human relationships. Thousands of years of bigotry and prejudice don't automatically change. Marx was a humanitarian and thought this would be a natural development.

The very basis of our common bond here was not just ideas but

ideas based on our own personal experiences. How is it that we could sit in that room together with such a common bond, to know each other so well (and not even know some of our surnames - it was quite funny asking each other (just for fun)) - such a diversity of womanhood; from the apprentice gardener to the Ph.D; aged from 16 to 45. From those who had hitch hiked round the world to the sister who had never slept away from the family for one night, except for going into hospital. From the sisters who had attended Catholic college and held the Catholic ideology, to the sister who is a member of the Communist Party and holds with the Marxist doctrine.

What was it that transcended all the barriers of class, culture, age (and so on)? The common bond was not just of our ideas, but the common bond of our experience. The analysis of experience of our oppression as women existing in a male-dominated society.

During the evening I was conscious of "where are we going to sleep?" (I didn't know which room to put my gear in.) I wondered if the sisters relating to each other would prefer to sleep together in separate rooms - or as it was just the weekend (they live together), would they just doss down with the rest of us? I also felt a shyness coming from Sue, who is relating to Helen and who is not a member of our CR group (and who may have preferred privacy). After vaguely worrying about this for part of the evening, I asked Jane directly and got a direct answer.

When I got up in the morning and walked into the living room to see two sisters lying naked in bed together with their arms around each other - wow, what an experience (it had a big effect on me). How elating to realise that I had total

acceptance, not just in theory, but in practice.

Sharing "bite-for-bite" the sugar (and sand) coated apple we roasted in the campfire we built at the back beach at Sorrento.

Finding out that timid little Katy - when she said weeks earlier that she worked at Melbourne Uni I had decided she must be a filing clerk or something like that, she couldn't possibly be an academic - not only is an academic, but also plays the guitar and writes songs and has won a \$5000 scholarship to write a novel. Imagine all that talent, all that potential, and being so oppressed in her sex role as a woman so as to be so timid as, in her own words, "I can't put four words together."

We had many consciousness raising discussions. Jane's age (as Norma says) seems indefinable, at one time so young and vital and at other times like the proverbial "wise old owl" - well, she is old in her experience (of oppression). Hearing Jane talk about her experiences - so much damage can be done that the pieces can never be put back together again. How deep our oppression goes. Feeling at the same time Jane has a strength that comes through it all - that to one degree or another Jane's experiences are every woman's experience.

Small wonder that there is a feminist movement, challenging the ideas of society, i.e. male culture. Small wonder that Mette Ejlersen writes under the title of "I Accuse." Small wonder that only women understand each other.

On Sunday we went to Portsea back beach. Two sisters walked across the car park to the rail with their arms around each other, followed by another two sisters showing the same affection. I walked slowly after them between the cars and people were obviously

s
t
n
e
I
a
t
i
t

a
N
a
h
s
N
O
I
r
i
o
i
n
a

agog. (To them it would have seemed "natural" if two guys were having a punch-up, but this was too much.) I overheard one of the young surries in a station wagon say, "Christ, I've heard about 'em but I've never seen 'em." I felt so angry that two women showing affection should be received as "peculiar" - but I couldn't think of anything consciousness raising to say.

When the other car load arrived, as a gesture of solidarity when Norma walked over to us I put my arm around her shoulder, gave her a hug and said "Glad you've arrived sister." When discussing this later, Norma was a little good-naturedly offended and said, "Curse you Joan, I thought you meant it." Now the really important thing about this is that before having direct personal contact with the lesbian feminists, I think I would have been not only embarrassed to be in such a situation but would not have put

my arms around Norma because of hang-ups - the "don't touch" hang-ups. So I did mean it. (I am grateful for the consciousness raising experience of contact with these sisters.)

I seem to have talked mostly about our lesbian sisters. That is inevitable as it was a unique experience for me because of their presence.

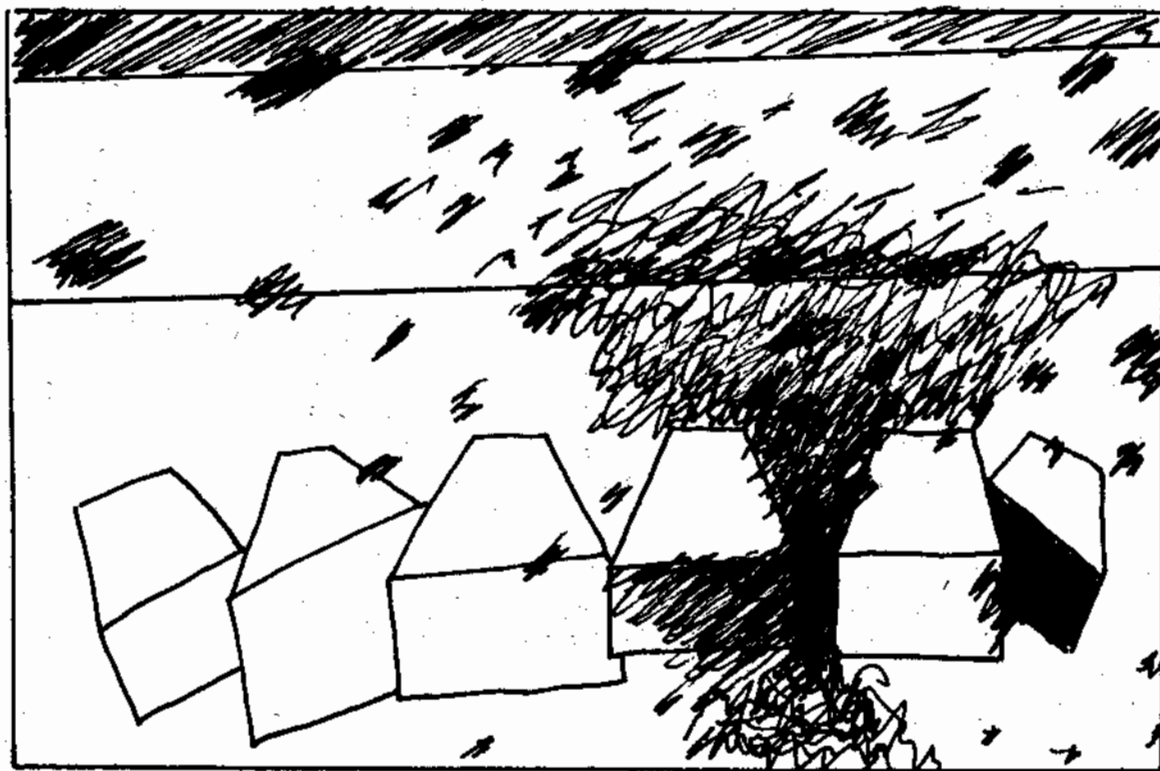
Of course there were negative things, of course there were hang-ups about property, hygiene, housework, and so on - to deny this would be to deny our conditioning.

