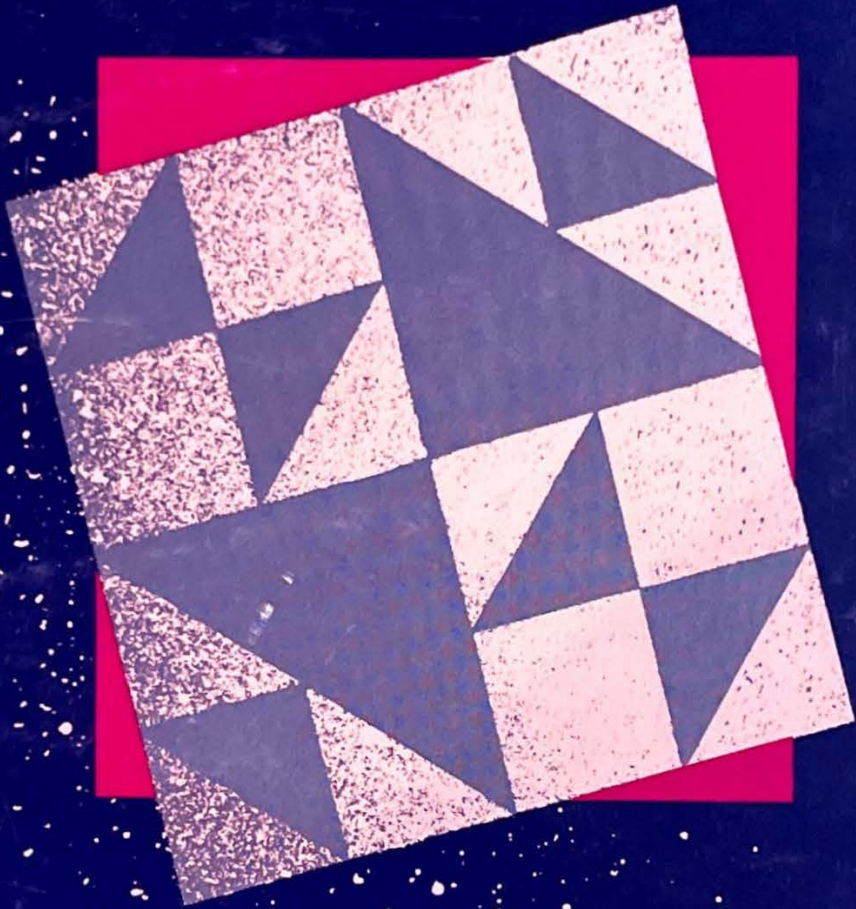


Lesbian Ethics



Volume 3 No. 1

Lesbian Ethics

Editor: Jeanette Silveira

Special thanks to: JMax, Sage, Martha, Amber

Cover design based on the patchwork quilt block, "Old Maid's Puzzle"

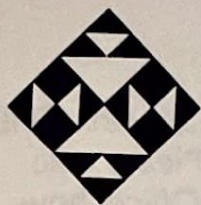
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Lesbian Ethics

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Editor's Introduction

LE has gone through several changes since you saw her last. First, SHE HAS MOVED TO NEW MEXICO! And is very happy here. Please note her new address (inside front cover, also p. 112). The Post Office, however, is being EXTREMELY slow in forwarding her mail, as in several months slow. So if you or anyone you know has written and not received a reply, please write again to the new address.

Second, and unfortunately, starting with this issue I've had to increase *LE*'s prices. Printing costs have increased by 14%. Rates for U.S. mail have increased by up to 33%; and while international postage rates have not increased, *LE*'s international air subscription rate was originally set too low. The cover price of an issue has been increased by 50 cents, U.S. and surface subs by \$2, and international air subs by \$4. HOWEVER, current subscribers will be able to renew your subscriptions at the old rates (\$22 for intercontinental air subs) through August 31.

Since I've brought up the subject of money, I thought readers might like to know about *LE*'s financial status. *LE* brings in enough money to pay her expenses (printing, postage, supplies), but not to pay for any salaries. Also, I have not yet been able to recoup any of my initial investment, about \$7000. I don't expect the new prices to change this situation.

Third, you will notice that the type size has been increased, in response to comments, particularly by older readers (including myself), that the former type size made *LE* hard to read.

As previously announced the topic for the next Readers' Forum (*LE* 3:2) is "Separatism: Beyond the Debate"; that is, what do Separatists have to say to each other, rather than to non-Separatists. Few contributions have been received to date for this forum. Here is a chance to write something different. A chance to put self-defensiveness and haranguing aside. A chance to dream. A chance to write *Separatist* theory, *Separatist* practice. The deadline for this Forum has been extended to August 31. The Forum topic for *LE* 3:3 is Dyke Humor. Let it all out for this one: Cartoons, one-liners, satire. How often do we encounter humor that is REALLY funny? Here's our chance.

Jeanette Silveira



Bloodroot: Brewing Visions*

The Bloodroot Collective

Selma:

In trying for perspective on Bloodroot's history, I'm going to write of the Presence of Absence, the image of the Fool in the Tarot, and finally, about being judgmental or, as women say pejoratively, politically correct.

We've been doing Bloodroot, a feminist restaurant and bookstore, for eleven years. Before that, for a year and a half, I did a Wednesday women's night¹ that I called Bloodroot in my home. Before that, there was a rather small conference in Pennsylvania called a National Radical Feminist Conference, intended to discuss how to make feminist communities. And before that, I was married, for a total of 19 years, with two children.

You may remember how it was in the early 70s. Feminists were really angry. We thought that we'd suddenly discovered something that we'd explain to men and everything would change. In 1975, at the National Radical Feminist Conference, Sagaris, a feminist university that had occurred earlier that summer, was criticized at length — for the poor daycare, for taking money from Ms. (was Gloria Steinem a CIA dupe?), etc. We assumed that there was a politically appropriate way to function, and we wanted to do it right! One night at this week-long conference, we divided the room into those who would make community on the land and those who would do it in the cities. I sat in the middle, in neither group, unable to think of leaving my friends or home in suburbia.

I was uncertain about what I wanted to do with my life. I had a lot of fantasies, no sense of what was really possible I was 40 years old,

*Earlier versions of these papers were delivered at the W.I.T.C.H. lecture series, Boston 1987.

and unhappy — not quite ready to give up my unsatisfactory marriage. Finally, in October 1975, my husband and I decided to separate. He got an apartment in New York City and was to leave by November 1. For three weeks I was frightened and confused, really terrified. He left on a Sunday. The next day, Monday morning, I was driving east for a doctor's appointment. I saw the sun coming up ahead of me, and I knew in a rush what to do. Once a week on Wednesday night, in my own house, I would cook supper. A friend could sell non-sexist books for kids. A photographer could show her work. It would be a women's cooperative exchange and we'd call it Bloodroot. And so we did, for a year and a half. It was fun, but scarcely serious. I continued to worry over the real future, because how could you change your life and the world in suburbia?

Early the next year a faltering relationship with a woman lover came to an end and there were, one night, strange dreams — of making a garden by Long Island Sound, of rooms of people eating Sunday Brunch, of statistics on the dependency of women after divorce that made me cry. In the morning I wrote the dreams down, though I did that rarely, and forgot them. Later that day, I got the same kind of rush I'd had driving east, nine months earlier. I suddenly knew exactly what I wanted to do: Make Bloodroot a full time part of my life. Ask other lesbians to do it with me. Use the money I had earned doing landscape design (and had hoarded separate from my husband's and my joint account) for a restaurant and bookstore.

We started looking for a spot. It wasn't until many months later — after we'd rejected the existing diners realtors showed us and the bleak storefronts on the Post Road, and when we'd decided, emotionally, on a building on an inlet of Long Island Sound on a dead end street (no walk-in trade there!) with room for a garden and a terrace — that I then looked back into my journal and found the record of the dreams which seemed to predict just such a place, just such a decision.

Those of you who have read Mary Daly's *Pure Lust* will be familiar with her concept of Presence of Absence.² At that time, I was unable to let my intuition, my third eye function until I was rid of what was truly emotionally disabling — the marriage, and later, the draining relationship. I had been searching, but had no clarity about how to proceed with my life until there was relief from this Presence of Absence, this busy-ness that took from me. I can't help but think this happens often. Women don't know what to do. Our lives are filled with time consuming matters — school, career, jobs, or some relationships that function

like television. They waste our time. They waste us. We look for the occasional good program and never know what to do with our Selves.

While we were still doing the cooperative exchange, Jean and Ruth Mountaingrove of *Womanspirit* magazine came to visit. By then we knew our plans, and so we asked them to do an I Ching about Bloodroot. We cut bamboo that I had planted in my yard, to do the reading in the old yarrow-stalk manner. What we got was hexagram number 4, Youthful Folly — an image of a spring which wells up at the foot of the mountain. And many times, in that period, I would find the Fool in my Tarot readings.

These eleven years seem a state of journeying, of wanting and dreaming, with potential for danger as well as cause for optimism. Like the Fool in the Tarot, we are searchers, travelling our journey. We haven't stopped. Full of hope, often naive, we believe in the future, and its possibilities. That's what I think Bloodroot is about.



For example, we did (and do) believe in collectivity, even though we didn't *know* what that meant or how it would work. We *did* know we didn't want to be bosses with employees. Still, there weren't enough of us to do it all, and some women, both lesbian and straight, wanted to work with us, though not full time. Since we strongly believe that those fully responsible must be lesbians working full time with a long term commitment to Bloodroot, we have the collective, and we have the part time workers. The part time women, heterosexual and lesbian, give similar reasons for being with us that many of our regular customers give for coming as often as they do. We are different from what is out there, so we are a haven, also a place to think, where they like the ambiance. Recent and current part timers include a realtor, a drop-out from IBM, a massage therapist, a lawyer, a teaching administrator, and a woman who writes and works in book distribution.

As for the collective: well, we started with three. Two came to work part time but wanted to be with us full time. First one joined; then one of the originals left, then the other joined. So, in the first two years we became four and it was like that for six years. In that period (just as now) we thought a lot about living our ideals. We found a lesbian lawyer who wanted to help us make our financial arrangement reflect as much as possible what we believed in.³ As we began to work together, we found that while we all shared responsibility for the business (roughly 60 hours of concentrated attention per week for each of us), we

each took specific jobs to do, picking what we felt most comfortable with or what we wanted most to learn.

But after six years one of the four left. And we were still, I think, naive — youthful folly! We couldn't understand why she was restless; we tried to keep her with us, and it was several years of tearing our roots, and several years after that of healing. We tried to write about it in our second cookbook, *The Second Seasonal Political Palate*,⁴ but it was hard then, in 1984, since it was still so fresh. And so for three years we were three. Then, last year to our surprise, Liz, one of our part time women, asked to join as a collective member. And as the three of us each privately thought about this, we each separately did our Tarots and we each got the Fool again. No surprise in that. And so again now, we are four.

Hopeful, like the Fool, we did (and do) hunger to be politically correct. We've wanted to see our lives in a political context, to think what a *feminist* business would be. We thought of the food. I had liked cooking, it was my housewife learned skill — well what was feminist food? And the answer was, ethical and ethnic, vegetarian food, so that people won't starve and animals aren't killed. Ethnic because of all the rich cultures we can explore and all the possibilities that foods present when there is no meat. When the center of a dinner is meat, the same dynamic takes place as when women are focussed on men. You know the worry: You can't cut all the good men out of your life, can you? If you're a separatist you try, and what you discover are all the wonderful woman/lesbian possibilities — ideas, art, ways of thinking, the way women are different when no men are there — how *present* we become to ourselves and each other.⁵ When meat isn't the center of your dinner, then the possibilities of other foods become endless and much more interesting. Men and meat are types of Presence of Absence. Meat centered dinners are boring.

So we would make a space to eat and chat, and of course there had to be books for the ideas we hunger for, and want to talk about. Those books would be the ones we love, or at least like. We're here twelve hours a day, so of course we won't have books we're offended by, or ashamed of. It's our home, after all! And music. We play women's music, 99% lesbian. We believe in its subliminal messages. We have one long wall, opposite the wall of windows that look at the water, that we've filled with old photos of women. We needed to make Bloodroot into a space that is good for *us*. You can see into the kitchen, and there's no waitressing.

In our "Youthful Folly" we had to be true to ourselves and our vision. We had to be strong in the face of nitpickers. You know how it is in our communities when someone tries to do something? Women, dykes (!) tell you you're serving the wrong brand of beer (meaning Bud instead of Miller) or that the waste basket is in the wrong place or that your salads are more expensive than at another restaurant (ignoring that your soups are cheaper). You can imagine that to the Fool this kind of carping was dismaying.

And other painful stumbles the Fool made? Well, many. I wish we hadn't fallen in love so often with women we wished would stay with us. But that's ridiculous; sharing good work with someone makes you love her. It's as if there has been a love affair with Bloodroot and with us, and just as is often true in love affairs, there is the exciting beginning when all one's hungry needs seem to be met. Then difficult reality sets in when differences become apparent, and it is necessary to *want* to make it work, to realize that when you are not distanced from your work and those who work with you, struggle is required. I think it is the same in lover relationships. Lesbians are so much like each other, so we come closer in our intimacy. Too often we have seen lesbians settling for other ways to think than lesbian feminism. Apolitical health concerns such as obsessions with food allergies or macrobiotics⁶ become the focus of their lives. Then there are women whose lovers want to exclude what is politically challenging in favor of a more "normal" life, and there are those who leave because they need a "real" job, as if we were a fantasy. There were times when there were precious few of us struggling to get the work done so that Bloodroot would survive.

The other big disappointment is the lack of recognition we've had from lesbian and feminist media. (It is interesting that the animal rights movement, which is as fraught with factions and arguments as is our own, has been so repeatedly admiring of us, not only bringing us customers, but making us feel valued in what we do!) For the past eleven years we have been a visible feminist and known lesbian presence in a blue collar residential neighborhood in one of the largest and poorest cities in the Northeast. All of our printed materials and the sign over the door carry the word *feminist*. Above the counter (where food is picked up by customers) are feminist and animal rights cartoons and occasional clippings of interest to us. We led a neighborhood fight against a recreational developer who wanted the city to take the waterfront land we owned away from us by eminent domain, and we received overwhelming support from our neighbors, who see us as hard working girls who

are quiet and grow flowers. In the lesbian section of our bookstore we have a sign that says "Gentlemen — We trust those of you who support women's self determination will curb your curiosity about lesbian books and limit your browsing to other sections of the store. Thank you."

Our clientele is surprisingly mixed, as out-of-state dykes often comment. Folks come from the rich suburbs of Westport, poor neighborhoods in Bridgeport (knowing there's good homemade bread and soup, cheap, here), and from the women's community in New Haven, a half-hour away. The lesbians and gay men who come in know what we're about. The straight women see us working together, often laughing and playing around, sometimes angry or downhearted. We are a visible example of what can be done without men. Of course they come to us and expect us to commiserate when they are in crisis or to celebrate when they win one against the patriarchy. It is clear to anyone who wants to notice that we are lesbian separatists, functioning right here out in the world, running what *Vegetarian Times* has called one of the best (Mariclare Barrett Obis' favorite) vegetarian restaurants in the country.⁷

So perhaps you can imagine that the overwhelming silence on the part of the lesbian press has been a disappointment,⁸ and the occasional pot shot or snide remark exceedingly painful. It seems we were naive to think our own papers would be as encouraged by our existence as we have been by theirs

The Fool has had good discoveries also. We have found that when you have a vision and you try to be true to it, to go on thinking, working, talking, you do become stronger and more intuitive in the way you make judgments. We often were surprised that we had each, separately, come to the same conclusions. We could see betrayals, or lack of integrity. We could see courage, as we looked out from our kitchen.



We are fortunate to have been able to create a life that is relatively integrated. We don't work at a job, go home to leisure time when one might cook or eat or go to a movie, and then wait for a vacation, or a date on the weekend. Instead, we have our daily work that we do together, talking, laughing, sometimes fighting. We cook the food and serve it and then eat together and at last go home with our books, read for awhile and then sleep. In the morning some more reading and then back to work, to talk about what we've read. These Winter days, when business is slower, we'll sit and knit. In the Spring, we'll start the garden. Every few weeks, our menu changes, partly to reflect changing

food availability, partly because we'd be bored doing it the same all the time. This rhythm to our lives, this working hard, is tiring, but not boring! And of course, there are the customers, many of whom have become our friends. It's not that we don't take vacations. We have for the past 7 or 8 years. But our daily lives *have* to be a satisfaction in themselves, for us to continue, as we do.

In this context, questions such as "Are you for censorship or freedom of speech?" have no meaning. What kind of boredom is there in lesbian lives to produce a market for *On Our Backs*, or for the violent, racist emanations from Lace Publications?⁹

Those of us who call ourselves feminist make our Selves and other women a priority. We are angry and political; we make judgments for our Selves. Lesbians discuss substance abuse, work towards "survival" of alcoholism, incest, patriarchal religion; yet some don't seem to recognize that sadomasochism is our own internalization of men's woman-hating. Sure, drugs, alcohol, religions (including those such as macrobiotics) are all turn-ons, ways to lose one's mind, one's Self. And so is the self-hatred in the so-called "freedom" of whips and bondage.

As you can see, we are proud to make judgments. Of course we want to live in a way that is healing, and exciting. Of course we want to be in possession of our Selves, even while we know we need encouragement from each other. We are passionate about our lives, we want to be engaged, on our journey, proceeding sometimes naively and always opinionated.

Notes

¹ Wednesday night continues to be women's night at Bloodroot. Since it is illegal to prevent men from coming, but not illegal to require reservations on the night we have a large group meeting, Wednesday has been women's night every week but two, for eleven years.

² ". . . male centered myths and ideologies . . . is 'stuff' that packs the mind, which becomes a garbage heap of details without focus. The glut of non-sense can be experienced watching television, reading newspapers, or attending an ordinary university." Mary Daly, *Pure Lust* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), p. 147. In *Gyn/Ecology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), Daly develops the idea of Self (as opposed to self) as an en-spiriting process. See p. 338.

³ The attorney borrowed from a stock agreement New Words Bookstore had designed and which came to us by way of one of the original owners of Womanbooks. It provided an easy way for those who had not contributed

initial capital to buy equivalent amounts of stock. We also decided that while each of us in the collective owns Bloodroot equally, because we want the future of Bloodroot to be secure, the stock cannot appreciate. And so whoever might leave can take with her only her stock value (no more than \$1200). She also must sell the stock back to those who stay. Since the value of the stock is low, any lesbian could become a collective member if she desires and if the rest unanimously want her.

⁴ Bloodroot Collective, *The Second Seasonal Political Palate* (Bridgeport, Ct: Sanguinaria Publications, 1984) and *The Political Palate*, 1980, are two collections of our recipes flavored with our politics and with quotes from our favorite writers and musicians.

⁵ Mary Daly introduced the idea of women being present to each other in this way in *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973).

⁶ Traditional Japanese food, with its balance of salty, pickled and bland whole grain is as useful for vegetarian inspiration and modification as are other cuisines of the Far East — Chinese, Indian, Thai, etc. The *conceptions* of macrobiotics, however, are woman hating and homophobic. For example, in the June 87 issue of *Macrobiotics Today*, Lima Ohsawa is reported to have apologized for her husband's dying. It is explained that she and he are one. In other issues, such as January 86, female homosexuality and independence are blamed for sickness. I will also argue that the macrobiotic advised exclusion of the nightshade family (peppers, eggplants, tomatoes, and potatoes) is hard to justify for Native Americans, since most of these plants are "new" world in origin, never mind for the Italians, Irish, Spanish, etc.

⁷ Mariclare Barrett Obis, Food Editor, *Vegetarian Times*, March 85: "This is the high water mark for fine vegetarian cuisine . . . Bloodroot is, in fact, my favorite U.S. vegetarian restaurant." And, March 87: "Vegetarian and feminist ethics share a consciousness of our connections with other species and with the survival of the Earth. The women of the Bloodroot Collective cherish the act of creating — with the Earth and with each other."

⁸ With notable exceptions, such as Lee Lanning in *Maize*, Batya Bauman who wrote to *WomaNews* about us, and Carol Seajay in *Feminist Bookstore News*.

⁹ Lace Publications was apparently created so that Artemis Oakgrove could write about "dominating dykes, sex slaves . . . and sumptuous living . . . raw sex . . . dominion and dependency," to quote from their February 88 brochure.

Noel:

When I was a little girl I formed images of how I wanted to be in the world. I imagined myself proud, self-sufficient, strong and free. The picture which always came to mind as a symbol was a straight spine, head held high. Between that time 37 years ago when I was six years old and now (I'm 43), much has happened to pull me away from the vision and back again. I now think of this journey as a spiral.

In *Right-Wing Women*¹ Andrea Dworkin talks about patriarchy's² brothel and farm models for womanhood. Before I came out, and before I came to Bloodroot, I had been both. Neither worked for me then any more than the lesbian versions (sado-masochism and having babies) would work for me today.

In an attempt to fit into the brothel model (the only option I could envision at the time) I was a fashion model from the age of 13 until I was 18. I then began to work as a Playboy Bunny in New York. Those two occupations amounted to the same thing — selling flesh. After about a year and a half (during which time I was acutely aware of the humiliation I felt), I decided to try what I now think of as the farm model. Because I believed I would find some pride in a more socially acceptable role, I became a wife, the mother of two children (they are 16 and 18 now), the owner of one dog, one cat and a house in suburbia. By then I was in my mid-30s and crazy to find something of meaning in my life. My childhood image of strength had become a very dim memory.

At this point Selma and Betsey came into my life. (I seduced them both at various times!) I met Selma through NOW and a consciousness-raising group. She and Betsey, and then later Patty, lived together. Both of them were looking for ways to live their lives as radical lesbians. I was in the emotional upheaval of coming out, of not knowing what my life could possibly become, when I began to work part-time at Bloodroot. (Patty, later to be a collective member also, began at about the same time.)

Those early years working at Bloodroot were extremely difficult for me. I struggled to juggle: taking care of young children and of my emotions (which were wild), and learning how to work the long hard hours required at Bloodroot with other lesbians in very close proximity — physically, emotionally, and psychically. I wonder now what it was that I knew then that kept me there through those hard early years, as I had no language for what was happening.

After a period of time, language began to form and it became clear that I wanted to make Bloodroot my life, that collectivity in our work

and living arrangements was a real possibility, and that I needed to think of lesbian relationships, our relationships, in a new way. During this period, my childhood image of the straight spine returned in a form I now call *stamina*.

Stamina (from the Latin root *stare*: to stand) means the fixed, firm part of a body which supports it or gives it strength. In other words, the backbone. And it also means endurance and staying power.³ The existence of Bloodroot opened up the possibility of living my life by radical lesbian values — values I was discovering were my own. My desire for a life of pride and meaning re-awakened the image of the straight spine, and Bloodroot became the way in which I might work toward it. I believed that if I endured, had the staying power so to speak, in the end I would have the life that I passionately wanted, and needed in order to survive. I would have something which was not an imitation of heterosexual society (neither brothel nor farm), but something which would be truly radical and in which I could begin to form and live my dreams.

One implication of the word *stamina* is that if we have it, we stand on our own; we are not dependent on one another for our Selves. This isn't easy given our hungers and the damage that has been done to all of us by patriarchy. But I know from my own experience that *stamina* is essential for us at Bloodroot, as I believe it is for all radical lesbian feminists. And I also know that the forms of relationship which encourage dependency erode the possibility for *stamina* and the creativity born of it. I believe we need *every bit* of that creativity to make our revolution and our world.

Bloodroot functions collectively — that is, we are inter-dependent. I have come to see our inter-dependence as valuable, radical, and different from dependence.⁴ We each have individual strengths and skills to put toward the making of the whole. It goes something like this: one of us creates new recipes, another can tell what spice will make the soup perfect, another builds and fixes things, another is patient with sauces that cook slowly, and so on. These functions overlap, of course, as do others, but it seems that each of us ends up doing what we like and/or do best. All of us and our skills are what Bloodroot is. As a matter of fact, *Bloodroot* was chosen as our name because, among other things, each flower and each leaf of this plant grow separately from the others. But the leaves touch and the roots are interconnected as can be seen in our drawing. We see ourselves this way — individual yet interconnected. (And Bloodroot makes for a nice prolific patch in the garden, too!)

In 1984, after six years in the collective, Patty came to the decision that she had to leave. Because of the intimate manner in which we had all been connected, pulling out her roots all tangled up with ours was exceedingly painful.⁵ She had been a lover, friend and partner and had lived with Selma and Betsey for six years. During that period, in 1980, I had bought my house together with another woman who worked part-time at Bloodroot. We all comprised, for want of a better word, a family. Our connections were defined in many ways, sometimes sexual, but not always. I loved the woman with whom I had bought my house. Although we were not lovers, certainly there were emotional ties of great depth. Ties to Selma and Patty, as well as to Betsey and my housemate, were strong and deep. Patty's going and the departure of other women who have worked with us over the years, including my housemate, require us to consider their reasons.

I think there are many. The work at Bloodroot is enormously demanding physically. And it does not pay well according to the standards of the patriarchy out there. What we, that is Selma, Betsey, myself, and now Liz, our new collective member, derive from our work here apparently is not valued enough by these women to compensate for the struggle required. Sometimes I think the rewards we reap can't even be imagined. There have been times when the intimacy and intensity of work in our kitchen, with all its internal and external pressure, is more difficult than some women can or wish to cope with.

Lesbians often assume that it is simple to work together — and then they come here to discover that it is maybe the hardest thing they have ever done. Some lesbians leave Bloodroot for the protection and security of a couple arrangement. We have found that the lesbian who is outside Bloodroot is often jealous of the time and energy her lover must put and/or wants to put into Bloodroot. In *Gyn/Ecology* Mary Daly states: ". . . the courage to stand/move alone . . . is at the heart of the courage to bond."⁶ I believe Mary is speaking of the radical bonding we work toward. Some forms of coupleness obviate the possibility of commitment to Bloodroot because it is impossible to bond with us and fill the demands of the relationship at the same time. In many ways it is also easier to be in a relationship of dependency than to have community with us and the struggle that entails.

There are other reasons too. But I believe the core of it is not *wanting enough*: The daily connection with other lesbians that Bloodroot affords, the real separation from the patriarchy that is our lives, and the resulting Selves that we are Becoming.

The patriarchy wants women weak, separated from each other, self-abusive, locked into dependent relationships, and predictable in our destruction of each other and our Selves. It wants to destroy courage in us so that even the imagining of a lesbian feminist world is impossible. And patriarchy has many weapons toward the destruction of our courage, including television and the rest of the media, religion, therapy, motherhood, "free speech," and the farm and brothel models (presented as our only options for existence as lesbians or as straight women).

Here at Bloodroot we've been together for eleven years in a space that is, to a large extent, separate from the patriarchy and from which we can keep a subjective beady eye on all its doings. And here I've learned to return to that early vision of myself and to value the stamina and radical courage we are growing. We use both stamina and the collective strength we derive from our radical lesbian bonding to, as Betsey has put it, "persist in our rebellion."⁷

Notes

¹ Andrea Dworkin, *Right Wing Women*. (New York: Putnam, 1983). See pages 174-193 for Andrea's thorough discussion of these concepts.

² I use the term *patriarchy* throughout this piece because it is the only word I know which describes the totality of men's ownership of this world we try to live in. Patriarchy is the rule of the fathers; it is the process and the end result of male destruction of life.

³ I want to thank Mary Daly for her investigation into the roots of words. She has inspired me to do the same.

⁴ Sarah Hoagland discussed her yet-to-be published book *Lesbian Ethics* at Bloodroot in February 1988. (She expects to have the book out by Halloween 1988.) In the course of that talk she differentiated between being "dependent" and "depending upon." This clarification was important to me because our interdependency requires that we depend upon one another in tangible work-related ways as well as in intangible ways.

⁵ After Patty left, I wrote a fable to explain to myself and to others who might be interested, why it was she left and what, in very simple terms, it meant to us all. The fable is in Spanish because I found a different and fresh imagination there. We printed it in *The Second Seasonal Political Palate* (Bridgeport, CT: Sanguinaria, 1984).

⁶ Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p. 345.

⁷In her forward to *The Second Seasonal Political Palate*, p. xxv, Betsey's phrase is "For persistence is rebellion."

Liz:

I am the newest member of the Bloodroot collective and though I've been here three years, I joined the collective only a year ago. I came here intentionally, to join this tightly knit threesome of long time intimates who have been together since they began the restaurant 11 years ago. Deciding to work here was a clear decision; deciding to stay was a difficult choice, to be true to my Self; learning to live here is both the hardest work I have ever done and the most satisfying. Bloodroot is that rare opportunity of a life in which all the parts merge, each of us holding the others accountable to a living feminist vision.

The year before I came to Bloodroot, I was in Washington, DC, where, with a handful of womyn, I worked singlemindedly making Sonia Johnson's presidential campaign of 1984 come to term. I was driven by a deep longing for all womyn to rage, to name the source of our oppression and to race on, relying on our Selves in our journeying to the *other-world*. I believed that we must love most the future made present in ourselves, that we must try to live what we long for.

The campaign, for all its force was not intended to endure. We were concentrating enormous energy toward a single fire which, despite its sparking potential, was itself fated to fade. Though we talked otherwise, we knew that we would part in the end and return to our separate lives. I knew I could not go back to my life with a lover in the country, a life that had become too private, too safe and too small.

Before the campaign I had had years of experience in social work, college administration, and grant writing. I had worked in women's centers, taught community based women's studies courses, and done the menial labor of washing windows and cleaning banks at night to make a living. I had left them all, discouraged by their fragmentation, their enforced passivity, and their ceaseless busy-ness. I came to Bloodroot, drawn to its stamina, its power to endure, and its ability to continue in its conviction.

The longer I stayed the more pulled I felt, between the possibilities I saw for my Self at Bloodroot and the death of my Self I was feeling in my lover relationship. The private life we were living was mired in an enervating spiral of nuclear patterns. The life I lived and the Self I longed to live were moving further and further apart. I needed to go on alone.

This 'going on alone' provided an enormous clarity about my decision to join the Bloodroot collective. Often, when making major changes in our lives, we as lesbians feel it necessary to have a support network, a lover — some private cushion to smooth the transition. I sought and found in myself what Mary Daly names the "courage to leave," a resolve to depart from the hopeless nothingness I saw before me. I chose to go on alone, and to cast my lot with the womyn of Bloodroot whom I had known but a short time, but whose courage begged my own. Joining Bloodroot was a leap of faith that the Self I longed for could be found in a life of working with these womyn whom I believed would become by boon companions.

Together, as separatists, we spend our labors at this work we continually create, work that is by, for and about us as womyn. The physical demands of the business require endurance and a clear sense of priorities. For us to survive together, Bloodroot must persist and grow in the depth and breadth of its reach to women. Concurrently, the routine day-to-day work of chopping vegetables, cooking and washing dishes must be done. There can be no 'time-out' to process rough spots, rather this effort must be woven into the very fabric of each day. "The necessity of our labors forces us to act together."¹

As the newest collective member, I must make a way for myself, finding from the things that need doing those I can do or can learn to do well. At age 34 I came here with a history of skills, many shrouded in a cloak of professionalism. I thought it would be an easy matter to apply what I knew and go on. It did not occur to me that there would be times I would feel stripped of my past, ungrounded, unsure of my strengths and courage. At these times I try to remember that I did not choose to stay here merely to build on what I had already done, but to create something new, and that to do this I must live as on the border of a dream. I must suspend part of myself and shape a new way of being.

Though I had imagined myself in this otherworld, I could not have realized the *power of presence*² which would be continually called upon. I had chosen hopefulness and found possibility.

What we thought came out of what we did. And we learned by doing. Necessity forced us to act together. And we were the ones who learned from closeness. We smoothed the way from one to another. We saw the pulling away and the cleaving. We balanced the weight of needs in our hands. And we waited for the right time. We did what they called impossible. We existed in ways called unreal. But our ideas came from what we did. And that is how we

imagined what we could do. And doing made us imagine more. And so our thoughts were grave and yet we laughed together. . . . And this is how our thinking has formed.³

Notes

¹ Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), p. 189.

² Mary Daly, *Webster's First Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), p. 88.

³ Susan Griffin, *Op cit.*, p. 189. *Woman and Nature* is written in two voices. The piece that appears here is only one voice.

Betsey:

I've been on a journey for over ten years. It's been a journey of enormous privilege primarily because I have had the opportunity to work and live a relatively integrated life with radical lesbians. My experiences and knowledge now confirm what I hoped: Radical lesbians can create a feminist context which gives life to a dream.¹ To my surprise, life's a lot harder and a lot more rewarding than I could ever have imagined. I would like to speak about what gives me hope and how I sustain it; what discourages me and how I fight it; and finally how the tension between these forces determines my spirituality.

Hope

How do I nourish my Hope? By encouraging my rage. For it is rage which fuels my energy and shapes the direction of my life. It is a singular tool which helps cut through the lies the world of men would have me believe. The ordinary lies; the ones that tell us to hate ourselves, to eroticize that hate through our sexuality (S&M) and to therapeutize the truth of our lives so that there is nothing left to do but adjust. It is rage which inspires me to dare and it is collective daring with other radical women which feeds my hope.

It is in the act of deep wanting that Hope resides. Wanting women to want for themselves is the single most important contribution a women's space can offer. For many women who first start to work at Bloodroot, there is an initial feeling of euphoria. They recognize our profound attempt to live an integrated life, desiring less and less pain (self-destruction) and generating more and more health of soul (self-respect). Our happiness comes from the experience of creating a context where women can make vital connections. Yet this happiness is tenuous and rough-edged; thus it requires careful weaving and mending which must

be done on a daily basis so that we and other women can begin to heal ourselves and gain a sense of the possibility of wholeness.

How do I sense wholeness? I try to find it in my time alone. Sometimes I use magic stones called the Runes which are a form of divination and originally were an alphabet created by Northern European women. One of the Runes, Sowelu, is shaped much like a backwards Z. It symbolizes the Sun's energy and wholeness, but I have renamed it for myself. I like to call it Hope at Large. The dictionary defines at Large as "free from restraint or confinement; at liberty, as a whole." For me, Hope at Large is the grounds for feeling that what is most desired is also possible.

Hope at Large is about the unknowable for women, the wholeness of possibility, which ultimately fuels the capacity to act. We find hope in an act as simple as the planting of peas in our garden in early spring or as complex as the slow development of a woman's trust in herself. Sometimes an angry poem or a powerful work of fiction from our bookstore gives me hope. But more often than not it is the ordinary conversations in the kitchen while serving up soup or washing dishes which make me hopeful. For it is these conversations, woven together everyday, which compose the fabric of our lives: Talking to each other — getting angry — risking judgements — telling a woman she is wrong or encouraging her to go on. We are learning to be accountable to each other. It isn't easy but there's no choice, too much work must get done everyday. Sometimes our quarrels simmer like soup on a back burner slowly cooking its way toward completion. Other times only a cloud burst will clear the air of conflict. Mostly we are learning how to condense the time it takes to resolve some of the problems of living and working together by closing the gap between the time a problem occurs and the resolution which follows.

Of course, working out the larger problems concerning important and deeper differences between us such as class complexities, race consciousness, and christian ethnocentrism to name a few, requires a more intense effort over a longer period of time. Much of this kind of change requires thinking with the heart, feeling in the bones, and having the time and space to do the unlearning which is required.

At Bloodroot I'm always trying to figure out what I don't want and what I don't need and this allows me to seek what is possible. And Hope at Large is possible.

Separations

Is this hope of mine ever in danger of giving way to despair? Yes. Men's greed for domination over life has wiped out whole villages, whole races, and now holds the whole earth hostage to computerized nuclear weapons. But I agree with Alice Walker when she says, "Life is better than Death, I believe, if only because it is less boring; and because it has fresh peaches in it."² So I intend to go on peeling onions, as well as eating peaches, and making my commitment to Bloodroot my most powerful protest to men's madness and my personal weapon against despair.

On another level, I want to talk about a different kind of discouragement which threatens my hope. When a woman who is an intimate part of everyday life at Bloodroot leaves, we are all changed. The weaving of our lives is interrupted and the promise we held together broken. By promise I don't mean formal pledge, but rather a *declaration of will* which gives some kind of assurance for the future.

One woman who had been part of the collective finally left after a long and indecisive period of time. Her departure had a ripple effect for many months, as part-time women sensed the disruption in our lives. This disruption caused women's memory of failure to surface, a memory of the many times we have failed or betrayed each other. One woman left and others followed. I think the worst moment I have experienced at Bloodroot came when the first to leave turned to Noel, Selma, and me in the kitchen and said, "If Bloodroot is so great, how come women aren't beating down the doors to work here?" The question silenced us. I have to admit the flame of my hope was very low at that moment. I now believe the answer to her question is the same answer to the question of why women fail each other all the time: *We live in a state of deep trustlessness*. So when we leave each other we reinforce this resonance of failure. Our tenuous trust in each other seems stolen once again and as a result we feel betrayed. For betrayal takes place among friends, not enemies.

From the beginning we have had a vision about our relationship; that it would encompass friendship — respect — constancy. Other women have had different agendas. Many times sexuality has been introduced as a destructive force. For example, in the early years when the web we were weaving was quite fragile, a casual visitor thought she would initiate a sexual affair with one of us — without caring what the consequences would be to us. Since the object of her attention saw the danger but was unable to act on her own behalf, intervention was necessary. During a particularly chaotic Sunday brunch I took the visiting

lesbian aside and said, "Forget it!" I wasn't unkind but I was firm and she left. It's not that this kind of intervention is easy, but we do need to learn how to do *more* of it if we are going to create our lives with each other.

Another example of the use of sex as a divisive force occurred when a long time acquaintance and frequent lesbian visitor, with whom we'd had differences regarding S&M, wanted to rub our noses in the loss of the collective member by flaunting an affair she was having with her. When we didn't greet this sadism with enthusiasm, she left angrily. Subsequently, she told a women's conference that we'd thrown her out over political differences.

The more intimate our relationship with a woman, the more deeply felt is the betrayal when she separates. A woman who had been with us for many years (initially as a friend and then more closely involved as a lover) left us on five minutes notice. She said she couldn't be with us because she needed a more normal, ordinary life. That is: she couldn't share the vision of friendship — respect — constancy. She needed to return to relationships based on her old pattern of worship — betrayal — humiliation. I now believe that when a woman tells me she "can't do it anymore" it's because she doesn't *want* to do it — whatever her reasons — because will comes before possibility.³

There is no question that such disruptions affect Bloodroot and weaken her collective spirit. But such acts tend to make me dig in deeper with all the tenacious strength I have. I've both seen and caused my share of pain with lesbians, which by rights ought to erode my belief in the power between us. But that's what men would have us believe and I am stubborn. I want them not to own my mind or will — they've stolen enough already.

So I'm trying to learn the differences between realistic expectations and unrealistic expectations between women.⁴ There are times when women expect more from Bloodroot than we can give and they become disappointed. We are a very small society of lesbians trying to create movement. The energy we use to create a context for radical communication between women is very concentrated and demanding. We need to find the answers to urgent questions like: How do we determine when to be fair and when to be loyal and where do the truths of the two meet? How do we distinguish between accusations meant to destroy and anger which informs our integrity?

So many lesbians are afraid of failure and the rage necessary to transform our despair to hope. But "Anger is mother to change."⁵ I hope someday to look into the mirror of my soul and see:

I am now the
Thing
that once I feared.⁶

Magic

How do we counter betrayal? How do we protect our visions? Most important is the development of our Third Eye. Bloodroot has many resources at this point, but it's really the use of our Third Eye, our deepest intuition, which keeps us on course. It creates the possibility of real transformation when it's most challenged. On the dark cold nights in our lives, when there is the least amount of light, like the nights of the new moon, there is an opportunity for the Third Eye to focus. This brings us clarity and insight. For it is in the simultaneous acts of looking in at the Self and out at the world that a third way of seeing, knowing, and trusting emerges. Sometimes the Third Eye is like a scout to the soul, telling us to trust ourselves, ahead of time, before we think we're ready. And when we take this leap of trust we sharpen our ability to see through the confusion in our lives. Our reward is the ability to create. How else would Bloodroot have begun? We didn't know what a radical context for women would be like. But that's the point — *it isn't like anything else.*⁷ We have to invent our lives everyday. And when we invent *we make the impossible real*, for without the capacity to act we are lost. Sometimes we act on more than we know and sometimes we know more than we can act on.

Watching women change, grow, become Themselves is when I feel hope is most contagious, most magical. The chemistry of this magic creates a kind of self-reliance which ultimately gives nourishment to stamina. This self-reliance is often mistaken for a kind of elitism, the arrogance of making a judgement. Anytime radical lesbians work together trying to create a context without men it's an act of rebellion — and dangerous.

At Bloodroot our existence is proof of rebellion and evidence of collective creation. And what is creation but a spiral whose magic encourages us to search. I need my hope to dream and I need my dreams to act. We need to "Dream in Female,"⁸ for when we do we spawn Hope at Large.

Like birds close to the ground listening for movement, we must listen to each other to discover our magic. And there is magic, running like an underground stream, whose current flows and connects us all with the movement of women making revolution. We must protect and become our visions, for they are what is most sacred.

Notes

¹ It's important to note at this point that there are women who are not lesbians but who have contributed and continue to contribute enormously to the well-being of Bloodroot. Nonetheless, it is lesbian spirit which sets and guides the direction of Bloodroot and it is lesbians to whom I address my deepest concerns.

² Alice Walker, "Only Justice Can Stop a Curse." In, *Home Girls*, ed. Barbara Smith (New York: Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, 1983), p. 355.

³ We have maintained a friendship with some of the women who left, including the lesbian who left the collective. Some women want to have a connection with us, something not uncommon among lesbians in other contexts as well. For example, ex-lovers sometimes find a place of comfort or agreement which allows them to go on and be friends.

⁴ Mary Daly, *Pure Lust* (Boston: Beacon, 1984). For an analysis of how guilt leads to betrayal among women, whether the expectations are realistic or not, see pp. 214-215.

⁵ You say I'm an angry woman . . .
Why aren't you an angry woman
Why can't you see, they don't want us to be
Angry women
Cause when we're in touch
The power's too much
And anger becomes mother to change.