Well, I'm back in the heterosexual, suburban, "normal" surroundings again - but I am writing this article...

Sisterhood does transcend all barriers.

Sisterhood is powerful.

Joan



My Sisters—myself

Internal change is the only change that is real. External change, the male kind, is superficial and has nothing to do with people. Internal change - feminist consciousness - is revolution and from it external change occurs naturally.

To discover ourselves, and therefore others, is, it seems to me, feminism cut right down to its core; it implies everything else.

We cannot discover ourselves in isolation, yet we ourselves are the only ones who can make it happen. Until now, until feminism, we have always been isolated, totally - we could never really have discovered ourselves.

To become whole human beings we have to interchange with other human beings, our equals, and, here and now, that means interchanging with women. We are the only people who are potentially, actually equal. We are the only people capable of breaking down all sense of competition and power. Women, without any investment in competition, are capable of seeing each other as real human beings, unclouded by the expectations and lies inherent in the female role, in any role.

Women, all women, are closer to themselves, to reality therefore, albeit distorted and repressed. We have always hated ourselves - how can we not when every word, thought and action is anti woman - yet all the more capable are we of loving ourselves, really knowing ourselves. Men do not hate themselves in the same way - how can they when every word, thought and action is pro man and by man - and therefore have no possibility of

really loving themselves, knowing themselves.

To discover ourselves we need to relate to equals. Before feminism I would never have imagined relating to women, on any level really, much less LOVING a woman. The first women's meeting I went to I instinctively knew what feminism was about - no division on the basis of gender and, therefore, loving people irrespective of their sex, and I was terrified. For six months I resisted the idea whilst still gradually becoming a woman identified woman. The more I started to love myself by identifying with other women, the more I was able to not only tacitly but positively accept the idea of loving a woman without restriction.

All the while too, without realizing it, I was breaking down my conditioned attitudes to sexuality. In the beginning my rage was so great that I couldn't possibly have had anything to do with men, and I was still unable to transcend my conditioning and love a woman. I felt as if my sexuality had been turned off. I didn't want to fuck a man, couldn't fuck a woman, didn't want to touch my own cunt, and felt no frustration at all. I used to look around at women I knew, carefully and closely, and tried to detect sexual response in myself, but naturally felt none. I felt incredible warmth and solidarity and love but nothing I could have called sexual in the male sense. Without realizing it I was de-isolating my sexuality, integrating it into my overall self as something inseparable yet integral. It

just happened.

The first time I loved a woman, without restriction, it happened quite spontaneously. My whole being responded totally, including sexually. It was an amazing experience, FEELING this happen in response to a woman - a mirror of myself, same psyche, same body. The absolute lack of power/conquest, of any sexual overtones - in the male sense - even though my response was incredibly intense. For the first time I felt the total integration of the sexual with the rest of me. Pure, organic, real open honest love. The amazing feeling of affinity and equality.

Equality. For the first time a person with whom I felt intuitively, instinctively equal. The first, strongest, feeling I had was of the natural balance between us. It was tangible. For the first time I could feel I was responding and being responded to as ME, not a role, a preconceived notion, and that was incredible. For the two days we were together before we even touched, my mind was unable to really define the amazing things happening inside me. I had never been so much in touch with myself, all the divided facets just came together and responded together. Harmony, balance, free flowing freedom.

During those two days every part of me was intensely high. We talked and talked and talked, but that somehow only reinforced, confirmed, our affinity. Yet now I have almost no recollection of what we talked about, all I really remember are the feelings - of warmth and love and pleasure, our unbelievable affinity - things that cannot be recalled in words and that take precedence in our memory because they relate to our inner self.

The knowledge we had of each

other was inner, real, it had nothing to do with external knowledge. We were able to discover each other so surely, so honestly, unhindered by images and expectations. We responded as equals, as people, as real beings. We were genderless, but only BECAUSE we are women. And that is the beautiful paradox.

Loving Katy, a woman, a mirror of myself, made utterly clear to me things I had hardly even recognised up till then about myself when I was totally male identified/totally alienated from myself.