Excerpts from "Angry Women" a powerful song by Laura Wetzler, a lesbian feminist songwriter.

⁶ Barbara Starrett, "Vanishing Point," *Heresies: The Great Goddess Issue* (Spring 1978), p. 109.

⁷ Of course there have always been women who have created alternative contexts together, as Janice Raymond in her book *A Passion for Friends* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986) so vividly illustrates. I am trying to address the act of creation, when you must discover the pattern yourself.

⁸ Barbara Starrett, *I Dream in Female* (Gloucester: Cassandra, 1976).

Recollections of a Sexual Life, Revelations of a Celibate Time

Judith E. Beckett

M. is getting ready for a bath. From the bed where I am sitting, propped up with pillows, open book against my breasts, I can see her as she undresses. I hear the gurgle and splash of warm water as it gushes into the tub and smell the sweetness of her special Caswell-Massay Pomegranate soap — a birthday gift from me. Moist steam swirls out from the open bathroom door as the tub fills; I can feel the warmth and moisture of it on my skin and hair. She bends to pull her black karate pants off the edges of her toes and her small, pointed breasts dip nipples like gum drops toward the bathroom sink: I have never tasted them. Striped cat Sappho winds herself in and out between M.'s legs which are unshaven, direct lines to her buttocks, round; together, like a pear. From there it's only a hair's breadth to the soft sweetness of that secret place she guards, protects from even me now that she is strong enough, grown enough, secure enough in our love to defend it; now that she is safe. She raises her leg to step into the tub, and her thigh curves in the milky steam. She lowers herself into water which is a little too hot. She gasps . . .

When I fell in love with M. eight years ago, I felt that I'd learn more about sex from her than from anyone I'd ever known because our sexual relationship was unequalled by anything I'd experienced in my past. She knew exactly how to please me, and her desire outburned even my own. We made a lifetime commitment to each other before we realized that there would be no more sex in our relationship. Ironically, I may have learned more from M. and our celibacy than from any of my other sexual experiences.

But a woman's sex life is not something she's able to write about easily or with a great deal of honesty. Comprehending the reasons for this is requisite for reading about my journey from innocence to promiscuity and from promiscuity to celibacy; understanding this is a good starting point for me as I attempt to write about my transition from straight woman to lesbian.

Through all my experiences, I have been learning about sex, what it is and is not, what it was and has become over the millenia since the days of Eve's fall from innocence in the Garden of Eden (somewhere in Saudi Arabia about 6000 years ago) up until the present time. But I'll begin with the "truth" about my own sexuality since healing begins with truth, and it's important that we're at last beginning to speak it.

Recollections

I learned all I know about sex, not from books or the Bible, but from my experiences "between the sheets." My early years were not unusual, including punishment for minor sexual exploits with my pre-school friends and an uncle who fondled and deep kissed both my sister and I into premature sexual responsiveness.

Later, I was left virtually an orphan by the death of my mother and the remarriage of my father to an Irish woman of strong Catholic beliefs who was unable to cope with my sexuality. And wasn't I a reminder of her new husband's earlier love and sexual passion? I ended up homeless and learned what it means to be a young woman alone in this patriarchal world without the love of her mother or the protection of a father, uncle or brothers.

I had a chance at a better life. Still a virgin after graduation from high school, at seventeen I had the opportunity to become a nurse and entered nursing school in a great city hospital in Manhattan. Fresh from a small factory town and still reeling from the death of my mother less than two years earlier, I entered the company of more sophisticated young ladies: of "city women" and all that implies. They taught me to "tease" my hair and wear make-up and introduced me to the city life of a young girl. This was in 1961 before the so-called "sexual revolution," which was born of the hypocrisy we perceived in those times: Believe me, there was as much going on sexually between women and men then as there is now.

I soon "lost" my virginity, painfully and with a great deal of blood, to the persistent efforts of a freshman Yale and the combined pressures of those peers whose friendship I coveted. I *truly believed* that this man, or

any man who "took my virginity," would marry me because that was the "decent thing to do." Later my stepmother told me that men marry only virgins, but it was too late for me: my Yalie had gone on to other adventures. Neither he nor any other man has married me since, so maybe my stepmother was right. In any event, I discovered that now that my passion was awakened, it was more difficult both to say "no" and to be heard (though it had always been difficult to be heard, I assure you).

Now the pain and punishing began. The Yalies said: "If you can't get a date, get a nurse." This remark was classist,² a reflection of the worldliness young women were assumed to have acquired in nursing school where we learned the secrets of anatomy and reproduction in the classroom, worked on the wards daily, and lost all sense of modesty as we were exposed to naked genitals, both female and male; we learned to *handle* a male patient's organ as we changed a dressing, swabbed it with disinfectant or thrust it into a urinal. We were expected to tolerate the sexism and sexual innuendos of our male patients without recourse, using our wits and wisdom to get by. It was probably here that I gained my deep disrespect for all things male.

After less than one year, with no home to go to, I quit nursing school and began my fourteen year career as a single, heterosexual woman. There was no turning back. Thinking that I needed men to fulfill my sexual needs, I had many lovers but was no free spirit. I was a victim of my own seemingly insatiable sexual appetite as well as the passions of the men I met. Sex quickly became an addiction. I worried that I might be a "nymphetomaniac."³

It didn't help that I was dependent on men for everything I needed in life. Without a family, I looked to men to give me the love and tenderness I had missed since my mother's death. I also needed a man to fulfill my "biological destiny" and play out my societal role of wife and mother, the only way I knew to regain the love and respect of my family and society. I desperately wanted to have a home, children, and a husband, but I didn't know how to get them.

Furthermore, without a decent job or career to give me a sense of self-respect, I was dependent on men for my self-esteem. When I did work, appearance and "attitude" counted big with my male bosses. I earned pennies (though, I was told, more than the "colored girls"), and without a car had little access to entertainment or a safe way to travel. I could barely afford a place to live. If I was without a male companion, one would soon appear. Expectations usually included sex (oral, vaginal or

rectal, the choice was never mine) and it was up to me to say "no." Doing that sometimes led to beatings, rape, and once, desertion on a lonely road where I was easy prey for the next man who came along. The *Kama Sutra*, written over 1500 years ago, lists among the "women who are easily gained over": "a woman who has nobody to look after her, or keep her in check."⁴

I had three pregnancies. During the first, I was sent to work as a live-in baby sitter for a wealthy family with two small boys. This was in a town far away from my home and parents, so no one would know about my shame. I was placed there by the social agency my father took me to when I told him I was pregnant. These people, aided by the social agency, exploited pregnant teenagers, paying us \$15 a week to care for their kids and help with the housework. They treated me like the servant I was. I ate separately, received no kindnesses and was isolated from all the people I cared about. Desperately lonely, I formed a strong bond with my unborn daughter.

Later, I was sent to a home for unwed mothers where I spent two weeks before my daughter Melissa Gail was born on August 16, 1963 (my sister's birthday). I held and fed her for the five days we were together until she was taken from me and placed for adoption. I couldn't think of any way that I could keep and raise her, and I was under pressure from my family and the social agency to give her a chance at a "better life." It was true that I couldn't support her and didn't have the support of my family to keep her, yet losing my daughter was the cruellest punishment I ever received for my heterosexuality.

After this loss, almost mindless with pain and unable to work other than at the most menial jobs, I nonetheless developed my first friendship and long-term relationship with a man. Because I could depend on him to protect me from becoming pregnant (birth control was still not legally available to women), I avoided getting pregnant for five years. By the time our sexual involvement ended, having had some therapy, I was able to reenter nursing school at a smaller hospital on a full scholarship and with a stipend. My relationship with my family was beginning to heal, and I was able to finish my work and graduate in 1968. Unfortunately, I was pregnant again at the end of my senior year.

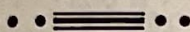
Terrified I'd be expelled before graduation, pregnant again when abortion was still illegal in the United States, and unwilling to bear another child only to have it taken from me, I had a male friend help me arrange for an illegal abortion. This procedure was accomplished for

\$500 in fresh green bills borrowed from a woman friend who had graduated nursing school the year before me. The operation was performed without anesthesia in the attic of a deserted house by an ex-medical student who held a flashlight in his mouth for illumination. My friend from nursing school stayed with me. She was so frightened by the ugly procedure he carried out on me as I lay on top of a desk with my panties down around my ankles, that, each time he left the room to empty the basin of blood, lye, and catheters that he'd held between my legs, she begged me to leave. We did leave before he finished and, days later, I passed the baby at the house of my friend who had arranged the abortion.

This child of mine was male. He was the length of the bobby pin I used to open his little fist so that I could see his tiny fingers and finger nails. He was perfectly formed. My friend's wife buried him in her backyard, but she was angry with me because she believed the baby was her husband's. Why else would he help me?

I soon became sick with a high fever, and then began to bleed. Ashamed and afraid to implicate the friends who had helped me,⁵ I didn't let anyone know how sick I was. I would have died if a classmate hadn't taken me to the hospital where we trained. While waiting to be treated, I had an out-of-body experience, floating around the emergency room, watching everything from up around the surgical lights. They saved my life with blood transfusions and surgery and allowed me to graduate as if being pregnant "out-of-wedlock" was the most common thing in the world — it was, but, since no one ever talked about it, I thought I was the only one. And I was filled with shame.

Once more, in 1971, I was pregnant (despite the use of foam and condom). This time, although abortion was legal in New York where I now lived, I was suicidal. I went to an emergency room where no one knew me and asked to be admitted to the psychiatric unit because I wanted to cut my abdomen open with a knife. We did have some good and sharp knives then, and I was afraid to be alone in my kitchen. I had the abortion while a patient on the psych unit. I woke up from anesthesia screaming and had a *grand mal* seizure, the only seizure I've had in my life. This abortion entailed more guilt than the first, since the father of my child was Black. In the midst of the Civil Rights movement of the late 60s, my mulatto baby's uncertain future influenced my decision to abort. Racism compounded my agony of guilt. I dreamed this child was a girl, but I don't know if it's true.



The time now came when I at last decided to take control of my life. I determined I'd never again do anything I'd be ashamed of the next day. This meant I'd accept responsibility for my sexuality, enter into all relationships knowingly, without illusions, be honest with myself and the men I came to know, and expect and accept nothing in return for sex. Fortunately, I was in a position to do this since graduating from nursing school. I had an income I could live on independently, a car, friends, and, because I'd kept the secret of my last two pregnancies from my parents, some support from my family.

This was in the 70s. *Cosmopolitan* and *Ms.* appeared, and I was soothed to learn that I was multi-orgasmic, something many women aspired to and which had come naturally to me. I honed my skills, learned some sexual gymnastics, chose men instead of waiting for them to choose me, and left their beds before they woke up in the morning. I saw the 1972 Preview Issue of *Ms.* with the signatures of 53 U.S. women who had had abortions (including Billie Jean King), and a small piece of me began to heal.

I was faithful only to myself. I still wanted to marry and have children I could love and raise to adulthood, but I hadn't learned anything yet to help me accomplish this. I lost weight and learned "how to dress" from my magazines and new friends. I stopped drinking alcohol and started smoking pot as an aphrodisiac that gave me more control over what I did. It seemed by the mid-70s there were two ways to be successful as a woman: to get married and raise a family or to be a *femme fatale* a la *Cosmopolitan*. I had long ago perfected the second but was still at a loss to accomplish the first.

Now I fell in love with a woman. I had no trouble deciding to have sex with her because I no longer felt guilty about sex. Sometime during the Viet Nam war, while "our boys" were raping women and murdering their children on the other side of the world, I realized that the good and forgiving Congregationalist God I had been taught to love as a child was not very much interested in what I did in bed: there was just too much else going on in the world. Besides, here was the answer to the problem of birth control. I couldn't imagine that society would punish me for being a lesbian to the extent that it had punished me for being a "whore." And so far, in twelve years, this has proved to be true.

Once I'd had sex with S., the world changed for me. It was as if I'd been at my ophthalmologist's office having my eyes tested, looking at

pictures through lenses that made everything seem distorted. Suddenly, when the correct lenses were placed in front of my eyes, things became brilliantly clear.

Through the eyes of a Lesbian, I began to understand how very different things are for women and men, and what had confused me before now began to make sense. Drinking in straight bars, it now seemed to me as if I was somehow able to see things, not only through the eyes of the women, but also through the eyes of the men. Watching other women, I saw the straight woman I had been — a middle-class white “girl,” huddled near the bar with my fiercely competitive friends, nervously clutching my glass and smoking cigarette after cigarette, searching for happiness, a man — someone to love me and for me to love in return.

But I also saw that the men were not looking for love. (Do they even believe in it?) They *might* want sex (“a good time”), but many of these men came here — often and alone — not to meet women but to see friends, make deals, place bets or watch football on TV, sometimes just to drink. Because I was uninvolved in the game, I now saw that some of the men had no interest at all in the women. I realized that we women didn’t know or understand the game we were playing or that the men weren’t playing the same game. I remember a male lover once telling me that at the age of thirteen, when I was imagining myself in a wedding gown of white silk, swathed in the scent of cherry blossoms, he was eagerly anticipating and pursuing his “first piece.” All of this was a revelation to me.

I also realized why it had been so hard for me to wear the costume of a straight woman. The tiny-flowered dresses, lipstick, blue eye shadow, pantyhose and treacherous heels. All proclaimed that I was childlike and helpless, sexually available, and dumb — things that *I was not*, that were *not me*, at least on the inside — and, freed from that, I was at last finding out who *me* really was.

With S., now, for the first time, I was loved in the way that I remember my mother loving me — for myself. Everyday of the four years that S and I stayed together, she told me how beautiful I was. None of my male lovers had ever said that in a way that made me believe it. Standing naked with her in front of a mirror, I finally saw and accepted the beauty of my physical body. Gradually, my perception of myself changed. This is the greatest gift she gave me, one of many.⁶

After S. and I broke up, I had several other Lesbian affairs and was able to experience new roles in relationships that were not limited to the

restricted and diminishing role of the straight woman I had always accepted. For instance, as a Lesbian, I saw a lover's eyes brighten when I brought her flowers — and then received my first toolbox in return. When I cruised women in Gay bars, I didn't feel desperate and demoralized (as I would have felt pursuing a man in a straight bar). Dancing with women, I sometimes led — and sometimes didn't. And the lover who taught me to grow fresh sprouts also showed me how to change the spark plugs in my car. Now, as I touched a woman's breast, I thought, "At last! At last!"

Revelations

I met M. in Provincetown. I drove there weekly from Boston in my battered blue Chevy to make love with her at all hours of the day or night: on moonlit beaches, in sandy guesthouse beds, high in a loft at the home of an understanding friend. As a lover, M. was self-assured, not hesitant or fearful as I'd sometimes found other women to be, and she approached sex emotionlessly, as I had learned to do. She knew what I had finally learned in all those beds with all those men: sex is only sex — an art perhaps but probably only a mechanical skill: I proposed at the Dairy Queen, and, back in Boston, we made a commitment to stay together forever.

It was after we made the decision as a couple to give up alcohol that M. became unable and unwilling to "perform" sexually. She said that without alcohol to numb her brain, sex made her feel sick. She confessed to her ongoing fear that, unable to keep up the charade any longer, she'd someday lose me as a lover.⁷

Now I began to learn what sex meant to me. My first reaction was disbelief followed by anger. I didn't intend to spend the rest of my life without sex, and I wasn't taking "no" for an answer. It was impossible to believe M. loved me but didn't want to have sex with me. For her part, M. couldn't believe I'd sacrifice our love for anything as disagreeable as sex. Clearly, we were looking at it from two different perspectives. Even though I knew of M.'s sexual history as a survivor of childhood incest, I expected her to "perform" sexually in the same way that society expects women to perform "normally," to seek counseling or enter therapy, to overcome our "frigidity" after we've been raped, abused or battered, and to become ardent sexual partners for men, no matter what we've been through in the past. Is it "normal" to enjoy sex when you were first raped by your father at the age of three?

I soon learned that a lot of my self-esteem was tied up with my sexual desirability, a lot of my self-worth measured by how much someone "wanted" me. If M. found me beautiful, why didn't she want to have sex with me? I was sure I had a bad odor, that she found me too eager, or that in some way I wasn't pleasing her.

I was hurt. I couldn't hear that M.'s sexual aversion originated inside *her* and not with me. I had to learn not to look at her in a way that made me feel powerful within our relationship, a way I'd looked at other lovers: as beings whose bodies were available to me for sex when I was aroused, felt bored, or needed affection or a renewal of my self-esteem. Wanting her left me frustrated and angry.

M. said she couldn't believe anyone would "do that" to someone she loved. She pointed out how *fuck* is used in our language to mean something awful. *Fuck someone over, screw around, and fuck you!* are examples of expressions men associate with the act of sexual intercourse. She did not consider Lesbian sex as "fucking," but she found it only slightly less unpleasant. I had to admit, the words *fuck* and *screw* captured the essence of some of my past sexual experiences, both Lesbian and straight. In a world where reality is defined by men, how could Lesbian sexuality possibly escape being contaminated by the misogyny and degradation of the male sexual experience? In my more casual, less loving sexual experiences with women, I had to admit that I'd sometimes acted out the same loathing and disrespect for women that men had so often shown me.

In thinking about sexual experiences I'd had, I was surprised to admit that while some of them were loving and pleasurable, the majority fell into an area which included everything from boring to humiliating and debasing, through painful to dangerous and even life-threatening. Lesbian or straight, during sex I was equally naked and vulnerable. The patriarchy had encouraged me to remember and glorify my positive sexual experiences but to repress or keep secret the horrible ones. This allowed me to continue to "perform" sexually while my most degrading and terrifying sexual experiences were reframed and played back to me as tantalizing and sensational entertainment on Saturday night movies. Society implies that if we can't find success and happiness in our "sex lives," we are failures as women and men.

Since alcohol had played such an important part in enabling M. and I to have sex, I began to realize too how much of sex is experienced under the influence of alcohol and drugs. Marijuana, alcohol and cocaine are used to enhance sex or even stir up sexual feelings where

none naturally exist. Fantasy and pornography are used in the same way. It doesn't seem to occur to us that if we don't feel like "doing it," we don't have to.



Our celibacy forced me to look at everything I knew about sex, most of which I'd learned, directly or indirectly, from men. Realizing the patriarchy has used this tool to oppress women for thousands of years, I didn't want to be enslaved by my own sexuality the way I'd been enslaved to men's in the past. Now I can't take anything for granted, accept anything as "normal" without questioning whether it's so.

What function had sex served in my relationships and in my internal life? I've learned that in my earliest search for sexual partners, I was looking not only for affection, but also for someone else to make me whole. I sensed that I was somehow incomplete, and I had no idea how to complete myself. In my lovers' passion, I saw reflected back to me an image of myself as attractive, desirable, and loveable — as *valuable* — because, at the time, it was impossible for me to find value in myself. At times during this period, I was grateful for any reflection at all because, except during sex, I was numb and not sure that I existed. I also needed a man to protect me (from other men), as well as to obtain and maintain the basic necessities of life. Sex was my part of the deal.

Later, I was searching for self-esteem. I became proud of myself as a sexual "performer." It was part of my personality, of who I was. I was better at it than most other women. I knew a lot about sex; I was experienced; I was "good in bed." And I hardly ever got hurt anymore. During this time, I was also trying to define myself as a *woman*, and, without marriage or children, what were my options? Luckily, M. came into my life at a time when I was about to begin defining myself — sexually — as a Lesbian and spared me from the pain of seeking my Lesbian identity in bed.

Sex was also a sad way of breaking through my loneliness to touch someone else.

What price did I pay for all that sexual activity? Most of my creative energy was depleted in my search for sexual partners, by my fantasies or during the sexual act. Because the spiritual boundaries of my body were constantly shattered by the sexual energy of others and by my own orgasms, there was no inner space that I possessed as my own. During this period of celibacy, I've been able to strengthen the integrity of the

boundaries of my self and shift my focus inward to discover a potential for wholeness, for becoming the woman I am capable of being. Within myself I've found great courage, self-discipline, inspiration, confidence and the capacity to give and *receive* love. I've discovered and had the energy to develop my literary and artistic gifts, my capabilities as a nurse, and my spirituality. I've found self-worth.

Maybe it was pleasure I'd been seeking sexually, but, if so, then during these past seven years without sex, I've been able to find other pleasures which I didn't know before and am only now beginning to experience. These include a more *sensual* appreciation of my lover's body, an appreciation *that is never satiated*, and also a greater sensual experience of the other sights, sounds and smells in my environment. It seems that, freed from comparison with the intense physical experience of sexual orgasm, more subtle sensory pleasures have been able to compete for my attention. Transcendence, another reality which is sometimes experienced through sexuality, can be vividly experienced through the other senses as well.

As for sexual "needs," they're less pressing than I'd believed. Without alcohol, drugs, pornography and undiscerning absorption of everything the media has to offer, they're much more manageable. Sometimes, unrelated to any obvious sexual content in my dreams, I now have warm and lazy orgasms while I'm sleeping, but I rarely masturbate because that requires that I create degrading fantasies, thought forms I'd rather not contribute to this world.