With men I felt, without knowing it, the incredible conflict between the image and the real me. Because I imagined I was a free, independent person - choosing the men I wanted, fucking around, not wanting to live with any of them - the immense pressures on me were all the more difficult to see. We are closest to free expression when we fuck and it is when fucking with men that I can identify, now, all the concentrated pressures of the female role, pressures that are so subtle - that are only to do with our psyches - that I find it hard to express in words. The pressure of knowing that all he wanted to do, regardless of how real a person he was, was to get that cock inside me - after all, that's what fucking IS: everything else simply leads up to it. I used to either become somehow paralysed by that pressure and let him get it in as soon as possible or prolong it almost endlessly by expressing what I felt and wanted to do - knowing all the while that it had to get in eventually. Not that I disliked his cock or felt overtly threatened by it - I loved it, was almost obsessed by it, and knew every little thing about it. It symbolised men, and I wanted so badly to be liked BY them as well as to be LIKE them. I didn't

want to be conquered or to conquer, yet either one had to happen. They are the sides to the same coin.

So, with Katy, the lack of pressure - symbolised by fucking, so clear then - was absolutely overwhelming. To know and feel that there are no demands, no paralysis, no prolonging, no leading up to anything, no conquering. We just ARE. Free flowing freedom.

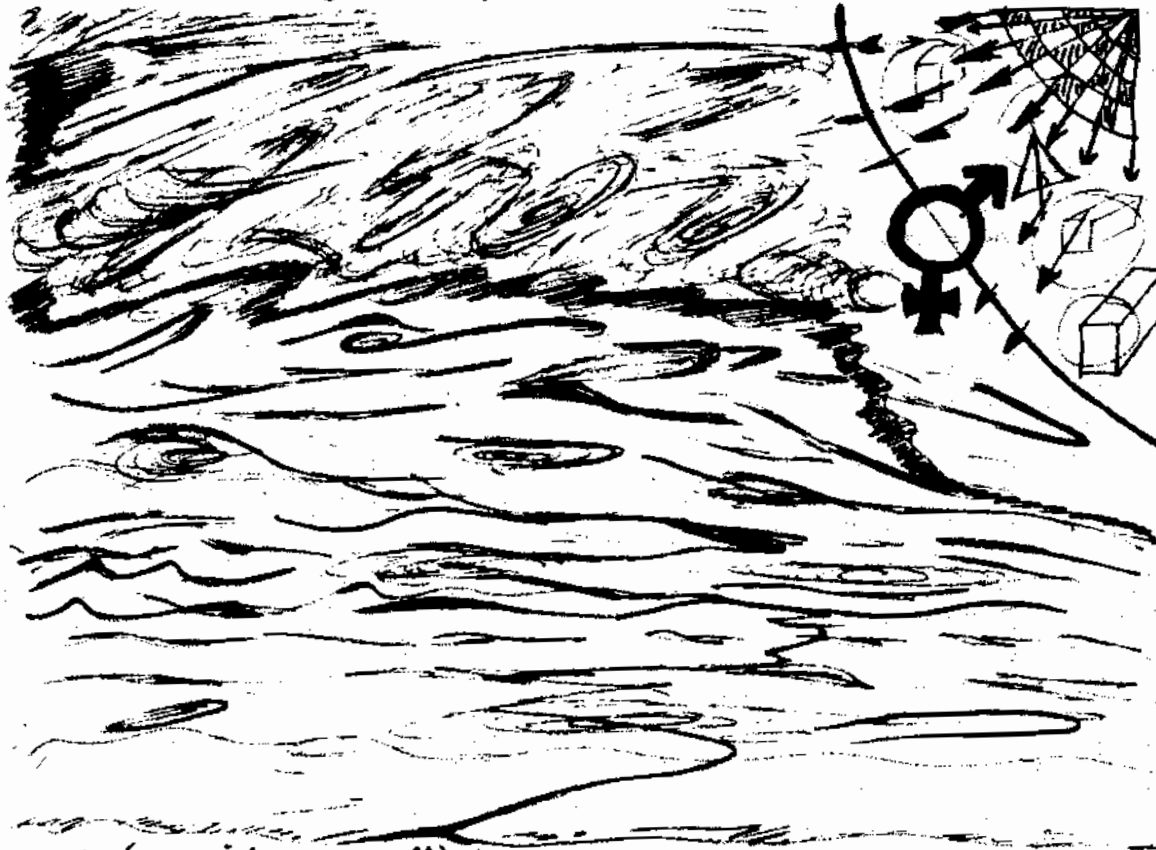
That is what loving/being should be. To de-mystify all the images, all the lies, and discover the essence. (And that means too, that I have de-mystified men, can see clearly, with no feeling of threat or hate, what they are and what they do.) To discover and KNOW ourselves by discovering and KNOWING others - and the more we know ourselves the less self-aware we become and the more we are able to get inside,

know, other people. (Feminism has NOTHING to do with what people call individualism, it simply recognises that change can only occur within ourselves in order for it to occur outside, NOT the other way around; it has everything to do with self yet is totally selfless.)

To discover our essence. To become whole human beings. To BE. Everything else is getting to that point, everything else is superfluous.

My entire life until now has been blind groping towards nothing, I have only now reached the point where I can begin to discover the essence, through my sisters-myself. THAT is the revolution, the living flowing pure revolution.

Jane



KATY (my sister-myself)

loving, daring, struggling for freedom... but above all, fear of the HE-church.

I think I also saw desire... but that may have been my imagination.

For an instant we were sisters and we were both lost... but I was no longer afraid of either the HE-church or the HE-god. And the only faith I have left is that she will soon overcome her fear.

I will never forgive the HE-religion. Christ taught us to forgive all, but then Christ was not a Woman and what he suffered is as nothing in comparison to the suffering of WOMAN.

One day my sister of the eyes and I will come together. We will struggle on the same side and we will share our newborn courage. We will love and laugh together and will both know that...

Religion oppresses WOMAN.

WOMAN is strong
We will be free

LOVE YOUR SISTERS AS YOURSELF

Laurie

Male Culture/Male Values

No-one will deny that it's the men who control all areas of our society, who determine its nature. Men invest capital; men build cities, bridges, motor cars, factories; men govern all institutions - the law, the making of it, the policing of it, the execution of their justice; men print newspapers, men print books, men control all media; men control the universities, the stock exchange, the banks; men determine international relations, economic policies; men settle their differences in war. Equally, men dominate the (male) Revolution; men run Trade Unions and socialist organisations; men dominate rock music, communal experiments, Gay Liberation etc. ad. inf. Exceptional women may participate in these spheres - they are exceptions, without substantial power. All this would be surprising if we did

not take it for granted.

But we do. When historians and scientists rave about "man's" achievements, we can only read with a sharper understanding of the accuracy of this claim.

For now we are beginning to see "man's achievements" on this planet with rather less congratulation, rather less enthusiasm for "man's astonishing progress." When I walk around the city I can't believe it. People everywhere at their manic activities, engulfed in a monstrous system which they are not permitted to question - however damaging it is to themselves. "Man" has all but exhausted the resources of the earth, "man" has destroyed his (and our) environment, polluted the air and the water, wiped out animals, birds and fish as if we had no relationship to our environment; Man has been blinded by his own

achievement to the destruction it has achieved. Now, even men are beginning to see what has happened - and to lobby in male institutions for men to put it right.

Our values, our roles, our every day life, are the concomitant of the male achievement I have described. Industrial man has built his castle on competition, aggression and ruthless indifference to others. This is deified in the male role. Man has pursued power without questioning his purpose. And man has constructed for himself an ego around which the world revolves - speak openly of male evil in front of any man and his ego responds full-blown. (Man is unable to see that his super-rational approach is a smoke-screen for precisely this kind of emotionalism.)

The male ego is hell-bent on seeing what it wants to see. The concept of progress is one of the chief methods for doing this. Men will go to any lengths of rationalisation to do just that. And, after all, our real values in this (male) society make cant of every religious, moral, political ideal - our real values are male values: aggressive, exploitative, indifferent to life on every level. When men cannot avoid seeing this reality, they glorify it in the name of progress, nationalism, or a debased ideal in public; and in the name of ambition, independence or strength in individuals. It is obvious that the "growth of violence" in our society is the inevitable companion of a male culture which has stripped its values naked. We are subjected continuously to the male media's record of just such male realities. All this would be surprising if we did not take it for granted.

Male culture has undertaken expansion for its own sake, expansion as the food for man's overwhelming ego. Expansion accomodates

unlimited competition. Population grows, competition escalates, growth is inevitably demanded. In the 1970s male culture has made the whole earth its back garden - and there is nowhere else to go, nowhere else to expand into. Expansion reaches its limit. You may deduce what happens then from the evidence of male methods available to you now.

And what have women to do with all this? Just about nothing. If anyone challenges that real power lies with men, ask him who has fucked the earth over, and what part women have played in the systematic deterioration of their environment, what choice women have ever had, what choice women have now who would do otherwise. On the level of influencing real action - it's zero. Only male objectives are achieved through male institutions.

Women come in at the level of ownership, possession. Woman, the "better half", rocks the cradle and rules nothing. Women have an ambivalent status amongst men's many possessions. "There goes my only possession - there goes my everything," as he was singing on the radio the other day. Women are just part of the complex world of ownership and competition in which men live their lives of "fruitful conflict". Women are at most the stakes and the consolations, at worst the servants and the cushions to absorb the ego-shock of a male's failure.

We have no interest whatsoever in perpetuating this system, yet the detailed occurrences of our daily lives trap us into co-operating. If a squadron of aircraft are, all but one, flying off-course, R D Laing pointed out, then the single plane on the correct course will look as if it is the deviant. Up until this time, we have been iso-

lated from each other - single planes - in this way the vast majority of us negate our feelings and accept male industrial culture as the norm, as reality, as something which we must accept. The (male) media bombards us with a record of male activities couched in such terms that our attitude to what we see and hear is predetermined. We are expected to glorify male achievement along with the (male) commentator.

For male culture had elevated progress to the level of a moral imperative. I remember at State School, when I was about eight, how much of our elementary history was given us in the caste-iron perspective of progress - things always getting better. No child could have found a way to doubt it. And it's only at this final stage, where progress is meeting its material limits, that questioning the "progress" assumption becomes an obvious necessity. When we ask what has got better, it comes down to longer life, less evident disease, the possibility of infinite material comfort and the reduction of distance (for some). (People and information can move rapidly anywhere.) We might well ask how much of this "improvement" is really important - we might disagree. We cannot however fail to agree that all this has got better for just so long as the resources last. That Man, in his piecemeal, headlong pursuit of material progress should have failed to ask about the purposes and results of his works would be surprising if we did not take it for granted.

Our books and our media see no need to question progress. Male progress remains "ideal", "ultimate", human achievement. Ecological disorder and disintegration is seen as a "problem" within that progress, a kind of hurdle - rarely

is it seen as the area where the whole male system can observe its destructiveness. In reality, the tight veneer of ideal progress had worn thin enough for anyone to see through it if she looks. We have no investment, no guilt - we are equipped to look. We are only prevented by these pervasive values which we have not yet questioned and rejected.

But the necessity for an end to growth stares us in the face. The choice this society (the world) has is between hardship now (in male terms) and disaster later (in any terms). THAT is the choice which male culture has bequeathed to us. Meanwhile, men are driving faster and faster towards the precipice. Men wield all power over society's direction. Individual men identify their power and prestige with the male culture I have described - the male ego is invested in a course which means imminent destruction. This is what makes the very fine recommendations of The Blueprint for Survival fanciful. For the Blueprint assumes that male institutions are capable of changing their direction and basis.