I wonder why as a Lesbian I felt the need to bond sexually with my lover (as I did with men) when together we cannot conceive children, pass on our genetic material, or "carry on our names" as men do in this way. Clearly I was not motivated by an urge to procreate, achieve immortality, or propagate the species. Yet, prior to my relationship with M., it seems that I didn't even *know how* to be "in love" without anticipating that we'd eventually experience genital sex. If I "loved" someone, then, of course, our relationship became sexual.

Why did I, as a Lesbian, use sexual intimacy to denote an *emotional* commitment? Why did I choose sex as testimony to my *feelings* and the reality that we were "more than just friends"? Men, it seems, use sex as a primitive way of "marking" women as "theirs" (which is why men expect the women they've had sex with in the past to be sexually accessible to them forever). This seems much like the way in which my cats mark the boundaries of the kitchen with secretions from their scent

glands as I open a can of tuna for their breakfast. Is this something we've learned from men that is perhaps *in every respect inappropriate* to a Lesbian relationship?

I read and hear that Lesbians often have difficulty finding sexual pleasure or satisfying sexual needs within long-term relationships. Lesbians wonder what it is about their sexual relationships, rather than what it is about sex, that makes it happen this way. I wonder: If M. and I had been sexually active since the beginning of our relationship, would we be "tired of each other" by now? Would we still be together?

Among Lesbians, it saddens me to see feminist ideals and projects sometimes crumble because of ill-advised fulfillment of sexual fantasies leading to bad feelings within our collectives and communities. Trust is undermined, and friendships are destroyed by sexual tensions, jealousies, and misunderstandings. Our love relationships sometimes end, too, because of sexual incompatibility, infidelity, or unrealistic expectations of what sexual relationships should be. It isn't that we want to hurt each other. Rather, we try to fulfill something unanswered within ourselves in a way that provides only fleeting satisfaction. That is, sexually. Misunderstanding of the source of our sexual needs dooms us to failure.



M. and I have been monogamous⁸ and celibate for more than seven years. We have both needed this time to heal; we've used this time to grow. Celibacy has freed up tremendous amounts of energy which we've used to work on other aspects of our lives. While M. at times still struggles with her rage as she confronts her incest issues, she's already won her battle with alcohol and drugs. My once poor health is improving, and I'm growing spiritually and creatively. Recently, I've begun to search for my daughter, Melissa Gail,⁹ who is now twenty-four years old. Over the last four years, M. and I have worked and dreamed our log home in Vermont into being and will move into it this summer. M. continues to teach me what it means to truly love and be loved in return.

We're not sure about the possibility of genital sex in our future; we're not sure we'll want or need it. Sometimes the past seven years seem like a long interval of foreplay. If that turns out to be the case, then, when we consummate our emotional commitment sexually, I won't forget that sex has a price, that it is a special gift to be approached respectfully, and that I must not take it for granted.

Notes

¹ A city in Saudi Arabia is called Jiddah, which means 'grandmother' in Arabic. According to legend, Eve is buried there. Her tomb can be found in the desert outside the city walls. Her Arabic name is Ummuna Hawa, Our Mother Eve. (*National Geographic*, vol. 172, no. 4, October 1987, p. 430.) No doubt the ancient Mother Goddess was worshipped here, as She was throughout the Middle East at that time. Descriptions of the Garden of Eden are strikingly similar to descriptions of the gardens in the temples of the "sex" Goddess's sacred harlots, including the presence of the serpent. The patriarchs might well have been driven, not from a mythological Garden at the beginning of creation, but from the gardens of the temples of the priestesses sometime after the Neolithic revolution. The reasons for this expulsion should be obvious.

² In those days, and since before the time of Florence Nightingale, nurses came from working and poor class families where they learned compassion (and often basic nursing skills) in response to the suffering they saw all around them. They looked to nursing as a bridge to a better life. Today, nursing has become an elitist profession; nurses are required to have a bachelor's degree, which eliminates women and men who can't afford college, don't have the academic background to get into college, or can't succeed once there. This surrender to male standards of professionalism occurred in the 70s when an effort was made to "upgrade" nurses' image and salary. It is partially responsible for today's critical nursing shortage.

³ *Nymph* is a word (Greek *nymphē*, Latin *nympha*) for the priestesses "who served in the ancient temples of the Goddess, especially in sexual ceremonies, where they represented the divine principle of flowering fertility Even now, 'nymphomania' connotes sexual obsession, like the moon-madness supposed to motivate the ancient nymphs in their season of mating." (Barbara Walker, *The Women's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983, p. 732). "Pausanius testifies to the presence of a bridal chamber (*nymphon*) in the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore near Phlieus" (S. Angus, *The Mystery Religions*, Dover, 1975, p. 115).

⁴ *The Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana, the Classic Hindu Treatise on Love and Social Conduct*, translated by Richard Burton (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1962), p. 177.

⁵ When abortion is illegal anyone involved can be prosecuted and sent to prison. Recently, a Panamanian friend told me that when she was sixteen, her best friend in Panama had an abortion. When she began to hemorrhage, she too went to the hospital, but there she was turned over to the police. As she refused to tell the name of her abortionist, during her interrogation she bled to death.

⁶ It was the issue of monogamy vs. non-monogamy that separated S. and me. Although, eventually, I was able to call some of her other lovers "friends," I finally couldn't tolerate a love which, for me, was essentially a series of desertions.

⁷ To quote Toby Summer ("Women, Lesbians and Prostitution: A WorkingClass Dyke Speaks Out Against Buying Women for Sex," *Lesbian Ethics*, 2:3, 1987, p. 38), "I wonder myself what it means that so many lovers have told me that our love-making was 'the best it's ever been' when what I held in my body was this incredible abuse. Once a whore, always a whore? . . . I mean, how could they not feel what was going on? Was I that good a performer?" M. was a great performer *as all women learn to be* when they frequently engage in sex against their will for the purpose of gaining life's necessities.

⁸ M. believes it is always painful for a woman to know her lover is sexually involved with someone else. This being so, she wonders why a woman would choose to hurt the woman she says she loves.

⁹ Since starting to write this article, I've found my daughter whose name is now Phebe (a name for the Goddess which means "Bright Moon"). We have recently met, with great joy, after our long separation. I hope that someday we'll have a mother/daughter relationship which seems natural and comfortable for us both, but right now we're feeling the sadness and anger of the years we've lost.

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Dyke Economics: Hortense and Gladys on Money*

Joyce Trebilcot

I. What Money Means

Hortense: I've been thinking about the way money works in men's cultures. I keep remembering a television program I saw before the crash on Wall Street — a woman journalist was interviewing a woman broker. The journalist was asking about men who had recently made huge amounts of money in the financial markets. "There are young men in their twenties and thirties," she said, "who, within a short time, find themselves with millions of dollars. What do they do with all that money?" "Do with it?" the broker replied, "Why — it's just a way of keeping score."

Gladys: That's like gambling. Professional gamblers don't want money in order to buy things — they use it to keep track of who's best, of who's number one.

Hortense: Yes. I think that the stock broker and the gambler are models of the way money works in male culture — at least now, in the U.S. The main meaning of money is that it is a marker in the game of masculinity, of competition among peers. A man's ranking is essential to his sense of himself as a man — to his very identity. This game — men jockeying for position with other men — is what gives meaning to their lives.

Gladys: But surely this isn't the meaning of money for *all* men; for some men, money is primarily a matter of survival, or security.

*This work has benefited from comments on an earlier version by Baer Gewanter, Flowing Margaret Johnson, Helen Eisen, Jackie Pastis, Jan Crites, Jeffner Allen, Martha Ficklin, and Ryn Edwards and, especially, Julia Penelope and Linda L. Nelson.

Hortense: Well, money can *also* mean survival or security. But I think that it is always also a way of scoring. A man's place in the community of men is virtually always determined, at least in part, by how much money he has.

Gladys: Well, perhaps.

Hortense: The important thing for men is their ranking among men. I just realized the other day that philosophy itself — my academic discipline — is not motivated, and never was, by the noble purposes they taught me — a desire to know the truth, to contribute to knowledge, to improve human life. The rhetoric is just hype. Everything men say about why they write — they can't help but write, they are endlessly curious, even that they want tenure or raises, or to be rich and famous — is secondary and superficial. In fact, what each one most deeply wants is to demonstrate that he is better than others. *Philosophy is just another way of keeping score.*

Gladys: So men can score by doing philosophy, by making money, by making women, by making points in conversation —

Hortense: Virtually every male project is a framework for proving who's best. Different men play different kinds of games: the priest, the banker, the bricklayer, the pimp — they are all brothers because they are all players, focused on scoring.

Gladys: But, Hortense, what about *power*? Isn't having power over others even more fundamental for these men than just being best? Isn't it being in control, dominating, that gives meaning to men's lives?

Hortense: No, that's my point. A man's ultimate concern is his relationship to other men. He wants power just to show other men how wonderful he is.

Gladys: Hmm . . .

Hortense: A man only competes with his peers, with men he thinks of as in some sense his equals. Men he thinks of as inferior — darker or poorer men, for example — are, to him, like women and children and nature: valued mainly as objects he can control.

Gladys: So for a slave owner, having slaves was mainly a way of demonstrating his superiority to other men of his class?

Hortense: Yes.

Gladys: But that account makes domination so psychological. What about the economic bases of slavery, of patriarchy?

Hortense: Of course controlling women and slaves and workers and armies and so on can make a man rich, but he wants to be rich mainly because he wants other men to believe that he is winning, that he is superior.

Gladys: But again, what about power? Surely men want to be rich, they want to be number one, because that means having power over other people, over what happens; it means being able to create reality in your own image —

Hortense: No. My claim is that *everything* other than the ranking itself — all the values in the system, the money and the power and so on — are just elements in a game; the object of the game is establishing rank. That's why competition is inherent in all the institutions men create for themselves. Hierarchy not only has to be established, it has continually to be reestablished and demonstrated, otherwise there would be nothing worthwhile to do, living would be like death.

Gladys: Well, proving that you're number one may be fundamental for men, but what about women? For most women, the main value of money is what it will buy. For me, money means security and independence: if I have money, I can take care of myself, and I don't need a relationship with a man.

Hortense: You are still dependent on the man you work for —

Gladys: Yes, but that's more tolerable than being dependent on a husband or father or male lover — my boss doesn't rule all of my time, all of my life.

Hortense: I think that for most women another value of money is as a sign of what someone else — usually a man — thinks we're worth: so if a woman gets a big tip, or lands a relatively high-paying job, she is likely to feel gratified, her self-esteem notches up.

Gladys: That's true, but then she's entering into men's system of using money as a counter in a status game. I think that most women in the U.S. now value money primarily because it gives us control over our own lives, allows us to be our own women —

Hortense: Well, I can't speak for most women. But it is clear that men have developed a very evil system — they make money a necessary means for nearly everything of value, and they keep control of all the money, and then they teach women that it is wrong to want money of our own, or to try to get it.

Gladys: I just want enough money so that I can work with wimmin and stay away from men and live where it's beautiful.

Hortense: But it's not easy to stop playing the boys' games. Surely, because you live in heteropatriarchy, your idea of your own value is tied up with how much money you have or can make.

Gladys: Yes, that's true. But when I make money, I am beating the boys at their own game, I'm getting money away from them so that I can

use it for us. Surely I'm entitled to admire myself for that.

Hortense: But then what is the distinction between the money/self-worth connection that is constitutive of class, and your pleasure at getting something away from the boys?

Gladys: *What?*

Hortense: The degree of self-esteem one is permitted is associated with class. The class system requires that everyone — including the poor and the rich — believe that the poor are inferior and the rich superior. So what's wrong with being poor is not just that if you're poor you don't have enough money, but also the humiliation, the belief that because you don't have money, you are an inferior person. I was talking with Monika the other day, and she was telling me about her childhood. She and her five sisters and brothers weren't allowed to wear shoes in the months without "r" in them — May, June, July, August — so as not to wear out the shoes. At Christmas they got a box of other people's cast-off toys from Catholic Charities. And once she went to visit someone who gave her orange juice for breakfast — the first time she'd ever had it (she says now it was probably Tang) — and she always remembered it, she thought it would be so wonderful to be able to have orange juice for breakfast every day. But what was most painful for her was not the lack of shoes and toys and orange juice, it was knowing that because she was poor, she was less good than other people, she was inferior.

Gladys: Surely you don't mean to say that she "knew" she was inferior; she only *believed* she was. She was wrong. Someone who is poor isn't *really* inferior.

Hortense: Nonsense. *You* don't define reality.

Gladys: The boys don't define *my* reality.

Hortense: Well, okay. But my point is that if I get money by playing one of the boys' games, I am likely to get pleasure from it that is designed by them, that they have trained me to feel. Using the money for dykes or politics or whatever doesn't change that.

Gladys: So we can't ever have any good clean fun getting money?

Hortense: Ha! The money-feces connection. Getting money for wimmin from men *is* fun sometimes, but I don't think it *ought* to be.

Gladys: You're so damn pure.

II. Getting Money

Gladys: Well, now that we know how *not* to use money —

Hortense: Right. Wimmin have to resist using money as men do, as a way of keeping score, as a way of marking some wimmin as "better" than others.

Gladys: But how *should* we deal with money? Should we all be poor?

Hortense: No! I think feminists should get as much money as we can. Wimmin *need* money. We can't be liberated without it. Wimmin need money for ourselves, for our friends, for wimmin who need money to be free of men and, especially, to create resources that will enable wimmin to live safely and permanently without men: housing, health care, food, transportation —

Gladys: But most wimmin are already getting as much money as we can. What would you have us do to get more?

Hortense: Well, it seems to me that a lot of middle-class wimmin have poorly-paid jobs like teaching and social work when they could be working in business or finance or engineering and earning two or three times as much.

Gladys: But, Hortense, most dykes who become teachers and social workers couldn't stand jobs in those other settings, even if they could manage to get them. They would hate the hierarchy, the competition, the exploitation, the deception. They would hate participating in organizations whose main value is ripping off other people.

Hortense: But we must have resources. I think we should get as much money away from patriarchy as we can, knowing that we are doing so on a relatively short-term basis — perhaps fifteen or twenty years —

Gladys: Fifteen or twenty *years*?

Hortense: — and all the time doing it with great political consciousness and support from one another — and, of course, acting lessons —

Gladys: *Acting lessons*?

Hortense: — so that we can be successful in patriarchal terms without getting caught up into actually liking the people there and believing in their values.

Gladys: Hortense, are you really recommending that a woman should undertake to work for fifteen or twenty years at a deadly job in some oppressive corporation in order to put money into a dyke project? That's asking her to sacrifice her *life*, her day-to-day, moment-to-moment life. Isn't it important for wimmin to be doing work that is meaningful in itself, work that we love doing?

Hortense: Well, look, — schools, social agencies, other institutions where wimmin work now — they're all parts of the same system, they *all* misuse people. It's true that one participates less in oppression in working for, say, the mom-and-pop restaurant on the corner rather than

a multinational. Still, it makes sense for some wimmin to go for the money — wimmin who are good at putting on men, at pretending to be players. The danger is in getting caught up in it, in enjoying it so much as to lose sight of one's politics.

Gladys: But it would be *wrong* to work for Nestle or Coors, for example, regardless of how much money one could make.

Hortense: What about working for them for three months for a million dollars?

Gladys: That's silly. You turn a serious concern I have into a philosopher's extreme case.

Hortense: Yes. But are you remembering that what I am proposing — trying to make as much money as we can — is for the sake of liberation? Of course wimmin shouldn't support Nestle or Coors, but what about working for so-called "socially responsible corporations" for the sake of the liberation of wimmin? My priority is the liberation of wimmin.

Gladys: But there's no such thing as liberation in pieces. Dykes can't be liberated while other groups are still oppressed — people of color and working class people and people in Latin America and Asia and Africa . . .

Hortense: Why not?

Gladys: Because it wouldn't be *liberation*. The wimmin who were supposed to be liberated would be limited by their knowledge that others were still suffering — or, if they didn't know, by the fact that they *should* know. They wouldn't be *liberated*, they'd merely be *privileged*.

Hortense: But we have to start somewhere. And the most widespread and serious problem of wimmin in the U.S. today is economic — think of how many dykes are on welfare or social security; think of how many have no regular income at all and are scrounging and hustling to survive; think of how many are looking for work and can't find jobs; think of how many work at crummy and frustrating jobs for hardly any money; think of young wimmin coming out of school wondering what to do next to take care of themselves. Wimmin feel so helpless economically that we don't much discuss this as a problem. We discuss all sorts of other issues — relationships, racism, sadomasochism — trying to find ways to deal with them and still maintain our precious connections with one another. But when it comes to money we are back to individualism — we may discuss one woman's job problems, we may lend her money, but we rarely see money as a problem we face together. This is because we feel powerless about getting more money; also, it's because

we've been trained by heteropatriarchy to deal with money as a very private and individual matter. Lesbians are likely to be more comfortable talking about what we do sexually or about our fears of death than about how much money we have.

Gladys: Yes. At least you and I know about each other's financial situations. But what I'm most concerned about is finding a *feminist* way to get money. Why do I have to get money to pay the rent by working for the boys?

Hortense: Well, there are some privileged wimmin who support themselves within wimmin's communities. Perhaps a few dozen or even a few hundred in this country — artists of various sorts, publishers, producers, perhaps a few bookstore owners, restaurant owners —

Gladys: Cultural workers.

Hortense: Yes. Mainly cultural workers. So that makes the movement mainly a cultural one, for privileged wimmin. I can imagine scholars a hundred years hence looking back on lesbian feminism in the eighties as a literary and intellectual movement consisting of certain kinds of art and scholarship. But that doesn't mean much for the daily lives of wimmin who are not artists or scholars. I say that what we most need now is a material base to make this a whole-life movement, not just one for privileged wimmin, or the privileged parts of ourselves. I say we must take money from patriarchy wherever and however we can get it, and turn it into resources for wimmin. And we have to do this in a serious and disciplined way. Preferably without wearing skirts.

Gladys: Hortense: For most women, there's very little opportunity to get money without a skirt.

Hortense: Yes, I know. Compromises must be made.

Gladys: Right. This is no time for purity.

III. How to Spend Money

Hortense: Gladys, suppose you had a lot of money. What would you do with it?

Gladys: Pay my bills. Take a vacation. Travel.

Hortense: No, I mean a *lot* of money. Millions. Hundreds of millions.

Gladys: Well, first, I'd be sure it was somewhere safe.

Hortense: And profitable — it should be producing some return while you're deciding what to do with it. But my question is — what will you decide?

Gladys: I don't know. Perhaps that the money belongs to all wimmin and we should make a collective decision. We could call a council of dykes so that all of us could decide together.

Hortense: A council? How many wimmin? Who?

Gladys: Well, what about something on the order of the 1977 Houston conference, but for dykes? Grass-roots meetings all over —

Hortense: Internationally?

Gladys: Yes. And the meetings would not only choose delegates to a national or international meeting, but also statements of priorities, of what needs to be done. And of course everybody's expenses would be paid, so that not just privileged wimmin could attend. And the national, or international, meeting would adopt an over-all agenda, guidelines for using the money.

Hortense: But the problems are enormous! Whose politics would determine what was done?

Gladys: There are huge problems. But I would like the process of deciding how to use the resources to be a collective one.

Hortense: I was talking with Sarah Valentine and Julia Penelope the other day about how they would use money if they had it and Sarah outlined what seems to be a fairly well-developed idea about buying a business that requires employees with many different kinds and levels of skill, so as to hire lesbians with a wide range of backgrounds. As I understand it, her main focus is to provide jobs for dykes with dykes — a way dykes could support ourselves without working for the boys. I think the idea is terrific. Imagine what would happen if dykes could work for and with dykes — if there were lots of lesbian businesses — stores and health care centers and building contractors and manufacturing firms —

Gladys: Dyke capitalism? How can we deliberately participate in capitalism?

Hortense: How can we not? We participate in it anyway. And how else can we get resources for wimmin? That's where the resources are. The point is to use capitalism for the benefit of wimmin —

Gladys: But how would such businesses be run? Would they continue to be hierarchical?

Hortense: Dykes would change them —

Gladys: But suppose we bought an existing corporation, with all its built-in hierarchies. We would be buying oppressive values, and we would have to perpetuate them, at least to some degree, in order for the business to continue. How would we deal with issues of class and race

and ownership and control and so on?

Hortense: Well, we would not be starting entirely from scratch. We would draw on the experiences of other lesbian businesses, of cooperatives and collectives of all kinds, on the traditions of anarchism —

Gladys: I don't see how a group of wimmin could go through the processes of developing an acceptable structure and, at the same time, keep a business afloat.

Hortense: But, Gladys, what are the alternatives? Surely it is better for us to earn our money in a situation in which we can take responsibility for what goes on than to be in a setting controlled by men where we have to cooperate with or ignore or sabotage their oppressive practices in order to get money to pay the rent.

Gladys: We will have to find ways to work without having a boss or being a boss, without giving first priority to productivity and profit —

Hortense: Yes, and if we aren't willing to do that, we'll go on as we are, most lesbians in this country using most of their energy just to survive. Remember that if we buy a business as a place for dykes to work, wimmin will have economic as well as political and social motives for keeping the business going. I think the idea is terrific; I think it can be done. It would go a long way toward freeing wimmin from the need to please men in order to make money. And that's just the beginning.

Gladys: I'm having trouble imagining this. What are these wimmin wearing?

Hortense: What are they *wearing*?

Gladys: Yes, I need an image.

Hortense: Well, I suppose that in the beginning those who deal with heterosexuals outside the firm would wear power suits — oh, Gladys, we could work that out —

Gladys: Okay, so the fundamental idea is to provide jobs for lesbians and also basic products and services, so that we can become increasingly independent of men. But these businesses would still be dependent on heterosexual clients and customers — at least until lesbians developed loyalty to them.

Hortense: Yes, but as women find out that they don't have to seem to be heterosexual in order to have a good job, there will be millions — *hundreds* of millions — *more* lesbians.

Gladys: Maybe billions.

Hortense: That's stunning.

Gladys: So what we need to do is to focus on buying and making businesses. Some dykes already have enough money to get started, to

get loans. I wouldn't be surprised if, as a group, we lack expertise — business experience, technical skills — more than we lack seed money. And we need guts. Willingness to take risks.

Hortense: You mean you're convinced?

Gladys: Well, tentatively. I need to think some more. Where would the initial resources come from? Are you willing to put your time and money into a project like this?

Hortense: You mean give up what I do, and put my energy into business?

Gladys: Hortense! Now that you've practically persuaded me of the importance of this project, are you going to back out?

Hortense: I don't want to change my life.

Gladys: I thought you wanted revolution, liberation?

Hortense: I get older.

Gladys: I can't believe this.

Hortense: Seriously. I've spent years getting my life arranged so that I can bear doing what I have to do, so I can get paid for doing what I like to do, so I am comfortable, happy, relaxed, not constantly hassled (as we said in the fifties) and stressed (as we say in the eighties). I am not willing to risk much of that —

Gladys: Incredible. If other political dykes are like you, then by the time they get old enough to have some money and some experience and some expertise, they are no longer willing to move, to change their lives. The boys have bought you by giving you privileges. If that's true of many of us, then we're stuck, we're doomed —

Hortense: Revolutions are made by the young —

Gladys: No, revolutions that are wars are *fought* by the young, by young men. War is not a model for our revolution. There is no model.

Hortense: The real truth is that I don't know anything about business. I've always hated it. I vowed very early, in the forties, that I would not do that kind of work. I can hardly start now. I want to do what I do. Write and teach.

Gladys: You didn't want to go into business when you were young because business as men do it is oppressive. With this project, you are committed to change that. You can still write and teach — you can do technical writing or teach new employees.

Hortense: But I want to write and teach about wimmin. To do theory.

Gladys: I'm finding this hard to believe.

Hortense: But surely you don't want all of the lesbian artists and

writers and organizers and activists to stop what we're doing and learn something new?

Gladys: Privileged dykes ought to make sacrifices for change. Maybe we'll find out that they aren't "sacrifices" after all.

Hortense: But shouldn't this project about business be conceived as providing jobs for lesbians who now have no income, or hardly any, or minimum-wage jobs, or jobs they hate?

Gladys: Of course, of course.

Hortense: But then I'm bothered about our talking about what *other* wimmin should do, or might choose to do. I don't want to think through ideas about how wonderful it would be for wimmin to put their resources into dyke firms — and then not do it myself.

Gladys: Wouldn't you invest in a lesbian business?

Hortense: It depends on how much money we're talking about — ten percent of my savings, or ninety percent. If I am to invest a large part of the money I'll need to live on when I'm old, I would want some oversight so that I could protect my investment. So there's your traditional structure, hierarchy. I wouldn't work in the business in a day-to-day way, but I would want some say about policy and hiring.

Gladys: That's okay, that's fine.

Hortense: No, no, it's not. Surely we don't want dyke businesses to have boards of directors?

Gladys: We want change for wimmin. We must not refuse to change because what we do won't be perfect, won't be heavenly, won't be the immediate realization of a vision.

Hortense: Yes, the boys make us idealists to keep us in place.

Gladys: So will you participate? Are you willing to change your life? Or are we engaged in just a literary movement?

Hortense: Okay, okay. Let's see, perhaps an organization of dyke investors, to put our money together so that we can do something meaningful —

Gladys: Right. It does feel strange, though, as if money and dyke values shouldn't go together.

Hortense: We've got to get used to new feelings.

Gladys: Yes, and as I've always said, we've got to purge ourselves of purity.

If Looks Could Kill: Fat Oppression*

Bev Jo

It's been said that fat oppression has become the last acceptable prejudice. There is an excellent book — *Shadow on a Tightrope*¹ — about the oppression of fat females, and many Lesbians such as Judith Stein, Diane Denne, and Amanda Hayman have done courageous, revolutionary work through their articles, grassroots organizing and workshops. Yet the idea that fat oppression is a legitimate oppression is still ridiculed, just as fat people are. Even otherwise ethical Lesbian publications still print fat-hating material in 1987 that denies fat oppression exists! Meanwhile, females are *dying* and suffering discrimination as well as permanent physical damage simply because males hate fat females.

The same tired "evidence" of the dangers of being fat are repeated over and over, even though medical evidence shows the opposite. Most doctors are as reluctant to accept the fact that fatness is natural and healthy as they are to accept the fact that Lesbianism is natural and healthy. The physical harm attributed to fatness is actually caused by the rapid weight losses and gains of dieting. Even after years of such abuse, fat females are basically healthier than thin females.² It's fat *oppression* that kills — not fat. If concern for health really is behind fat-hatred, then why are diet foods, full of dangerous chemicals, so popular and why aren't smokers harassed by strangers on the street the way fat females are? After all, smoking also sickens the nearby non-smokers.

*Excerpted from a longer article about looksism. For Lesbians who want to find out about getting a copy of the entire article, send a SASE to Battleaxe, P.O. Box 9806, Oakland, CA 94613.

I want to thank my dear friends Linda Strega and Ruston for all their help, support, and encouragement in writing this article.

A good example of typical fat-oppressive medical care happened when a lover and I went to a Lesbian doctor because we had chronic fever, weakness, and fatigue. My lover was thin and I weighed only about 160 lbs. at the time. The doctor told us there was nothing wrong with us, but, in order to get more energy, I should lose weight and my lover should drink coffee. Caffeine is known to be harmful to well people, never mind the damage it can do to sick people. I've since found out that my symptoms of continual fever, fatigue, and aching fit those of the early stages of leukemia and other kinds of cancer. Weight loss is also associated with cancer; but luckily I've gained weight instead, so it's unlikely I have cancer. I still haven't gotten a diagnosis, but my weight gain protects me. Many forms of cancer and other diseases prevent adequate assimilation of nutrients so bodies literally waste away. Having substantial weight gives us time to fight back and heal ourselves.

Mainstream medicine teaches the function and importance of all body tissues and organs except for fat tissue — which it claims is only harmful. There is no rational "scientific" reason for this. Medicine is male dominated and women have more fat tissue than males. Like the rest of male science, medical theories often reflect nothing more than male prejudice.

Fat is a protection for our bodies — it cushions muscles and internal organs from injury, insulates us from the cold,³ and helps us to float, making swimming easier and drowning less likely. Fatness literally strengthens our bones. Osteoporosis, the weakening and thinning of bone tissue with age, is a major cause of injury and disability, leading to death among many older females. But as our weight increases, so does our bone mass, giving us tremendous protection from osteoporosis. Studies show that thin women are at primary risk for getting osteoporosis when they're older.⁴ When we let our bodies naturally get fatter as we grow older, we reduce that risk.

Our bodies know what they're doing. Male thinking, so obviously reflected in male religions, teaches us to hate and distrust our bodies. We are told to separate our minds from our bodies and to treat them as two beings: 'The mind should be the master and the body the servant.' (This is schizoid thinking — and men call lesbians crazy?)

Fatness is also protection against famine. People who've gone through periods of starvation often become fat if they finally get adequate food; 95% of people who diet gain back even more weight.⁵ Our bodies naturally interpret dieting as starvation and so they guard us against future starvation/weight loss by regaining the lost, necessary

weight as soon as they can. And they become reluctant to ever lose weight again by permanently lowering our metabolisms — which is why the more you diet, the harder it is to lose weight.

Fat is literally protection against death. When people are dying of cancer, they usually waste away and die from starvation as much as from the other effects of cancer. So if you're fat and you get cancer, you've got a lot more time than a thin person has to try and get well. Yet even in this age when cancer is a modern plague — more than 1 in 3 people in the U.S. will get it and most of us know Lesbians who have died from it — we are still pressured to be thin.

One of the greatest obscenities about fat oppression is that, while people are dying of starvation, literally dying of thinness, fat is despised in rich countries. Even now when there is such panic about AIDS and people in the last stages of AIDS are skeletal, fatness is still feared and hated. (In Afrika, where fatness is still associated with good health, AIDS is called "the slim disease.") But the day may come, as AIDS spreads, when thin people will be looked at warily, and only fat people will be considered healthy.

Why this unreasoning fear of fat? It's because fat is associated with femaleness. Look at the most ancient statues from across the Earth. They're of wonderfully fat females. (And they're not images of pregnant women, which male archeologists are so fond of saying — they're simply, gloriously fat.) Fat men are oppressed, but much less so than fat females, and most of the anti-fat propaganda is aimed directly at females.

Fat is also a *Lesbian* stereotype that is commonly depicted in jokes and cartoons. A friend of mine overheard a woman at work talking about an acquaintance who had gained weight recently. Another woman asked, "Has she gone gay?" Dieting is a male idea and Lesbians are likely to be fatter, because we're more our natural selves. This is something to be proud of.

Men want everything to be huge except females. They're always measuring things and saying "bigger is better," from their pricks to their nuclear missiles — but not females. Females who are the same size as ordinary large, muscled, healthy men are considered fat and unhealthy. The standard "healthy and fit" female looks emaciated compared to the standard "healthy" man. Men want us to be invisible except as sex objects, but fat females are blatantly present. Fat females are an offense to mankind. Men want us weak, with just enough strength to serve them. They don't want us to have fat anymore than they want us to have brains

or muscle. And they've been breeding us for thousands of years, just as they've bred "domesticated" animals to be almost unrecognizable compared to their original, natural selves.

Look at what men have done to animals. They hate so many creatures. Non-mammals in particular are called "ugly." Perhaps that's because the maleness in spiders, insects, fish, reptiles, and birds is less visible than it is in mammals. Some animals are all female, including a certain kind of lizard. But male scientists are working hard to create the first male of that species.

Then there are men's favorite animals, dogs and cats. Men have bred dogs, in particular, into forms that would never occur in nature. They are made into caricatures of their true selves in order to fit men's bizarre fantasies. The most valued dogs, the certified pedigrees, are the least natural and the least likely to survive on their own. This cruel genetic interference has resulted in deformities common to certain breeds that cause the dogs to suffer great pain. All this is done in the name of being "animal-lovers" and "dog-lovers." But then men say they "love" females too.

Man has been tampering with nature for as long as he has been able to. How do we know how much the many years of enforced selective breeding have changed our own female bodies? Men's preference for small and controllable women was the reason for footbinding and painful constricting shoes, and is why most females diet in countries that are dominated by European-descent male culture. In many places in the world, men and boys are given the first choice of food, including the meat, while women and girls eat only what is left. Females across the Earth die from starvation more than do men and boys. But even in the U.S. and other countries where Northwestern xtian European values dominate, in families where there is plenty of food, young girls are being dieted at an unprecedented rate — simply so they will be acceptable and pleasing to men.

Gynocide includes the systematic underfeeding of females and overfeeding of males. A study made in Italy, but which applies to all of Europe, shows that baby girls are breast-fed less than and for briefer periods than boys, and girls are also weaned earlier: "on the average, the breast is withdrawn at 12 months for little girls, at 15 months for boys. Duration of nursing at 2 months is 45 minutes for boys and 25 minutes for girls. Nursing at 6 months: 8 minutes (girls). 15 minutes (boys)." ⁶Studies in Egypt and Jordan show that mothers' breast feeding is continued "longer for boys" and they are "generally better cared for."

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency food consumption charts show that young U.S. males eat 50% more than the average U.S. citizen⁷— yet 80% of 9-year-old girls in the U.S. are on diets,⁸ which will create a new generation of females who are smaller, weaker, and more susceptible to disease than ever before. Lack of sufficient nutrition in a growing body prevents it from developing to full size and makes it much more vulnerable to illness.

This desire to weaken females is in direct response to Feminism and the ever-increasing numbers of Dykes all over the world. If Patriarchy announced it was going to limit females' food in order to control us, there would be a tremendous resistance. But since it is presented as a way for us to look "beautiful" and be more "normal," women eagerly diet themselves and starve and harass their daughters (whom they legally own).

Some doctors are concerned that this will diminish the girls' child-bearing capabilities, thus affecting future generations of males. But where is their concern for the girls? Many girls may be tormented into dieting by the incredible fat hatred which exists in primary schools. In a recent study of fourth graders (9 to 10-year-olds), thin kids were called "smart" and fat kids were called "icky, too much, ugly, and lazy." In the film, *Portraits of Anorexia*,⁹ one young girl said "they called me fatso or blubber. I just stopped eating so they'd stop calling me names." But it's almost always the parents who are forcing girls into dieting by depriving them of food.

Anorexia nervosa is a medical term used to describe voluntary starvation, "most common in young, single women." It's generally thought to be caused by intense dieting and 15% die from it. Although doctors refer to girls' "fear of oral impregnation," it's more likely a response to oral rape.¹⁰

Meanwhile, doctors pressure fat females to take addictive diet pills and to have intestinal bypass operations, stomach stapling, and liposuction. Liposuction, a technique of ramming a tube into the body and sucking out the fat tissue, is fairly new, but at least 5 females in the U.S. have already died from it. Half of the doctors inserting gastric bubbles report complications once the bubble is in place, but still the operations are done and the doctors get richer. But, as has been said many times: "You can't be too thin or too rich."

Medical information shows that we have very limited control over our weight. Fat is hereditary. If both your genetic parents are fat, you have a 80% chance of being fat, which is why some ethnic groups are known as fatter than others.

Fat hatred *kills* females, yet too many Lesbians diet and talk of diets. Too many notice and comment on the smallest weight gain (or loss) in another Lesbian and try to police her to shrink herself. Even the most causal, "neutral" comment about weight gain can be an insult and pressure to diet. Lesbians diet in order to fit in as more "normal" and to be more "attractive" to other Lesbians. Patriarchy wants us to waste our time and energy on a feminine obsession with "beauty" and thinness. It's a way to avoid thinking about what's really important in our lives.

Men call *us* ugly? Look at them! We already know they hate us, and that can't be changed. What we *can* control is avoiding internalizing that hatred and turning it on ourselves and other females. Even if we try to accept fatness in other Lesbians and only hate it in ourselves, then we still do men's work for them. And, besides, it's not possible. If we hate our own fat there's no way we can accept fat Dykes.

Fighting looksism is dyke-loving. Lesbians need to think about who we are hurting and stop doing it. Do we really want communities where anyone who doesn't look like a mannequin feels like an oddity? Do we only want to be around Lesbians who fit male-identified standards of "pretty"? What about the incredible handsomeness and realness of the diverse faces and bodies dykes are born with, that reflect the multitudes of races, ethnic groups, ages, sizes, shapes, and abilities living on Earth?

Is it right for disabled Dykes to be rejected by able-bodied Dykes? Should older Dykes feel out of place among younger Lesbians as they are in the het world unless they try to hide their age? Should Dykes with ample hair on their bodies continue being made to feel like freaks? And do we want fat Dykes to injure their health and torture and kill themselves because too many Lesbians believe men's fat-hating, female-hating lies?

As Dykes, we know what it is to be feared, hated, and attacked because we're "different." We know what it is to be the alien group that's ostracized and stared at. So we should never treat another Dyke — or ourselves — that way.

We've already rejected most of men's commands and lies. Dykes have questioned and fought lies and injustice more than any other group of people. We have been in the forefront of challenging all forms of oppression. The more we continue fighting the lies, the stronger we become, individually and as communities. Why not "let ourselves go" and really be our natural selves?

Notes

¹ *Shadow on a Tightrope*, ed. Lisa Schoenfielder and Barb Wieser. Aunt Lute Book Co., P.O. Box 2723, Iowa City, IA 52244.

² "Is It Unhealthy To Be Fat?" Dr. Paul Ernsberger, *Radiance Magazine*, Winter 1986. A graph with 4 weights of females, 110 lbs, 122 lbs., 224 lbs. and over 287 lbs. shows that the fattest (at over 287 lbs.) live longer than the thinnest (at 110 lbs.). Those in the 224 lb. group outlive the "insurance ideal" weight of 122 lbs.

³ Wearing only a bathing suit, Lyn Cox swam the 2 miles of the Bering Strait summer 1987. The water temperature was 34 degrees Fahrenheit and, although people usually die in such cold water after 2 hours, Lyn swam for 2.12 hours and was fine. Doctors said that her layer of fat acted as an internal wetsuit. She weighs about 180 lbs.

⁴ MacNeil/Lehrer Report.

⁵ Alvin Feinstein, "How do we measure accomplishment in weight reduction?" In, *Obesity, Causes, Consequences and Treatment*, ed. Louis Lasagna, Medcom Press, 1974, p. 86.

⁶ This study and the following one are described in a thesis by Marian Lems of Brussels, Belgium, 1981-82, "Perspectives d'Analyse de l'Ideologie de la DIFFERENCE, Comme Fondement de l'Hetero-Patriarcat." Her sources were: L. Van Loon and Van Pee-Grosjean. "La Femme: Objet de Sante Publique," *Germ, Lettre d'Information* 99, June 1976, 18-19; and E. Gianini Belotti, *Du Cote de Petite Filles*, ed. des Femmes, Paris, 1977. Marian says, "Of course these results are of a planetary nature, since patriarchal oppression itself is omni-present."

⁷ *Dietary Consumption Distributions of Selected Food Groups for the U.S. Population*. Purdue Research Foundation for the EPA, Washington, DC, February 1980.

⁸ A report on KRON TV, San Francisco, June 6, 1987, said that 80% of 9-year old girls are on diets. In *Newsweek*, July 27, 1987, a study by Laurel Mellin of the University of California at San Francisco stated that "81% of the 10-year old girls were dieters." "more than half the girls described themselves as overweight, while only 15% were. . ." In *Time*, July 14, 1986, Dr. Michael Pugliese, of the North Shore University Hospital in Manhasset, NY, reported that "restrictive diets . . . now account for one-fourth of the cases of failure to thrive seen at the hospital. . . the youngsters were all on low-fat, low-cholesterol diets and getting only 63% to 94% of the calories they needed." A 21-month old girl had ". . . failed to gain any weight in nearly 6 months."

⁹ By Wendy Zheutlin, Fat Chance Productions.

¹⁰ *The Merck Manual of Diagnosis and Therapy*. (Merck, Sharp and Dohme Research Laboratories, 1966), p. 1120.

I'm a Material Dyke*

Flowing Margaret Johnson

I actively pursued a "spiritual path" for two years, ending that journey as a battered lesbian. This experience taught me in graphic terms how dangerous spirituality can be when pursued in the context of heteropatriarchy. I have been mentally writing this paper for years.

My cosmology is fairly simple, and I come to this analysis as a white, educated womyn of 46. I am an evolutionary creature and one of earth's attempts to create a sentient being. The species I am part of misuses technology, separates itself from the earth and seems headed for extinction. The earth would renew itself and in another evolutionary process would again create a conscious creature who might do better. Humans cannot kill the earth. Since we are on top of the food chain we will extinguish our species first.

I, a lesbian, who grew up believing the catholic church, watches, participates, experiences, laughs, and cries at my own attempts to create a personal cosmology. At my most optimistic I feel the cosmic dance in my bones and heart as I live with this planet rotating and spinning through space, holding her place in this solar system, galaxy, and universe. I trust in the process and know myself to be involved in a long and dynamic expansion/contraction. I relax into the knowledge that this life span I am living is for joy and not struggle.

At my most pessimistic I see death all around. No free-running horses, wolves driven to extinction, grizzlies hounded to death, forests

*I shared some of these ideas first in an address to Womyn Gathering in 1984. Thanks to Julia Penelope for far-ranging conversations regarding spirituality and psychic power while we collated DYKE games, and her expert and concise editing. Thanks to Marcia Levin for reading early drafts and loving me. Thanks to Joyce Trebilcot for her criticisms of the first draft of this paper.

dying, and men lying and justifying as they kill the earth. Most "great" religions teach followers to maintain an aloofness from the physical plane. "Everything is perfect," "the way is not difficult for those with no preferences," "the purpose of life is to prepare for death." These are all patriarchal reversals¹ intended to lead us into apathy toward this world and allow the myth perpetrators the power to shape and control the earth plane. A radical spirituality concerns itself with the Earth.

Encounters

Many personal experiences have shaped my attitudes and beliefs about spirituality. I will share a few that seem applicable.

I grew up as a catholic, taking in and believing their way of things. At puberty I began to hear voices. They would come at any time. During the day when I hung the clothes, during the night when I slept. I could not understand them as they spoke too fast and the words ran together. I learned that if I ran really fast and concentrated on running they would go away. I did that for months. The voices disappeared for good. I was relieved and stopped feeling crazy.

I weep for that child who didn't understand. Who fearfully rejected the voices. I seek, still, the innocence of that youth so that I might hear those messages. That youth will not come again in this lifetime.