Growth and competition are so acceptable that they are celebrated - still. The most perfect expression of male culture, the capitalist system, pursues policies of production-expansion and consumption-expansion in the face of a now-foreseeable terminal point. I can only assume that individuals involved at every level refuse to recognise this because they do not wish to, refuse to see their actions in a total perspective because the total perspective invalidates and threatens their (habitual) actions.

The pressure to participate daily in the (male) nemesis, is all-pervasive. Mass media is a magnificent tool, working solely for the perpet-

uation of the male path to destruction. The media plugs consumption, both in and outside advertising. Men seek status in the system and a life whose success is measured in his material acquisitions, his house, his car(s), his capital (if he's lucky), his wife and his family. In that kind of order. He is totally unable to see his individual consumption in perspective. His success is, anyway, inextricably bound up with his, and other men's consumption. His false needs and his serving of them, are the symbols of his success. His growth as an individual is exactly the microcosm of his system's growth. His mind is a closed circuit.

Women, of course, participate in consumption. Women are equally submitted to the growth and possessions propoganda of the male media. It should not however escape us that the media is male in male interests for male benefits. The position of women is that of a possession. We have no investment

in the system beyond our investment in our men. We have no power in institutions, no power for change through men - looking at the record. But we, sisters, are free to question - we have nothing to lose (but our chains). We are not condemned to a closed mind. If there is any hope for survival, it demands total change.

We have first to understand that this system means not only our individual oppression but total destruction; we must also understand that this system cannot function without us. We must see that our stakes are imaginary. And we must, by all means available to us, withdraw our support - from institutions, from consumerism and, first of all, from the ego of every man we love, like, or meet on the street.

SEE IT ALL, SISTERS, AND SAY GOODBYE.

Kerryn

If only I could just scream some abuse,
break some windows,
kick some prick in the balls,
bomb some buildings,
murder some sexist pig men.

If only it could be that easy
to destroy
the source of our oppression,
the cause of our despair.

If only it could be that easy
to escape this prison
that is within ourselves.

Chris

What's the Alternative?

Sex role division has neatly divided up the psychic qualities of human beings.

Women are: dependent, passive, fragile, non-aggressive, non-competitive, inner oriented, interpersonally oriented, nurturant, sensitive, intuitive, yielding, receptive, unable to risk, supportive, subjective, empathizing, emotionally liable.

Men are: independent, aggressive, competitive, leaders, task oriented, self disciplined, stoical, active, objective, analytic, courageous, unsentimental, rational, confident, emotionally controlled.

As given, this is as hard on the man who doesn't feel aggressive as on the woman who doesn't feel fragile. But we live in a patriarchy which pushes man's supremacy in creation, government, thought, employment, action. There's nothing random about the fall of adjectives in these two lists: they're part of the process by which men control women. Men get benefits which range from an unpaid housekeeper companion to money or an ego-boost. They're a hell of a lot less likely to demand change.

A feminist is a woman who works politically towards ending this sex role division. Pretty big revolutionary force, a potential half the world. Pretty total revolution, meaning a head change in every revolutionary, and, in the end, freedom for the oppressors as well as the oppressed. And, since this is total revolution, there's no

question of how to start and what would be the best action. When we first start to become aware of our conditioning, we start to change, both ourselves and the society around us.

Activism

Without thinking, we become activists. We have been segregated off into a caste, with its own ideology, life style, dress, mannerisms, and we've been judged, and have judged ourselves, on how well we kept to the rules of our caste. Now we don't see any need to keep the rules. I can dress functionally without needing to fear being told, "You look like a man"; or I can paint my eyes violet and my nails green without feeling I can never appear in public "without my face on." Everything comes under scrutiny, and a lot goes, from the padded bra to compulsive housework. Shulamith Firestone's idea of a boycott on pleasing smiles starts now. The things that pleased us before don't please us any more. There are fewer books we can read, fewer films we can watch, and a lot of assumptions in everyday conversation that we can't nod to. We can't go around asking men to put up our shelves and mend our fuses. We start to enjoy putting up our own shelves.

This isn't trivial. What we do and what we think are one and the same. And the Mr Joneses know something's happening here, even if they don't know what it is. That doesn't mean they welcome the change. And so, even without seeking it, we find ourselves doing a lot of arguing. Routine objections and routine counters. Learning that the only males

who will admit to oppressing women are the ones who very nearly don't, and that women too feel threatened by an attack on their feminine role. Countering people's assumptions by our own existence.

Most of these arguments take place in tea rooms, at parties, dinner with the family, in bed, not in the cooler atmosphere of a debate or interview - "Good morning. Can I speak to the woman of the house?" Our activism is tested in all those relationships with family, friends and lovers which seemed to us, before we realised we had been conned, the reason for our existence. Wives are leaving husbands, lesbians are refusing to stay in the closet. The personal is the political. Just as we realise that the way our lives were moulded wasn't just an accident of fate, that we share a common expression with women of very different backgrounds and personalities. So too when we start to change we start to fight that oppression in total.

Some kinds of discrimination are enforced by law and can be fought by law reform: we lobby for abortion on demand. Some kinds of discrimination get by because they're thought to be the product of public opinion: we write letters to The Age saying we're not satisfied with a place in the home. A lot of discrimination is in employment: here we demand equal pay and hassle employers for equal opportunities. We organize for reform and protest and boycott and the sharing and handing on of information, always remembering that the first feminist movement went into decline after we had got the right to vote, so that we have to keep our final ends in view and not be satisfied by concessions. And because a lot of what we say no to isn't clear out there's also the spontaneous symbolic protest - mass

women's entry into male bars, real naked American women confronting Playboy sexists, feminist graffiti. Our roles are so incredibly complex and detailed that there's a million ways to confront them. We can all act in our own ways wherever we are, and constantly learn new ways of action from our sisters.

But all this goes on in a male world. We have to know and be cool about the fact that we've been socialized, that the roles we grew up with were male values, that honesty's hard. How else could it be? We're all dependent on men, fathered, bossed, conducted, inspected, mended, plumbed, doctored and governed, if not fucked by men. Our history is male, our culture is male, our religion is male. Small wonder if we don't have a very clear picture of ourselves. So along with our attacks on the patriarchy, we want to start building up our sense that there is another way to live. Not that we need a blueprint of an alternative society before we act: breaking down sex role division would necessarily result in a changed society. But to feel our guidelines clearly in tricky confrontations, to keep our sense of direction and purpose and enthusiasm, we have to know what we want as well as what we don't want.

Sisterhood

The first place where we begin to find out who we are is with our sisters. Women have been isolated from each other, in suburban cells and marriage competitions. The housewife envies the career woman envies the housewife. Old and young disapprove of each other. A whole series of myths have created the idea that women always bitch about other women and only associate to-

gether when there's no option. And so women have talked to each other either with polite hostility or with uncritical confession. For "real conversation" we have gone to men.

Only now we're starting to talk to each other. Inside and outside of consciousness raising groups, we're realising that shared experience will lift us out of the hole of self-doubt and self-blame, and in sharing our experience we're having to find a new way to express it. Mankind's words are really loaded. We need a new language. In the meantime we take a tilt at "girl" and "lady" and "Miss/Mrs", and say "oppressed" for "neurotic" and "chauvinist" for "manly" and "honest" for "aggressive". We are finding a way of talking that is general without being abstract. Experience counts. We meet and everyone has her say without needing a chairwoman and minutes are unnecessary because we mean what we say and a woman's defensiveness or ego tripping can be spoken of openly, just as much as the ideas she expresses. Honesty, not impartiality. And it's not easy to be honest. We've all tried hard to be the norm. Civilization needs you. But since we've never been afraid of our sisters' opinions like we have of men's, we only need to get the idea that none of us are second class citizens to be able to start talking openly and honestly together about what really matters. And then we have a way of talking the male language that involves neither pseudo-matiness or a feminine desire to please. (Not that an unliberated hearer won't put our words into one of those two categories, but we're concerned with our speaking, not his hearing.) Sister solidarity is a very real feeling, not just a catch-phrase for a movement.

Sexuality

So far, so cool. Once we have seen, we don't have to go on doing what we always did - we can't. But as we refuse to conform without questioning, as we refuse to accept that it is a man-centred universe, we start to look at alternatives. Firstly at the established man-woman bonding. A lot of feminists come to feel that "feminism is the theory, lesbianism the practice." From the other side, a popular question is, "Do you think all women should become lesbians?" It's another male-defined word. A lesbian: noun, all-encompassing. Heterosexual: adjective, descriptive of an aspect. Subtle distinction. In fact it isn't possible for me to become a lesbian as it's possible for me to become a typist. I can't make an intellectual and evaluative decision to love another woman. In making love, there aren't any "shoulds". But we can all get to work on the "should nots". For most women there would be barriers to making love with a woman they loved, barriers that can be taken down. "Lesbian" is also a fear word, the last insult, our sexual prejudices being the most unconscious and the most ingrained. But once we accept other women as our equals, and men as our equals too, not our superiors, we realise that our love for other women is not low on a hierarchy of loves, but equally valid. In a patriarchal society it is more likely that women who are putting away the feminine role will find mutual and communicative love with other women rather than with men, the oppressing class. "Only women can give to each other a new sense of self. This identity we have to develop with reference to ourselves, and not in relation to men. This consciousness is the revolutionary force from which all

else will follow, for ours is an organic revolution. For this we must be available and supportive to one another, give our commitment and our love, give the emotional support necessary to sustain this movement. Our energies must flow toward our sisters, not backward toward our oppressors." (Radicalesbians, New York)

As a feminist, I felt it very boring to have to go round announcing that I had become a lesbian. I didn't identify with the term at all: I related to a woman, didn't intend to get tied up with all the extras in my listener's mind. But it seems now that the word has to be used often enough to take away all the myths surrounding it. Just as we see that our sisters' oppression is our oppression, we have to be prepared to "become lesbians". Not necessarily to stage a mass Lysistrata-type walk out together. Lesbianism in itself isn't the answer. The woman who keeps going the continuous battle for recognition with her husband is trying to escape her conditioning: the woman who offers her passivity to another woman is not. It's another place where we have to change the language, for while a lesbian seems like a separate category and lesbians a subdivision of women, we are still oppressed.

The real needs are for a new understanding of the words "love" and "sexuality." The second's probably easier. In male language "sexuality" goes along with concepts like a good lay, low cut dresses, sultry glances, different positions, aggressive enthusiasm. It's a pretty genital idea. The intellectually acceptable idea that sex is energy comes out emotionally as energy is sex. Women have kept more in touch with the idea that all energy is sexual, and that sexual doesn't mean genital. This was

turned against us in the great campaign to cheat women of our orgasms, but we mustn't react into the alternative idea that the way to keep the body going is with plenty of instant zap orgasm power. Every orgasm is different, and more than release of tension, it's response. Intake of breath on looking at a hillside or the sea or clouds is a sexual response. We have to be able to feel the food we taste, the cup we hold, the motion of our bodies in walking before we can fuck as ourselves.