In 1978 I was standing on a pedestrian island waiting for the light to change. Suddenly I was "seeing" from two perspectives. I was still standing on the island and at the same time I was observing, from high above it, a miniature street scene. Traffic flowed north and south as lights changed and the cars stopped and went. The action was speeded up. A red car traveling south went through the intersection, made an illegal U turn and drove over a pedestrian island. I "watched" in amazement as a stick figure slowly spun upward, turning in the air as it got closer to my strange vantage point. The features and clothes became recognizable and to my horror the stick figure was myself. I returned to a single "normal" reality.

¹ Mary Daly defines patriarchal reversal as one of the four methods essential to the games of the fathers. The other three are erasure, false polarization, and divide-and-conquer. See *Gyn/Ecology* (Boston: Beacon, 1978), p. 8.

I cautiously and immediately moved off the island to the sidewalk where I stood very close to an elderly man. Just as I began to relax, a red car made a U turn and drove over the spot where I had stood a moment before. The man turned to me, saying, "It's certainly a good thing you moved." I agreed. I had seen the future and by my action had changed it.

Profound questions remain from this experience. Who or what created that precognitive experience that saved me from serious injury? My spirit? A spirit? The lesbian switchboard in the sky? And why? This is not the only time when acting on my intuition has saved me from injury. It is the most dramatic.

What does my experience say about time? Classical science, which shapes how most of us see the world, is based on the myth that the future is determined by the present and, therefore, careful study of the present permits us to unveil the future. Yet, as Einstein said, "For those of us who are convinced physicists, the distinction between past, present and future is only illusory, however persistent." Could there be some way for us to short-circuit the years and lives of drudgery seemingly necessary to eliminate the patriarchy, and somehow, as Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, slip into another time?

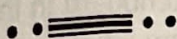


At times intuition has led me astray. At one point I was living at Findhorn, a new age heterosexual community in Scotland renowned for its connection with earth spirits. Findhorn is based upon traditions of mysticism and uses ritual magic, psychic power and meditation as community tools. I had traveled there to live for a year as a gardener and had entered the community as a known lesbian and feminist. I came out as a witch a few days after my entry into the community. The witch part of my identity bothered them the most. The community is situated at Forres, a village where witch burnings took place and where Shakespeare located his three witches scene in *MacBeth*. They are quite phobic about witches and witchcraft.

On my second day in the community I went to a hilltop overlooking Findhorn Bay. Excitement and joy about being in the community overtook me and I danced and sang to the sea. Then I threw my hands to the sky and sang, "I am a witch, I am a witch, I am a witch." Immediately I felt a strong fear. The air changed. Everything seemed to pause. It felt as if the earth held her breath. I heard a roaring in my ears and a violent and angry energy assaulted me. I fell to the ground and envisioned myself encapsulated in a sphere with a mirror on the outside

surface reflecting energy away from me. I was shaken and did not mention it to anyone for a few days.

Finally I talked about it in my entry support group. I found that the hill where I chose to first assert my witchself was the hill where witches were murdered. I realized at that moment that the witchcraft I claimed and talked about was a play witchcraft. I knew little about the craft, had virtually no training, and was playing with a psychic energy beyond my control. I stopped doing spontaneous and solo rituals.



In my early days of spiritual exploration I confused psychic power with spirituality. I somehow had developed the belief that if you had psychic power you also were spiritually evolved. Following intuition without the check of intellect and process with trusted lesbian/feminist friends created a life threatening battering relationship. A lesbian lover created a cult around herself and in the isolation of traveling in foreign countries I lost myself. The new age chant, "you create your own reality," so warped my thought processes that I stayed in the battering relationship trying to figure out why I was creating it.

While in the Findhorn community, I began rebirthing with a womyn (Chryss) who eventually became my lover. Rebirthing is a technique using deep and controlled breathing to enable entrance to a meditative state. It helps cleanse and heal the body because of the increase of oxygen and induces mystical states. It also creates profound feelings of euphoria and extreme emotional and psychic vulnerability.

Chryss was very psychic and I opened myself completely to her with the naive trust that characterized me during that time. She could speak to me in my head from a distance, she talked of schools on the psychic plane, and was an accomplished astrologer. I shared my dreams and visions with her and accepted her as both lover and teacher, believing she had done the same with me.

She became the center of my existence and I eventually left the community with her and three other members. Her promise was to teach me psychic skills. I followed my heart and my intuition, completely ignoring the messages of my intellect. Chryss was abusive. In retrospect it is obvious, and yet I stayed with her in the name of spiritual exploration, ignoring my own lesbian/feminist principles.

We traveled through India, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia. Slowly our egalitarian group of three lesbians, one heterosexual couple, and one heterosexual man turned into a cult. As I tried to keep my ethics together

the group turned on me and I felt the intimidation, fear, and isolation that any rebellious cult member feels. I also became a battered lesbian.

It is important to note that I have no history of abusive relationships. This battering relationship stands in isolation. I gave Chryss psychic power over me. I mistook psychic power and manipulation for spirituality. I trusted Chryss before I had any reason to, and continued to trust her after I had every reason not to. My love for her, my faith in lesbians and my distrust of those non-lesbians in the community who tried to warn me colluded in my self betrayal. Chryss almost killed me while I tried to figure out why I was creating this reality.

I look back on that experience with profound relief that I survived. Wimmin tell me of dreaming about me being in danger and sending energy out to me from their circles and private rituals. I believe that lesbian energy is what reached through the fog of my confusion and pulled me back to the lesbian/feminist community to heal. I have not again actively explored spirituality in a group.

I no longer trust intuition, psychic energy, nor love without the leavening reality of the intellect. I now have four questions I use when approaching any teaching. Does the teaching state or imply that someone or something else is the true holder of knowledge? Does the thought require that I reject any of my own beliefs or my current friends? If the answer to either of these is yes, I say no to the teacher and the teaching. The other two questions require yes answers. Does the teaching act to empower me? Is it beneficial to the ecology of the earth?



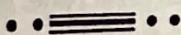
The use of psychic awareness and meditation in communication with other creatures could be explored more by lesbians. In Findhorn there is an alpine garden. It is circular and terraced to the top, where a flagstone path leads to a stone-covered flat area. This area was a favorite place for the full moon rituals of the wimmin's spiritual group. Moles began tunneling into the garden, raising havoc and virtually destroying the plants.

One community ethic was to use no violent intervention with nature, so a creative solution was called for. The gardeners meditated with what is termed the "essence" of the mole. They first studied the animal, becoming clear about its role on the earth. They approached it with love and respect.

When all were comfortable with their feelings for the animal they began to vision. First they visioned the alpine garden with the mole runs in it. Then they visioned another piece of land with runs in it. Finally,

they visioned the alpine garden with no more mole runs. They did this daily for two weeks. In effect, they asked the moles to tunnel elsewhere, offering an alternative. At the end of two weeks the early morning risers were greeted by a sign from the moles. The outer circle of the garden had been encircled by a perfect mole run. We interpreted this as a signal from the moles that communication had occurred. I spent two more months in the community and during that time the moles discontinued tunneling in the garden.

Intelligence and awareness are not limited to our species. We can forge astonishing connections with other earth creatures if we create the energy, the quiet meditative time away from the distractions of survival, and the vision that allows us to communicate psychically with other creatures. What would happen if we meditated with the "whale" and asked what it wanted from us? Part of the answer is obvious, but my suspicion is that another part would be a complete surprise. Can this technique be used to learn from other species?



When I went to Findhorn I identified as a lesbian/feminist/witch. I was earth centered and seemed to draw all of my energy from the earth. When visioning energy it usually spiraled upward from the earth and into the sky. When upset or depressed I would "ground" myself into the earth. The earth was my "mother" and I was dependent on that realization.

As summer solstice approached I became more and more agitated. A feeling of forboding grew. I was restless, unable to concentrate, afraid. Other wimmin reported the same symptoms. The day before solstice, feeling too scattered and distracted to garden, I decided to take the day and meditate.

I went to a favorite tree, sat on the ground, and tried to relax and ground myself. I found a resistance. I sensed a wrongness in what I was doing. I let my need to control go and opened to intuitive information. The message I received was clear: I had been dumping into the earth, assuming the earth energy would cleanse and heal me. I felt an angry earth, one demanding that I stop using her as a dumping ground for my own inadequacies, that I stop using her as a mother and recognize that I am part of her and she of me.

I felt a strong pull of energy coming into my head and toward the earth. I relaxed. I then felt, and eventually envisioned, an energy spiral coming from space, through me, and into the earth. It was as if I had

become a conduit for energy to reach the earth from somewhere else. It was my first conscious awareness of some energy force not of the earth plane.

A year earlier I had attended a workshop with a Native American womyn teacher and talked with her about a chronic neck pain. She suggested that I envision energy coming, in a spiral, into my head and out of my feet. I commented that I always envisioned it the other way. She smiled and said, "I know." I did, for a while, envision energy flowing in that direction and, with the help of massage, the chronic problem cleared up.

Eventually I returned to my old habit of feeling energy coming into my feet and out my head. After the earth withheld her energy from me at Findhorn I began envisioning energy in a double helix spiral; one branch spiraling from the earth through me and to space, and the other coming from space through me into the earth.

Energy and intuitive events are less believable to me than material events. The intuitive could be a projection of my own mind and I am wary of them. My guide to internal events is how they affect my feelings, physical well-being, and state of mind. If I feel calm and relaxed I am at ease with events; if restless and unable to sleep I question them.

Reflections

My belief that earth is spirit-grounded leads me to apparently strange conclusions. If the earth plane is not balanced and life-affirming, does this imply that there is some problem on the spirit plane? Or does it mean that the earth matter we inhabit is so dense that the spirit cannot properly communicate and therefore influence our behavior? Or is it just that evolution has gone awry and our species is bound for extinction rather than continued evolution? Or could it be there is no spirit and only human projection of our need for someone else to accept responsibility?

One possibility salient to a radical lesbian like myself is that the patriarchal culture devouring the earth has so cluttered the psychic realm and so distracted us by our need for sheer survival that our connection with our spirit is broken or at least full of patriarchal static. Lesbian country spaces are absolutely essential. Spiritual exploration by lesbians can only safely take place in a space cleansed of the reversals, dominant behaviors, and dichotomies of patriarchy.

Women evolved on this earth plane in a slow and arduous process from molecules drifting in a chaotic early universe. Every molecule of

our body was once part of a star. Spirit must also evolve. One of the first lies taught to me as a young catholic was the answer to, "What is god?" "God always is, always was, and always remains the same." The universe is 14 billion years old. I do not believe spirit predated the universe, I believe spirit is part of the universe and has evolved with it.

So, assuming that spirit evolves, is it possible for us to influence the evolution of the spirit? Can we be activists on the spiritual plane? If goddesses and gods are psychic creations, why not change them?

If magic works, and I believe it does, then more of us need to be studying magic, reading the old texts, finding the notes and secrets hidden away as wimmin went underground during the witchburnings in europe and the genocidal colonizations by european cultures.

The psychic plane is real. It is that plane we enter when we do effective rituals, when we do magic, often when we dream. Many of us are not consciously aware of this plane and walk it only in our sleep. Lesbians can find ways to enter this plane awarely, act in it awarely, and understand how those actions affect the earth plane. Many wimmin believe a battle rages on this plane just as it does on the earth. If that is so, wimmin have the advantage there for technology cannot affect that place and technology is men's primary weapon on this plane.

Radical spirituality is grounded in this world and in our lives. If spirit exists then our body is our spirit grounded. We are spiritual when we are living this life, this moment, to its fullest and in complete awareness.

It is true, too, that, for political activists, like myself, complete awareness can and sometimes does lead to despair and apathy.

I believe that the earth and all her creatures are involved in an evolutionary shift. Old ways of making decisions are too slow and separating. The computer revolution is the physical manifestation of this shift. Psychic powers and communication between womyn, between womyn and other animals, and between womyn and spirits is the non-physical manifestation of this same evolutionary movement.

Each thinking creature on the earth is a neuron within the earth. We are weaving connections between these neurons. Being conscious of these changes can speed up this evolutionary process and direct it to some extent. As lesbians of the most destructive species on earth we have both a terrifying responsibility and a joyous opportunity.

I cycle in and out of actively exploring spirituality. Right now political activism on behalf of lesbians is my primary focus while I continue to integrate what I already know and await a new time of focus on spirituality. I suspect that every womyn's spirituality will be unique, to expect

or search for "the way" is a patriarchal trap. Each womyn brings her own background of race, class, and experience to her spirituality. An openness to surprise, a suspension of disbelief, an attention to both intuition and intellect, and trust in lesbian/feminist ethics seem to me the best tools with which to explore the realm of the spirit.

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Radical Lesbian Spirituality

Nett Hart

By the sound of the drum beneath our fingers, by the feel of the earth on our feet, by the call of our wildness, by the taste of our lovers, we will know, we will know, that which we are called and that which calls.

We name ourselves Lesbian as our first act. We are Lesbians in search, in search of our roots, our ground of being. As we move toward our spirit calling, we will not flee life and complex questions. We immerse ourselves in living, in the heart of the matter, the heart of matter. We immerse our heart in the ordinary things of our lives with vision focussed on the present. We are looking for the physic and the metaphysic, the ethic and the metaethic, reality and metareality. We do not mean meta (beyond) as trivializing the "before," setting up a dualism between the act and its meaning, but as some connection that will run deep and true, bringing together our concerns. We are looking for a place for Lesbians to gather, to share what is most profoundly our own, an end to psychology and an opening for revelation.

We are moving like a stream of consciousness, a river of thought, an ocean of Lesbian self. We experience what we cannot articulate, but do not deny that we have experienced it. We say what is true today, leaving "forever" to the stars, knowing they, too, change and die. We do not question that we are spiritual.

We are energy, given to many forms, quixotic. We are awakening in a world of broken spirit, of spirit split from material. We look to matters of spirit to heal the material condition of the earth and her peoples, to heal them in the physical plane, to re-establish the equation of energy and matter.

We claim our experience as Lesbians as source and text of our spirituality and look for common strands with which to weave a fabric loose enough for all of us, yet strong and elastic. With Lesbian experience as text, it will be a multitextured cloth.

Our radical Lesbian spirituality is not yet communal, has no public expression, is rarely communicated between friends or even lovers. It is a sacredness we know within, may honor with private ritual we can't explain, but hesitate to witness to our community. It is not so fragile, but we have no vocabulary for it; so we wait, unwilling to borrow words from any other experience. It has as yet no symbols acknowledged that communicate beyond words although we daily are creating them, not consciously as symbols, but as images of our lives whose spirit is at the core, becoming more accessible to us as we move deeply into Lesbian experience.

Our daily, momentary, Lesbian spirituality is not a set of beliefs or practices but an attitude, an approach to all things in our day and in our night, an attitude of honoring ourselves and what we believe. Our beliefs are the act. It is a way of doing things, not the thing done.

Our spirituality is best described as a movement for it is not and cannot be fixed in position. It is a discovery, a deepening, occasioned by revelation, by insight, and by experiencing what it is not. It is a movement in that it informs and animates our best efforts on behalf of our Lesbian self, our Lesbian friends, our Lesbian community. Because it has few words of its own to introduce itself, it is known in action; it is how we live. It is a movement in that its momentum is generated hour by hour by each of us living our own truth and so it takes on a power that is continually calling us out to take more risks, to lose our fear, to expand.

Radical Lesbian spirituality is non-dogmatic; it springs from interaction within the community of Lesbians and from each Lesbian's own deep knowing. The judgements it makes are provisional, related to the context of Lesbian self-love. No set of teachings is imposed upon participants. What proves true in the living, what resonates with the Self, what other Lesbians witness in the community, is the spirit we share. Experience is the arbitrator of realities.

Our experience becomes more available to us as we develop our grid of meaning based in the experience of being Lesbian. We are not separated from our experience of knowing by reality constructs ignorant of

Lesbian being. As we begin to construct a Lesbian reality, we collectively give shape to our experience in such a way that Lesbian defiance of "norms" is not subsumed.

Our spirituality is non-mediated. We have no hierarchy (a stack of priests), no high priestesses. We have no intercessors. Our spirit calls directly to the spirit addressed. We do not faint at the responsibility we take for our own lives or well-being. As individuals or community we do not yield up our knowing to a leader, however powerful. We take the risk of being full participants in our own lives, directing our energy as we make choices of focus, allowing ourselves a variety of expressions. We each are capable of spirited expression.

While our emerging radical Lesbian spirituality is not derivative, it has many mentors. Some of this is apparent when we use words of other traditions to express what we are coming to know. Some of this is evidenced by the borrowing of ritual forms from other traditions when we panic, lose courage in the absence of a form. Some of this eclectic appearance is the investment of our own spirit into symbols of previous religious affiliation and we do not want to lose *our* spirit with the abandonment of a form that not only no longer suffices, but actively promotes our oppression. We may need to exegete this tradition to take back what is our own.

The more we learn of our own ways as Lesbians, the less we borrow from other traditions whether eastern or native american, jewish or wiccan, xian or african. Each people has found its spirituality in its own community life. Truth is communal; it lives in the lives of its people. It is created in context rather than existing as an enforceable code. We create a spirituality, not by adopting/adapting the practices of others or of our community of origin, but by living our own truths, honoring our spirit.

Our spirituality is immediate, available to us as we occasion it by opening to it. It comes in blazes of insight, in lingering notions we cannot remember, a time before we know. It comes as experience with changeable interpretation as we alter our reality.

We rely on sensation. We have highly developed/developing senses and respond to the information we receive. Our senses extend beyond sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste. We are learning not to control sensation with expectations, we are learning to receive what is before us

in new patterns; at the same time acknowledging there is no value-free perception. We are learning not to denigrate that which we know but cannot have received through the expected channels of sensation, information. We put all sensation on a par: it is not better to hear than to see, to pick up psychically than to smell. All sensation becomes information as we have some bowl of meaning in which to place it.

The radical Lesbian spirit of which I speak has its roots in Lesbian experience as Lesbians in primary Lesbian community. We may try on other forms to gain awareness and perspective, but any form that does not begin in the self-love of Lesbian wimmin will eventually deny our fundamental, elemental identity. We learn most about our spirit in going within, creating in the gaps of the moment. We need not fear the void, the absence of a form. The void is not equivalent to our invisibility, to our ceasing to exist. The void is the stillness, the fountain of Lesbian being. We begin with the trust of the self to find a way, a trust in the community to live its truth.

As Lesbians we need to encourage ourselves and each other to know our hearts and minds, our bodies and instincts in a space of suspended judgement/interpretation so we can develop what truly comes from a center of Lesbian being. We put aside all assumptions including the assumption that we know what kinds of experience and insights are spiritual, or that we need any such category — as though it were separate from our life as Lesbians in Lesbian community.

In encouraging one another to know our own hearts we hear one another into speech, into action. Our spirituality is not privatized, not a singular personal relationship with the sublime, the divine, a separation from engagement. The goal is not personal liberation from mundane mass culture, this world. Liberation is an act of community, a belief of a community in itself, in its present, in its power to create the world in which we want to live.

We come as a subject to our own spirituality. We are not creating ourselves for "spirituality" by any name, to give ourselves over to something outside ourselves, even something we have created. Lesbian community, an enspirited Lesbian body, is not something, outside, beyond ourselves. We are our own fulfillment. It exists moment by moment by our participation and faithfulness. We are She Who Knows and She Who Acts. We are subjects of our own spirit, not objects, not tasks and

goals, not history and culture. We are who we are at this moment, fully in the experience, in the present, awake but not self aware, that is, not outside the self commenting, interpreting, critiquing from a distance. We are fully ourselves at the moment, whole, undivided integers within a community of integers. We are what engages us now.

We are subjects among subjects. We live in a sacred world. There are no objects to objectify. Everything is filled with spirit and so communication is more possible than exploitation. We are animists, not anthropomorphists. We do not see everything in human terms: we receive each on its own terms as a living being whether as something we have named tree or rock or Lesbian. We approach everything with reverence for it, as it is, in its moment, in its precision of being exactly as it is. We do not see other subjects as they are useful to us, objects, but as they are. We are totally subjective, a world of subjects among subjects. We encourage each Lesbian to see herself as a subject, self determinant, self defined, not an object of some other consciousness. Only as the self heals to the self can we live the communal life of equals.

Our radical lesbian spirituality is not sentimental, not fed by emotional memory or wishful thought. It is creative of a reality we can and do live, of a reality rooted in ourselves as we know ourselves to be. It is profoundly accepting of our whole selves, courageous, discouraged, committed and free. It places Lesbian being squarely in the present, each moment accountable for its own redemption, its own meaning. Because it is rooted, radicalized, by the present, it does not look back to historical revelation or practice for justification nor look ahead to justice/retribution/redistribution in the future. We respond to the situation with whatever is most Lesbian loving, most self loving; we are challenged to respond/be responsible as if every act mattered, whether or not it has apparent consequences, because in every moment we matter.

We are empowered in every moment to reconstruct our reality, conform it to our belief. We may realign the pieces, add and subtract, shift paradigms of meaning. Every configuration is an aesthetic question, the creation of an integral relationship among the elements.