The difference that actual cunt contact makes is so obvious that it's absurd to mention. That's where the nerve ends are. But think of definitions of orgasm - the great one is that I forget myself, that is, my social identity, that is, I stop thinking. In fact, if I'm in touch with my sexuality, I lose my self-consciousness all the time. But someone who has what Reich calls "orgiastic impotency," who fucks by turning on a mind-mechanism that drives him straight at a purely genital orgasm, naturally sees fucking as something special. Which it shouldn't be. Frigidity, monogamy, promiscuity, masturbation, platonic love, friendship are all equally bizarre as concepts, if sexuality is equivalent to life energy. We should be able to express warmth of feeling by touch as well as word, without fearing or anticipating fear. One thing to be learned from GLF is their spontaneity, pride and cheerful sexuality. Maybe this is only an ideal for them, but it isn't an idea much associated with feminism at all. And yet in groups with women I've felt a greater emotional intensity than over eighteen years spent in places of education. If we start to rediscover our sexuality together, we could recover polymorphous perversity pretty fast,

right away from the "he/she only wants one thing" syndrome.

Love

Because the great block on sexuality has been that physical expression has been stereotyped like all other activities. I hug my child, kiss my mother and maybe my close friends, fuck my man. People are property. This comes out even more with the other word "love." Love is a feeling of unity, but gets perverted to a feeling of property - "Mine, mine forever" - where the man or the parent is the owner. Love between friends, where there's no question of owning, is rated lower for that very reason, and love for myself which is the basis of all love for anyone and anything is regarded as highly improper. Because love is property, people come to think of it as something they can and should get. We look for love and someone to love, without realising that our sense of unity comes from being where we are now; and because it's an unreal search we're easily bombarded into accepting the patriarchy's definition of love, which is, essentially, a long-lasting heterosexual couple. Sure, the state described as "being in love" has its own reality which is different from "loving the world." The heady feeling of affinity with another person's being is an intensification of our sense that we are all part of different manifestations of life.

But preference isn't exclusion: love isn't naturally monogamous (a word that means "one wife" anyway), jealousy isn't instinctive. Love is part of the world, not an escape from it. I can't get any special validity from another person, though I've always been told I can, and internalised it during all those hours waiting for the phone

to ring. The most important thing is that we understand the difference between a special affinity and a special dependence, and are prepared to break down dependence and exist confidently in ourselves rather than create unreal affinities for unreal comfort. Love is not an ideal: it's actual.

The Work Ethic

When love stops being tied up with property, property itself will be under assessment. Even now, women have a different view of money from men. Men get money by working, promotion, business ventures. Women conserve money, spin it out, save and bargain. Money's a tangible thing to us, an exchange for food and clothes, so it's easy for us to imagine a world where there's no insurance, capital, stocks and shares, credit and interest, the paper money. Easy enough, but not so easy to do without money at the moment. Still we can take it lightly, get the Man's bread and then be activists in his jobs. We can go on working towards our own ends as nurses and teachers and cleaners and factory hands. We can fight to become truckies and posties and politicians and diplomats. Agitation for equal pay is a good thing (more bread), and for equal opportunity too (more bread - maybe). It's nice reading how in Sweden women aren't only given the legal opportunity to work, but that it's understood that social pressures have been against her working, and that this has to be changed too. But what about the jobs themselves? Are they made for meaningful work?

One way and another it's true that we need meaningful activity. Very few westerners can be satisfied with "sitting quietly doing nothing." But for the glory and

benefit of modern capitalism, meaningful activity has turned into the work ethic, where it's a matter for shame not to have a job. Occupied for most of their lives with "jobs," all of which, from company director to labourer, involve conformity to the job's image and meaningless shit-work to fill up the hours, most men forget about the idea of meaningful activity. And women are caught in a multiple bind. Being outside the system, we can see clearly the extent to which men are fooling themselves. On the other hand a lot of fragments of meaningful work are embedded in the system, but often on the other side of the line: no women allowed. Women don't get decision-making jobs: we'd make different decisions. Those who get the closest to it have generally gone into the conformity bit so thoroughly that they accept male values in their heads, though the women who get a feminist consciousness as a result of their experience in this line, can do really good work. But the woman who wants to be a labourer or an engineer is in the bizarre position of fighting hard to get where she doesn't want to be. Big deal. And in the meantime, where does the bread come from?

Not necessarily from a lifetime nine-to-five. The counter culture's made an institution out of hustling. There's a lot that's free, a lot that can be lifted. It's possible to live for nothing, though it's hard work, so that it's possible to put away money on the dole. Not everyone can adjust their expectations of life to that degree. Still, take a part-time job, or work a while and stop work a while, and then there's time for all that unpaid activist work, time to step back and assess, time to experience.

Another alternative to joining the work force is living on the

land, in a group of people with a common purpose, co-operating without the binds of the nuclear family. This is a big step, and involves a lot of new learning. Most of us aren't ready for it, and a lot of us would regard it as an A-grade cop-out. Too much pastoral idealism is obviously a hangup. Modern cities are sprawling steel-and-concrete death traps, but our distant ancestors lived on the land because they had to: technological developments bring us together in larger units. To say that we don't want the cities we have is not to say that we have to, or could scatter over the countryside. But we do have to question whether cities are as much as we think where it's all happening. Because right now the cities are in danger.