The aesthetic is the ethic. We choose to live with the complexity, the ambiguity, the multi-layered meanings of our experience. We create motion, asymmetry, balance, staticity and novelty in an ever fluid stroke. We are unwilling to leave out any part of the story for the sake of con-

gruity, efficiency, or correspondense to another's truth. Our moments of meaning are transparent color overlaid with the text of our lives.

We come alive as the flesh of Lesbian community. We embody together the rage, hope, love, gentleness, concern, fire, passion that propelled each of us from a world of conformity to the death culture to a world of Lesbian Loving. We come alive as our full selves in community, a community that validates and encourages our Lesbian being.

We embody our radical Lesbian spirituality; that is, our spirituality lives in our particular flesh, how it feels, what it needs, what pleasures it, what memories and scars form its substance. We do not speak of transcendence for we love this flesh. It hosts our desire, gives concreteness to our beliefs. We endeavor to be fully present, rooted, in this flesh, in the experience of this flesh, in the holographic memory of each cell. Our self love begins in the acceptance of this body in this particular form and color, with these particular strengths, competencies, preferences, limitations.

Rooted in the flesh we are open to kairotic moment, that is, to time out of chronology. We are able to respond from this very place, this very time, this experience as we experience it. We are fluid, moving, yet moving from a thread of deep connectedness, an embodied existence. We have a sense of place, of belonging to this earth, of creating/being created by this community of Lesbians.

Lesbian spirituality is available to any woman in the act of loving wimmin. It is intentionally separatist. It is certainly not available to males whether they are friends (!), brothers, gay men or sons of Lesbians. It is a space within each Lesbian community and interior to each Lesbian where access is not presumed, cannot indeed even be forced. It is a space in which a resounding NO! is said to males so we may begin to hear our own YES and YES and YES.

Radical Lesbian spirituality has no roots outside of Lesbian self-knowledge. It is what we create/are creating from our Lesbian center. It differs from "women's spirituality" in that radical Lesbian spirituality develops in the context of Lesbian lives and is intelligible only from a radical Lesbian separatist base. The metaphors, symbols, rhythms of this spirituality have their centrality in the experience of Lesbians loving Lesbians. *We are not primarily daughters or mothers or goddesses, but Lovers.*

When we take the metaphysical leap necessary to love another wommon, when we enter Lesbian community, when we name ourselves Lesbian, it reverses, throws into question, everything we have been taught, every interpretation of experience, every aspect of the "culture" of origin. We enter a world where what had been impossible — that is, to love a wommon — has become the central affirmation of our being. Any other thing, any other vision becomes possible, even likely. We have done the one thing that could not be done. All other transformations of reality are derivative.

That this transformation of reality has been accomplished by the act of loving a wommon is primary. No other act will replace in importance this revolution of consciousness. No other ritual will so bring us back to center as the active love of Lesbians.

Our radical Lesbian spirituality is fully integrated in our lives. We may or may not have rituals, but we live in sacred time. The way we plant our gardens, the way we sit down to tea, the way we love a wommon are all sacraments. It is the rightness, the fully-consciousness, with which we do our tasks, live our lives, that is sacred.

That is not to say our ways are unchangeable. Because we are conscious, we continually adjust, radically alter, how we do something, or what we do. When we can no longer do something because of what we now know, we find new ways. We do not recriminate ourselves for our previous lack or insensitivity nor do we expect all Lesbians to be conscious of the same things, but we insist on living our lives in awareness. We are profoundly accepting of ourselves and each other, at the same time challenging ourselves and each other to come true, shed limiting and destructive beliefs and habits.

A radical Lesbian spirituality that begins in the self love of Lesbians is inherently a spirituality of justice, intolerant of any limitations to the self love of Lesbians imposed by institutional and individual racism, ageism, classism, imperialism, or ableism. It cannot be posited on a substructure of bigotry nor used to support any malignment of Lesbians. It is responsive to the individual in her situation. It does not assume responsibility for the conditions that cause another's oppression except to ask how each of us benefits from this. When we establish a rightness about our place, charge our actions to conform to our beliefs without excuse, we are able to be whole and our action is not without consequence. Justice

is core to us: we cannot be ourselves and live with injustice, benefit from it, be abused by it, or become its tokens. We create a just world because we need the full participation of every Lesbian. We do not romanticize oppression. We may learn under difficult circumstances, be noble, generous, and brave under duress, but oppression is not the teacher.

Lesbian spirit is an ability to envision the world, a power to act, to change ourselves and the world. We are not obligated to recreate the world; we are *able* to do so. We come not as co-dependents of the oppressed, that is, not as those who in achieving solidarity require the conditions of oppression for political analyses and self concept, but as Lesbians who create freedom and in freedom recreate the world.

We are motivated/mobilized by Lesbian self love. As our expectations change from fear to hope, we open to more love in the present. Hope transforms the present, the abundance created by Lesbian love enacts change.

We wander but are not lost. We make change but remain committed. We believe in a future but live in the present, uncharted. Because as Lesbian wimmin we truly love ourselves, we dare to hope and, in hope, create.

Dyke Magic

A Readers' Forum

Healing with a Hex

Dyke witches speak of rituals to cure all kinds of sickness; herbs for this and spells for that, but it is rare to hear a dyke talk of using magic to curse and hex the greatest illness we face every day of our lives — the patriarchy and the men who rule it.

I firmly believe that what must be done for us to survive is to find ways to render men powerless in every way possible. What shines through time and time again, when I ask what must be done, is that I keep on raging, for it is my rage which has taught me how to feel alive again and which brings the greatest clarity, the deepest healing.

I seek vengeance with a fierce eye and a keen instinct. I am learning how to send back to men the energy with which they have wounded us.

I want to share with you a ritual hex of rapists which I enacted in a grove of cedar trees last week on the ninth anniversary of the night I was raped at knifepoint. I and a lover were raped for being Lesbians. Our lives were seriously threatened as well, but we survived.

I find keys to what I must do in healing rituals in my dreams, in the stones on my altar, in the beat of my drum, in dykely conversations, in my inner voices, in what my body speaks of — the joys and the pains — and the memories, both new and ancient.

An intimate friend placed a half-shell of a robin's egg on my altar recently in reflection of what she and I visualized one night while I was raging in a canyon, calling out to Hecate and cursing rapists. I needed to cry but could not, as often happens when I get close to the immense emotional pain I hold in my gut. The egg shell is the walls I have built around this pain and is beginning to crack. Numb and encapsulated, I can no longer fit inside of this shell, nor can I contain this pain and this fury.

Oh Furies and Sister Warriors, I want more. I want a formal hex that they will feel. I want to give them back this terrible ball of pain. So I plot, I brew, I gather my strength.

I take the day off work, feeling giddy and daring to take this time for remembering and cursing when so many would rather I forget and go

on, Lesbian friends included. At home I gather objects that I will need, especially a circular mirror to reflect their poison back to them. Also, the rapist doll a dear friend made for me three years ago is right for this spell. From my altar I take a piece of malachite/azurite to unblock energy, the robin's egg, a yellow candle to open my solar plexus, my wand that I made of a cholla cactus skeleton, my heart-shaped crystal, dried cedar and sage for smudging and Pacific sea water. The ritual doll comes with a long, thick needle.

I drive out to a favorite area past a canyon in a friend's van, singing a song by Sidney Spinster about the violence which touches our lives, but can never touch our ". . . lesbian bodies." I sing it from my gut, from that place where, even though I hold so much pain, I know that I have endured and they can never kill my spirit. But there is much work to do. I am wonderfully impatient.

It is a fine day for a hex. The sun is warm, the desert winds stir my rage and the cedar trees are perfect guardians. I draw a circle in the soil with a stick and seal it with a handful of crushed cedar and then sea water sprinkled round.

I thank the goddesses for such a clear day and a strong purpose. I pick up my wand to call the four directions, naming especially the goddesses of fire/destruction/rebirth at the south — Kali, Hecate, and Pele.

I place the mirror in front of the lit candle, facing south again. In the center of my circle is my altar atop a bandana.

I look to the south and call out the particular rapists I will hex today and all rapists in general and every man. I imagine the fear any of them would feel hearing me cursing them in the open, and my own fear lessens.

I have brought with me the hex I wrote as a part of the story that I finally wrote down about this particular rape. I read it aloud, moving in all directions as I fume, embellishing when I feel the desire.

VENGEANCE

Seven Sisters gather in darkness on a Coos Bay Beach
 They bring candles and firewood, food and drink, a ritual doll,
 knives and drums, and
 Their Rage, as deep and ancient as the Eye of the Crone.
 Blood curdling screams leap from their throats.
 The memories of rape need no conjuring here.
 Lesbians and Daughters of Lesbians, they have all suffered the
 enemies blows.

There is one amongst them whose fury is as new and fierce as
the wind which rises to greet them.

Come out you cowardly creatures.

Come and meet your fate.

Come gaze into the fire and see how we burn your effigy there.

The Mothers shame you.

The Daughters spit on you.

The Sisters slay you again and again.

The Furies are cursing you.

Hecate, Diana, Kali, and Marion¹ tear you to shreds.

Take this bloody bundle of pain, it is yours.

Take these years of humiliation, they are yours.

Take these gasps of terror, you own them.

Take these cries of helplessness, they are *not mine*.

It is not ours, it is his.

He does not hunt, he is stalked.

He cannot wound, he is dead.

So be it.

The wind does rise to greet my rage and brings a knowing smile to my lips. When I finish reading, I bend down, pick up the needle and begin to stab the rapist doll over and over again, cursing them all out loud and wishing them dead with each thrust.

I feel a shift inside of me at this moment, remembering how badly I have wanted to kill them, but could not. My fear then moves out of my throat in belly screams and turns to pure spite. I can see their balls shrivel with each curse; see them shrouded in their own violence; envision their pricks twisting, growing inward and impaling them. They must die of their own cancerous energy.

I scream at them to look into the mirror of truth and see their own reflections and receive that which they own — cowardly death, rape and malice. The Furies do not want us to forget their crimes, the Earth herself is me in the simplicity of such harnessed and directed anger. We move together in this hex, not separate this time. I see droves of them falling in agony, turning on each other as they have always done.

I douse the doll in alcohol; I build a small fire of twigs; I throw the creature onto the flames. I laugh and I dance and I keep on cursing as they burn, remembering how many of us they burned. I breathe a little easier.

¹ A Lover who was murdered for being a Dyke.

I hold the malachite/azurite to my gut and begin to moan. Then I hold the egg shell to my solar plexus and I feel another layer of protection shatter and fall through my uterus to the ground below. I let the moans out, louder and longer, and feel something lifting. A few precious tears fall, but cease abruptly when I hear a chainsaw motor begin nearby. This pain feels too great today and I am alone. I am afraid to keep on feeling it, to allow myself such vulnerability, knowing that it is a man using the chainsaw, breaking the flow of my sacred spell.

But I gaze through the membrane of the egg shell and I see what I have done today. I am amazed.

I stir the embers as the last of the rapist effigy burns. I scatter the ashes inside the circle and stomp them into the ground, letting out great yells as I land on my feet each time.

I gather my ritual objects into my pack, then kneel in the circle with my palms on the Earth. I breathe into Her that which she has given me today and offer thanks. I open the circle, put my pack on, and begin to walk back.

Along the forest road, a pine tree calls out to me and I walk to her, lay down my burden and let her hold me. Her bark makes my skin tingle. I put my face up to her trunk and breathe slowly and deeply, closing my eyes. I can hear her humming; my blood becomes her sap and I see branches shoot out through my scalp. My arms become great limbs; my legs become roots. We return soon to our own forms, still embracing but I am not yet finished. I spiral chakra light through us, into the ground and out to the sky. I breathe a sigh of relief and pleasure and squeeze her tight before I let go.

I feel loads lighter. I walk with a proud heart towards the van. It was a great day for a curse. I sing all the way home.

Sage Deserdyke

Dyke Magic

I wish now that I had called this forum *Dyke Magic* when I put out the call for contributions, rather than *Spirituality*. *Spirituality* has connotations of ethereality and male religion. Magic is ours.

When I received the Bloodroot pieces in the mail I felt a joyful and immediate resonance with my own experience of doing *Lesbian Ethics*. It is the experience I wish for all Dykes, everywhere: Through *Lesbian Ethics* I know myself to be (I have been even when I didn't know it) a part of a network, a pattern, a flow that is More Than myself, a part of a Dyke Plan and a Dyke Purpose. The underground stream of magic about which Betsey of Bloodroot speaks is real. I never thought *LE* would

succeed, I also never thought she would fail. I have simply done her, let her be done through me. And yes, persistence is essential. But work blessed by magic is easier than any other. That is the clue.

For me separatism is magic. I did not become a separatist because I had convinced myself with a logical argument that it was the only answer. (What is the question?) I simply am not able to live "struggling" with men, in their world, trying to change their minds, hearts, and institutions. Even if that would eventually work (which I do not believe), the price is too high. In my introduction to the first issue of *LE*, I said: "Only when we can openly and fully say what we want do we possess ourselves [and, I would add, only then do we love ourselves] . . . for me . . . there is no joy to match that of returning once again to the knowledge of what I really want and thus of who I really am." Within patriarchy it is too painful to stay in touch with what I really want; but numbness, self-deceit and collaboration are the only alternatives there. Separatism solves this problem for me. As a Separatist I am fighting *and happy*. I have wanted the whole world, the right to anything (ethical) in it that I chose, and men have robbed me of this birthright, and I am not willing to try to convince them to give it back. That would give credence to their right to take it, and would *waste me*. I'm not even really willing to spend a lot of time "struggling" with other Dykes. I am creating what I really want while, and by means of, living with it and in it as much as possible. That is magic.

I have learned some small things about magic in the last few years. It works. When I have done it alone or with my lover, it has worked, and I have seen it work for others. Even those circles where humanist lesbians call out the names of greek goddesses do have effects. I have done those circles but I won't do them again. They feel wrong to me, apart from me rather than of me. But imagine how powerful they would be if they came from our separatist guts.

I used to imagine magic as something that was projected outward — you know, eyes that flash lightning. What I have found for myself is the reverse. The times that I am able to influence are the times that I have emptied myself and invited the other in to me. And then imaged the results I desired, in as pleasing a way to the visitor as I can manage. The principle of aikido if you like: 'How wonderful it would be, dear pud, if your car crashed into that wall over there.' There is at least one hexagram in the *I Ching* about the power of this kind of influence.

Another thing I know is that the future comes into the present. Significant events in my life have been mirrored, or anticipated, by prior

imitations of themselves. And the future (or just the physically distant) appears in our dreams all the time.

Why do we treat all these truths as though they were shadows, not meant for the "real" world? Why are we hesitant to acknowledge and use them to destroy males and their hideous tyrannies? Because, as one friend suggested, we were burned for it? Did those women know they were in a war with men? Can we protect ourselves better? Because men have brainwashed us? How many horror stories written by males are about a powerful, evil force locked up somewhere and threatening to break loose? Is that not us? If men had magic power equivalent to ours, would they not use it?

In *LE 2:3* Dicey Yates says that men have presented their pitiful mysticism as the highest and truest, so that we would not discover and develop our ability to truly union, to merge consciousness with another woman. In Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Darkover* novels, a group merged-consciousness, most group members being women, generates the power that digs mines, heals bodies and defends against armed aggression. This, I believe, is an archetypal image. If we can union with one woman, why not with several? If we can use magic to make our lives more comfortable, why not use it to bring down the malocracy?

I hesitate to say more, because I am inexperienced and I do not know where the pitfalls lie. But I do know that when we live in a world where magic is "unreal," we live in the shadows.

Jeanette Silveira

Sweet Mother, She's Alive!

Sweet Mother, She's Alive! The Lesbian Witch, The Ferocious Earth Lover.

My heart leaps with hope when I hear of, when I meet Lesbian Witches. Oh, how many times have I despaired alone with my visions, spells, magic, breathing and meditation! I do know wimmin who consider themselves Radical Witches. Many are traveling wimmin and often it is hard to gather on important holidays. Vital, specific information on magic and transformation is not shared enough — so I write to add to the dialogue.

I consider my spirituality to be radical, first, because I (re) discovered her on my own. By uprooting old images and beliefs and by nurturing my own true-ist visions, I have learned. I explore my own energy field and chakras. Rarely referring to books or to others' experience I reclaim through ritual my mother-healers of long ago. As I change my diet, clear away addictions and seek the quiet earth, as my left brain/mind gets out

of the way, songs, stories, chants and images spill in.

Recently I have become aware of a split in the right and left sides of myself. I feel a battle between my right and left brains, and I know I truly am shaking to my soul, to uproot the patriarchal upbringing and values I have had. To think and move within a spiral is to look at life in a different way — this will be my final integration, as my energy center will deflect other patterns.

Magic is a strong tool. Through spells, visions and channeling we can alter the flow of patriarchal energy. Wimmin at the Seneca Wimmin's Peace Camp were successful in shutting down an army generator after a firewalk ritual. In wimmin's Ritual Action Group (RAG) rituals we have focussed on stopping the clocks and timers inside nuclear warheads, we have surrounded Womyn's Health Clinics with protective circles, we have sent hope and loving energy to wimmin in pain, to wimmin in war. There are many, many stories of the magic of Greenham, Seneca and other witches who have transformed patriarchal power.

Ritual is radical in that we can use it to heal/become whole, to transform, to initiate or to complete. Friends and I have held rituals in this simple way: We gather to do rituals on hills, in eucalyptus circles and redwood groves or sandy ocean beaches. We are not surprised that collectively we have brought everything we might need — salt, water, tools, food, etc. After connecting with the local energy and spirits we:

Cast an outer circle: Clockwise (Venus/Passion) or counterclockwise (Earth/Grounding).

Call in the Four Directions: East/Air, South/Fire, West/Water, North/Earth.

Cast an inner circle (often opposite the direction of the outer circle, to create a cup of energy).

Call in friendly spirits: Goddesses, animals, heras (never men)

Heal: Throwing, Clearing, Casting Off, or Transformation; then Drawing In, Healing, or Filling Up. "We Delve into the Darkness with Glee"

Listen: What lesson or new insight has been received.

Thank: The Directions, Spirits, Friends, and Open the Circle.

We focus our healing energy on Ourselves, Sisters, Womyn's Communities, Sisters in Struggle, Animals, Plants, the Earth and her Indigenous and Struggling Communities. We honor and recognize the roots of our ritual in Matriarchal and Native American communities, to name only two.

Many times we have been interrupted by men — and very dramatically too, although they have never stopped our rituals. Once in

an abandoned field two men rode up on horses to a circle of 20 wimmin but were repelled by our energy and didn't get too near. Twice we've been told to put out our fires and once a fire jeep came charging up the hill and stopped right over our hastily covered fire. It is clear they feel our work, and it makes them uncomfortable (cackle, cackle). We can dismantle and transform their structure, machines, brains, power, and control by tangibly sending our magic energy to stop their clocks, timers and buttons. The patriarchal worship of death must be diminished/brought to balance and the altar of life upheld.

Alone I do rituals to affect all parts of my life — my emotional transformations, my home, my work, relationships, sexuality, family and conflicts with authorities/patriarchal power. I know soon I shall seriously (and playfully) create rituals to celebrate wimmin's bloods, our recovery, our courage. And I want to fly. Oh I know we can fly in our dreams and visions but I want to fly — my whole physical body: It's just a simple matter of levitation, isn't it?

I have been in several firewalk rituals. They are incredible in the way they transform and empower wimmin. We bring up and clear out our fears by stating them in our circle. We raise energy, often with song and then open a magic doorway. When an individual womyn gets "that ole firewalkin' feelin'" she just walks across, stepping into a pool of water. Firewalking has taught me about courage — about breathing deeply and taking one step forward. One time I took off my shirt and rolled in the fire to clear away cords I had to my chakras.

Several wimmin I know have become disenchanting or fearful of rituals. Often I feel wimmin become afraid of what they might "unleash," as if the energy or magic within is laced with evil and violence. Clearly there is a need for gentle opening and trust in oneself. Could it also be fear of darkness? I feel it is. Many white wimmin have accepted dark as bad and scary. Yet the darkness is the womb, the earth, the spirit world, the mystical and the most beautiful depth I have ever felt. Our racist training alienates us from not only our colorful sisters, but from our inner self as well.

Psychic Healing to me is radical. Spontaneous healing through identifying and releasing blocked channels does occur. What? Healing without pain? Impossible many say — we have to struggle, to feel our pain coming and going. Certainly I realize there is and will be pain in our healing. Yet with the right healing tool, openness and courage, some healing can be spontaneous and easy. I have cleared old pain, body and stress habits, and emotional reactions in a short clearing process. Once I

understood that emotion is energy in motion, I recognized that when that motion stops or is blocked, I have pain. By increasing the vibration of my energy and with the help of a healer or tool (crystal), I can unblock the energy and its accompanying belief until it flows out of my body.

I study Kajukenbo Kung Fu at the Hand to Hand Self Defense Center in Oakland. We are a strong thriving school of wimmin and children bringing forth our power by training in Body, Mind and Spirit. In my training, I've become aware of the intense power of my spirit as I can break boards and repel attackers with my energy. On the event of my first belt promotion, to orange belt, I wrote a story, *The Birth of the Warrior Witch*. Costumed as a Magical Spirit Hawk, I combined mime, dance and Kung Fu in my initiation flight. In this story I describe the tree of life meditation. It is sacred to me. Daily, even hourly, I send down my roots, connect with the earth's core of life and draw her up, clearing tension and blocks.