The Ecological Disaster

It's a fucked up world, we know, and that's frighteningly literal. The earth's getting covered with concrete or impoverished by men's mistakes in farming; the air is smog-ridden; the rivers are poisoned; the sea is dying; the natural systems of organic life which maintain themselves have been disrupted. Capitalists exploit natural resources as if the earth wasn't finite, and then turn to the scientists for new answers and new sources of power, as if science were indeed the new god, not simply a form of our understanding of what we are and what we do. Fooled by the idea of progress, and a man-centred universe. And that's one point at which feminists aren't itching to change "man" to "people," because it is an exact statement of the facts. One ecologist writes:

Man, as distinct from woman, the family craft-worker, likes steady work rather less and

brings his inventive mind to easing craft processes. I am sure man invented the potters wheel and the lathe, and then carried on patterns which woman had conceived in the first place. (Sir Frank Fraser Darling, Reith Lectures)

Of course he doesn't go on to say that the only way to avoid ecological disaster is to remove the sex role orientation of our society, but we can start to see interesting parallels. Unlike socialists, ecologists tell us that all our work for large-scale changes will be wasted unless we change our own lives now. Ecology takes in the minutest details of our own lives -- don't use pink toilet paper, discard excess packaging on the supermarket steps. Like feminism, it knows the duality between planning alternative life styles, and the urgent need to do something about the established situation confronting us. In fact, it's just convenience that gives us words like "feminism" and "ecology." The two aren't separate categories: they're part of the same process, the same response to what we see. Because civilization and all it implies is man-made. Women are organic. We've been overlooked and left out, and in consequence we remain aware of what's around us, rather than always trying to impose our own wills. Feminists are natural ecologists, and as soon as the ecology "movement" cottons on to that, the better.

Radical Feminist Communes?

Of course, if the disaster isn't kept under control, then we won't be choosing alternatives. I have a vision of radical feminist communes working a hard living from the land, but know that wouldn't turn a lot of sisters on. So for

the moment, simply register that the patriarchy is literally self-destructive, and know where the answer lies. Here with us. And certainly, whether on the land or not, living together more is part of the whole process of change. At the moment factors ranging from the accepted norm of marriage and pair bonding to the architectural set up of our houses (all those separate rooms) keep us in isolation. As we change our heads, meet our sisters, understand in retrospect all the ideas conditioned into us by the nuclear family, inevitably we get less attached to any kind of closed circle living. It can be more difficult to actually break away.

"Communes always collapse."

Living together at the moment involves all the problems of our half-liberated egos, of our nuclear family conditioning, of our different stages on the way to revolution. But that, more than anything, is the practice of feminism.

Well, are we working towards group marriages? And are we working for a return to the land or for the control of mechanical jobs by computers? How are we going to educate our children? Are we going to de-school society? To change sexuality, are we calling for sperm banks and test-tube babies? And shouldn't all this be what we're talking about when we talk about alternatives?

I don't think so. We're practical. We're acting now, rewriting our history, finding new ways of relating, starting to speak a new language. "Rather than concentrating the female principle into a 'private' retreat, into which men periodically duck for relief, we want to rediffuse it -- for the first time creating society from the bottom up." (Shulamith Firestone) Laws follow the actual practice of a society, and change as society changes. We don't have to work out new laws: we have to change the way

we act. For ideas can't be imposed. They have to be accepted. So there's no point in refining a new blueprint for 1984. Methods will evolve, as long as we know what we want.

Living in the Present

And that's not lazy thinking. Mankind's been caught too long in the logical rational bind that adds point b to point a, then point c, and so on in a chain that's fine in itself, but more a mental exercise than any real understanding of our multi-faceted experience. So now we have men writing books: about the value of stoned thinking rather than straight thinking, of lateral thinking rather than vertical thinking, of schizophrenic experience rather than normal experience. Suddenly we recognize our old friend and enemy, woman's intuition. Suddenly we see that we've never been expected to think logically, and that's been used as a put-down, but in fact it means we've got less to learn. The personal really is the political. The little wife who shook her head and said, "If women were in parliament there wouldn't be wars," is a right on sister. There are no large mysterious social and economic forces controlling the world. All those institutions were started by people.

It's vital that we believe in ourselves, trust ourselves, experience ourselves. When we exist in the present in every moment, then all the habits, cop-outs and conformities of the patriarchal society will start to peel away by themselves. All honest experience is valid. "If you sit, sit; if you stand, stand: above all, don't wobble." We live in the future and in the past, hope and blame, think that our clothes are more real than our bodies, never listen. At the same time we still know that we

have complex and contradictory feelings - "Changeable as a woman." Once we have got rid of the old names for them and got rid of the idea that there are half a dozen standard emotional programmes and anything that isn't on them is not normal, then we can be what we are without needing the security of something that isn't ourselves to justify our existence. Social institutions: the family, marriage, femininity, masculinity, god. The institutions of religion are divided up under a hundred different names. But the mysticism at their core is simply different ways of saying that we have to be able to recognize what's real, through disguises. The patriarchy offers us a ready made set of disguises. When we take them off, religion will be de-mythologised along with the rest of it.

Revolution Now

We are divided from each other. The only alternative to enduring this forever is revolution, pure and total change, organic change. We have to end the colonization of woman by man, the first oppression, based on her physical weakness and her bearing of children. Some of us will work with belief towards a positive restructuring of society like the one Shulamith Firestone outlines in her last chapter. Some will be Delilahs, Scum women, hate and attack. Some will stay here and some will split. Some will work for their grandchildren, some for themselves. But we'll all carry our oppression with us, whatever we do. So far we've only been liberated from illusion. We don't have our freedom. We have to fight for that still. Fighting in the streets, there'll be that before it's over, but fighting in our own heads too, all the time, fighting others' att-

itudes and our own, fighting for honesty which is freedom, which is revolution, which is the alternative. Because we will know what we

want and we will have it. Sisters, change is a living possibility.

Jenny

Mountains lie in folds -
rippling from peak to peak -
over the earth;
like veils
over the powerful rippling muscles
of the earth mother

Fear her
all you men
who walk the dangerous ridges
of her love

For too long
she took the sharp blades
you drove into the valleys
of her love -
and she watered your crime
with her tears

But now is the time to fear her
you rapers of the earth,
There is a strong and powerful
sisterhood
rising -
and the rippling muscles
of our unity
will send your monoliths
crashing
into your fear

Chris