I have experienced vibrant connections during rituals by sending my roots throughout the earth. The connection with wimmin of other lands who are doing their own rituals and prayers is immensely encouraging. I can feel our web, our healing magic. Wimmin shall guide this planet back to the balance of life and death, dark and light. I am optimistic, idealistic. In my creative work I speak out about our pain and suffering, yet I feel responsible to offer positive solutions or possibilities. Though the witches were murdered, many chose to blend with the sea rather than fall to the hands of the pricks. I know that their courageous power has come on through to us, the present witches (on earth). It is up to us to revitalize the ancient magic and transform our dreams into life.

Reba Rose

Playing Indian

Does a radical or separatist lesbian spirituality exist? I have seen a trend in the past years within the women's community to become more "spiritual." One form this trend has taken is what I call "Playing Indian." These groups of predominantly white women get together to do what they call "Native American Rituals." They are involved in what they call the "Medicine Wheel" and are on their way to becoming "Medicine Women." They are taught some by Indian men, some by white women who have "learned" from Indian people, and some, very few, by Indian women. But mostly this is a "tradition" being taught by white women, to each other, and does not have the acceptance or approval of the great

majority of Indian peoples. "Traditional Indian sweats" are "performed" at full moon gatherings, rituals and chants of the Indian Peoples are used along with "sacred" Indian drums, rattles, pipes, shields, etc. All this while a group of predominantly white women gathers in an acrylic teepee (bought from some white company) and chant "Ho" in unison. These are the same songs and spiritual play acting that has been going on at men's rainbow gatherings for 15 years.

Now if the fact that the boys are doing the same type of "Indian" rituals isn't enough to get these non-Indian women to stop and rethink these practices, let me bring up a few points. Predominantly white peoples have committed and are committing genocide upon Native American peoples. White women directly benefit from this genocide. When you commit genocide on a people, you acquire everything that is theirs. Their land, their language, their culture and their religion. Therefore, the trend in the Women's Movement to "adopt" the rituals, symbols, songs, sacred objects of Indian peoples puts the "finishing touches" on the genocide of the Native American peoples.

When I present this perspective to non-Indian women involved in these "rituals," I am told, "These teachings have been released for use among all peoples to wake up and save the planet." What I see is a small, elite group of white women, who have the time and money to "play Indian" and can't even get along with each other, let alone interact in a non-racist way with the women of color in their own communities. Now, am I supposed to believe more racism will save the planet? Please

...

Then there's the "But I was an Indian in my past life" rationale. It's nice to have a rationale that can't be proven. They rarely want to talk about who they are in this life. Why? They don't want to talk about their privileges, as white women in a racist world. They don't want to talk about how they're going to wake up and save the planet. These issues are negative, I'm told, not spiritual, I'm told, will be figured out later, I'm told. My anger is my problem, I'm told.

Well, my anger is a very real part of my Radical, Separatist, Lesbian spirituality. Righteous anger can have a purifying effect when channeled as a spiritual force. Woman's anger is as old as the core of fire burning within the earth — it is an ultimate purifying force that can wake up and save the planet.

Any true spirituality cannot be separated from the physical. Isn't the separation of Spirit and Matter the lie men have tried to teach us so they could destroy our world and offer us "pie in the sky, when you die

(Amen!)”? A women’s spiritual movement must be a Physical Movement intertwined with the Spirit. All those boring issues like racism, poverty, violence must be solved. It will take some creative Spiritual Women’s energy to do that!

When we as women do our rituals of personal empowerment, seasonal celebrations, rites of purification — rituals that can, and do, help give us the strength and focus we need — let these rituals be a natural, free-flowing creation from our hearts.

No more memorization and play acting. Women are the very root of life. Within us are all the most ancient rituals of wisdom. Maybe if these women would stop and look within, they’d discover their own rituals. Maybe with Spirit and Body a Radical Lesbian Spirituality can exist, and some real planet saving will happen!

lami

I am sure Spirituality varies with each individual womyn. Mine goes deep within me and has been part of me forever. There are experiences of your physical being that get you in touch with something that is Alive in us all. Something that connects us to our Lifeforce, the Flow

It is part of our being, Our True Self. Not always does the Spiritual self show itself in physical expression. Personally, my experiences usually come through my daily activities of living and surviving. Rarely do I have to seek outside myself, or have to set up a situation in order to experience my Spiritual True Self.

It amazes me the ways in which I see other womyn trying to get in touch with their own Spirituality. It seems some have even gone to the extent of ripping off other peoples’ cultures and traditional customs for the sake of finding their own Spiritual Selves.

We as Lesbians have had our OWN rituals and chants. Sometimes we’ve even been known to make up our own. We don’t have to rip off a whole nation of people to get back to our OWN ROOTS.

K. Moon

A Lavender Tithe

What is the place of lesbians in the cosmic scheme of things? I have an idea, an intuition, that seems to me most marvelous. I want to take you along the path which led me to my belief.

During my first winter here at Rootworks, I dreamed of luxuriant gardens blossoming in the rockhard clay. I nourished my dreams with stacks of library books about soil, plants, herbs, and everything I could find about gardening, horticulture and agriculture. In one obscure book I

read that in the earliest records of agricultural societies, it was customary to set aside a tenth of the yearly harvest to be seed for the following season's crops, in order to assure the food supply for the entire community. What caught my attention was that tenth — a tithe! The original concept and practice of tithing was not to a human institution, but to Mother Earth! When the invaders forced the patriarchal church on the native agricultural peoples, a tenth of the yearly produce from the fields and gardens was diverted from Mother Earth and became an obligation due to the foreign god.

Like a seed, these facts waited dormant for years until I found the further information I needed, while reading cross-cultural studies of diverse societies widely separated in time and space: The recurring estimate of the frequency of same-sex bonding is around 10 percent of the population.

An occurrence common to all or nearly all societies makes me wonder what natural laws are at work. I assume that the Universe, or, as I prefer, the Goddess, knows what She is doing, and that Her "doings" preserve and continue Her existence. This is a sort of cosmic "Gaia Hypothesis."¹

As I mulled over this thought, I remembered the wise ones of early history, who tithed to Mother Earth, and so lived. Could it be that in creating lesbians, the Goddess is tithing? If 10 percent of her daughters are reserved from the consuming tasks of reproduction and care of the new generation, then that ten percent might be in some way a tithe to Her future.

Now the most challenging question: If lesbians are a tithe, how do we serve Her purpose? What are we here to do? There may be many answers. I do not know them all, but I do know one.

To share my answer with you, I must share a very private experience. I seek words delicate and wise enough to point toward an intense spiritual experience, never meant to be described by the language I am using. The words are narrow and linear, the experience was beyond them.

My lover lies in the V of my legs. Within the trust and admiration we have for each other, we have been transported by sexual pleasure into timeless transparency. Love moves through us and surrounds us. As I reach to cradle her head in my hand, her gaze rests on my face and then on my vulva. At that moment I experience her worship of me. But not

¹ J.E. Lovelock, *GAIA, A New Look at Life on Earth* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979).

just of me. She worships the holiness of my female body and the mystery of the Vulva. Instantly I know with the certainty of direct intuitive knowledge that the first worship of divine mystery was the worship of the magical power of women's bodies. In our original wisdom, we women understood the awesome powers of life-giving, of creation, and of the transcendence which sexual ecstasy brings us.

Between the original truths of this worship and the present absurdities of male theology, women's holiness has been subverted. The result has been impossible dogma: the creator is male, the mother of god is a virgin, a cruel murder is the will of a loving father for his son, eternal punishment will follow deviation from the laws of this jealous god, and on and on. The original truth is that the Creator is like women. She is constantly creating form and energy. Her acts of creation are ecstatic, and all Her creation is loved. Our lives and our deaths are in the natural cycles of Her ways. All are equally her gifts.

The ancient people worshipped the creative powers in the earth and cosmos. They saw natural and heavenly processes mirrored in the bodies and monthly cycles of women. For example, the Sanskrit word for temple or sanctuary is the word for womb. In all parts of the world, mounds, hills or mountains were called the breasts, the pregnant belly or the pubic mound of the Goddess.² They saw the female form in nature: in caves, in rock clefts, in the ocean tides and in forest openings. These were the first altars, the first temples, inspired by the worship of women.

During this time when male energy still dominates by force and deception, the worship of women's ways and of our Goddess/Creator is kept alive, rich and holy in our lesbian loving. Because love of women is central to our nature, homage to the Goddess is inherent in our lesbian lives.

Perhaps we are Her priestesses, chosen as a tithe to ensure Her continuing presence on this planet through our passionate commitment to women. I believe the purpose of the Universe/the Goddess in consistently creating lesbians everywhere and throughout all recorded time, is to ensure the survival of the worship of the life force, that inherent quality embodied in being female, in order that life itself may continue.

Jean Mountaingrove

² Barbara Walker, *The Women's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983).

"Real Girls" and Lesbian Resistance

Jacquelyn Zita

For some time now I have been following the essays in *Lesbian Ethics*¹ on Lesbian femininity. I have read these articles with feelings of pleasure in recognition of a shared point of view and with feelings of anger. While I was working in Stockholm last year, I facilitated a formal Saturday afternoon discussion at a Lesbian coffee house, where Linda Strega's "The Big Sell-Out: Lesbian Femininity" and Ruston, Bev Jo, and Linda Strega's "Heterosexism Causes Lesbophobia Causes Butch-Phobia" were discussed. The mood of that discussion was one of disagreement with the one-sidedness and the rhetorically inflated language presented in the articles, although a lively discussion ensued regarding levels of tolerance and intolerance within Stockholm's Lesbian communities. Those present discussed the impact of community rules which seem to be oppressive both to insiders and those coming in (or "out") from the outside. How these rules were related to roles became a matter of roving commentary, from those who claimed they would never wear a dress to others who indirectly agitated against those wearing ties. Attention to these more external aspects of apparent butch/fem role playing and the paradox of both using and rebelling against patriarchal language regarding sex role behavior seemed to become an obstacle in this discussion as it is in the writings in *Lesbian Ethics*. This experience and my continuous reflection on this issue have led me to write this essay.

First I would like to review some of the ideas presented in several of the *Lesbian Ethics* articles and then develop a different analysis of feminine Lesbianism. The Fem Question (or the question of what our relationship to the socially constructed heterosexual norms of femininity ought to be) is, I believe, one of the central questions of feminist theory. This question takes on an exceedingly interesting form of debate within contemporary feminist Lesbian communities, where anti-role ideology

holds a powerful grip on our lives and where the critique of femininity is clearly linked to a radical understanding of the institution of heterosexuality. Lesbians represent a group that refuses to obey the patriarchal mandate to sexually service the opposite sex. Whether or not this entails an additional refusal to carry on the role of feminine behaviors associated with this servicing constitutes the Fem Question within circles of feminist Lesbians.

As for my own personal identity within this debate, I find myself stumbling between the clear lines of "either/or" argued by Strega,² as I discover various aspects within myself of what have been traditionally called butch and fem. Depending on the group I am with, I am considered more butch or more fem, but inside and away from these different readings of my self-presentation, I find a swirl of aversions, desires, pleasures, likes and dislikes which defy singular gender categorization. I agree with Penelope's argument that we need to advance beyond the language of patriarchy and its oversimplified categories to make room for complex and joyful experiences of self. I find the anti-fem arguments thus far presented in *Lesbians Ethics* overly dependent on simplified patriarchal categories. Yet, a paradox emerges where total and radical elimination of patriarchal words, such as "man"/"woman," "masculine"/"feminine," and "mannish"/"womanish," may only superficially erase the ways in which we have deeply internalized the meaning of these dichotomies and are deceptively hiding from ourselves. On the other hand, adopting the language often oversimplifies and "shortcuts" through our personalities and experiences.

Throughout this discussion I am reminded of Adrienne Rich's notion of Lesbian existence. "Lesbian existence suggests both the fact of the historical presence of lesbians and our continuing creation of the meaning of that existence."³ What is important in our discussion of the Fem Question is this much broader process of creating the meaning of our existence within our communities and lives. At the very least, we can hope to have communities or friends where the obstacles of lesbophobia,⁴ lesbian-hating and woman-hating are not present and where heterosexual privilege and straight thinking are no longer necessary. This hope belies the fact that simply switching genital predilections is not enough, since our bodies and minds may still carry, unreflectively in some cases, the behaviors and attitudes of heterosexual policing, ranking, and thinking.

One of the solid insights of the Battleaxe writings,⁵ a point that is brought home over and over again, is that Lesbian anti-butch attitudes

are in part a product of straight thinking, where a woman "who looks more like a woman" is supposedly more valued than her butch counterpart. Anti-butch policing within Lesbian communities re-enacts this rank ordering. As the Battleaxe writers have pointed out, fem behavior carries with it the privileges of passing and appearing to be "less Queer." Butches bear the burden of more obvious visibility and are more often victims of violence against Lesbians and queer-bashing. This ranking among Lesbians further reinforces other oppressive hierarchies within our communities:

When two femmes are lovers or friends, if one is more oppressed because of being darker, fatter, or older, having less looks privilege, less class privilege, or less or no het experience, being more Dyke Separatist, etc., she is likely to be considered the less feminine of the two, and therefore "the butch." This just adds to her existing oppression, and she is more likely to understand the nature of butch oppression as a result of being treated like a butch at times.⁶

I believe one finds in the Battleaxe writings some truth for some fem Lesbians. There are fems who are Lesbian in their sexual preference behavior, while appearing to be "straight" in their gender behaviors, using this as a ploy to walk the middle, disavow connection with more visible butches, cover the shame of sexual realities, and gain from the privileges of heterosexual passing. However, there are other accounts of this behavior. The authenticity of these accounts seems to be the issue. In the Battleaxe writings, there can be no authenticity in fem behavior, since by definition "woman" and by extension the gender posturing exemplified in fem behavior constitute a contradictory Lesbian category. One cannot be both a Lesbian and a "woman" (or fem). The argument conceals its own conclusion in these negatively cast definitions of "woman":

"Woman" means het female: a female who accepts and participates in men's definition of her place in patriarchy as a helpmate (helper of man), bearer, nurturer and defender of men; who accepts this place and function which require denial and betrayal of her own rights, freedom, and well-being and those of all females, because those rights conflict with the male will to rape, dominate, possess, and destroy.⁷

"Woman" is defined by her allegiance and orientation towards male values.⁸

"Woman" is actually not a biological definition as men claim: it is an artificial social definition invented by men. It defines what men want females to be — a submissive human being who bonds emotionally, mentally, and physically only with men, and who tries to live down to men's definition of her.⁹

In contrast a common attitude heard among fems is that butches seem to act like men. As Penelope has pointed out, the meaning of "lesbian" within heteropatriarchal semantics is often perceived as "lesbian" = "not woman" = "man." This either/or categorization and lack of imagination can be attacked on two levels. On the level of social practice, a Lesbian never receives real male status within the dominant culture. She is in fact often perceived within that culture as an imposter, a pathological deviant or a freak, and treated accordingly. The equation of "lesbian" to "man," a product of nineteenth century mental science inversion and popular perception, is not a real equation but a way of policing and holding women in line. Secondly, this simple either/or logic lacks the imagination necessary to see that Lesbians are in some ways resisters who *refuse to participate* in the narrowly construed category of "woman." Instead of allowing for this slippage, as a consequence of woman's narrow confinement, heteropatriarchal semantics undermines our perception of resistance, strength, complexity, and courage by casting such actions as sickly male imitations. Stepping out of the narrow confinements of traditional womanhood has always been considered stepping over a semantic line where "not woman" = "man." On the other hand, fear of accepting and acquiring qualities that appear to be masculine runs deep in some Lesbians and perhaps with good cause, as not all ways of rejecting and despising femininity are necessarily liberating.

As Penelope has pointed out, "what is labeled 'masculinity' is held up to us as the ideal of what it means to be 'human,' so the female who embraces the femininity forced on her by heteropatriarchy is by definition, less than "human," *sub human*. Femininity is made to seem attractive because females who act 'like a man' are deviant, and therefore, 'bad.'¹⁰ In a curious way the definitions of "woman," presented in the Battleaxe writings, deepen the no-win situation for the fem. She must both suffer the consequences of the misogyny of 'real men' from the dominant culture which treats her as *sub human* and further confront an alternative community of females, who *may appear to her* to be acting like men, although they are not real men, and who again tell her that she is not quite good enough: she is to be recategorized as a *sub dyke*.

Her acquiescence to fem training is perceived by the Battleaxe writers as a vain effort to be accepted as a "real girl" in the heterosexual world. In a Lesbian context, she is no longer real. Unfortunately, the Battleaxe writers invent 'a real nature' (the butch) to buttress their arguments: the butch Lesbian is more truly female, more self-affirming, more true to herself and able to live in accordance to Lesbian values and not male lies.¹¹ This hasty essentialism is regrettable, since it forecloses a more in-depth discussion of what we mean by "Lesbian resistance."

Following the Battleaxe analysis, the original heteropatriarchal equation has shifted from "lesbian" = "not woman" = "man" to an alternative Lesbian reading of "butch" = "more truly female," where the import of "truly" suggests more natural, more authentic, more a realization of one's true being. "Woman" has danced around in this linguistic space and has now become "the masculine" — an infiltrator into Lesbian community, a female acting like a "woman" in "wo/man's" clothing. Her inauthenticity is guaranteed by definitional ploy:

Because a few Butches have occasionally bound their breasts, Butches are called "male." But we think the things heterosexual women (and Fems who copy them) do in order to fit men's female-hating fantasies should be what gets called male . . . Who but the truly male-identified would: wear apparatus that pushes their breasts out and up into men's faces; painfully remove the fur on the body or face; wear make-up that looks like bruises across the face; poison herself with chemicals that disguise female aroma; or wear a dress that makes her more vulnerable to rape? Who else would deliberately starve and torture ("exercise") herself to look weak, powerless, unfemale, and THIN enough to please men?¹²

Feminine clothes and games . . . are male-invented signals and symbols and results of female submission and degradation: we cannot transcend them or reclaim them — they are in no way natural, they are loaded with meaning. They are actually masculine to the extreme.¹³

In summary then, the Battleaxe arguments against fem Lesbians consist of two different approaches. First there is a definitional argument, in which the meaning of fem behavior in Lesbian contexts becomes "male identified" and contradictory to "the true meaning of Lesbian." Secondly, there is a concern for the consequences of fem behavior in which the fem is called upon to regard and be accountable for the consequences of her behavior. These consequences include the harm done to oneself in passing, appearing to conform to the dominant gender norms,

and the harm done to other Lesbians. I find this appeal to accountability and responsibility¹⁴ a better way to approach the Fem Question, since the question which ought to be central to this discussion is how we perceive Lesbian resistance in all its variety and not how we can evaluate it using the grids of masculine/feminine. In the critique that follows I would like to make a plea for a plurality of Lesbian kinds, which can carry varying degrees and varieties of resistance to the dominant culture. By turning our focus to forms of resistance, I think the discussion on the Fem Question can be shifted away from the difficulties involved in definitional question-begging.

Semantics and Resistance

The Battleaxe writings and the now published responses to these articles have been furthered most notably by Julia Penelope's article "Heteropatriarchal Semantics: Only Two Kinds of People in the World." In this article, Penelope correctly points out that the Battleaxe discussion on gender behaviors is still very much locked into the grids of heteropatriarchal semantics, but that Strega's real intention is to push our perception of butch Lesbian, in particular, beyond this language of containment. We should, according to Penelope and the Battleaxe writers, see the butch as a resister, rather than a deviant or a "little man" as she is perceived on the heteropatriarchal register. This is an important point, since it militates against a "semantically closed" reading of non-feminine Lesbian behaviors. In seeing hitherto butch behaviors as acts of resistance, a different posture is taken towards heteropatriarchal reality and even towards butch "heroism."

However, the Battleaxe writers and Penelope have engaged in the same kind of semantic closure with respect to fem behavior. Aspects of fem behavior are condemned as necessarily subservient and manipulated. What is assumed about women engaging in such behavior is "the dumb woman theory" of patriarchal domination. According to this theory, women have been manipulated and brainwashed into accepting the norms of femininity and into seeking male approval for "good girl" behaviors. As passive objects of male construction, these women do not know their best interests, or if they do, sheer cowardice, fear or self-hatred keeps them from stepping out. Fem Lesbians, who should know better, are either similarly stuck or two-faced. Even cunning "good girl fem Lesbians," who play fem because of the rewards and privileges given to them, have been seduced into meeting interests and aims which undermine their own integrity and which harm other Lesbians. Accord-

ing to Penelope and the Battleaxe writers, such behaviors, however cunning, are no longer acceptable in Lesbian contexts.

Penelope argues that we should keep in Lesbian language the category "fem" but abolish the category "butch" because the latter type of Lesbian is a resister who escapes heteropatriarchal semantics while the first is a collaborator. She must be labelled by her continuing loyalties. However, this attitude towards women seems familiar: conceiving of her as a passive object of manipulation, pontificating her best interests, and explaining her behaviors and ill-choices as acts of cowardice, fear, selfish interest, and self-hatred (another version of female masochism) construct another a box of semantic closure. This fore-shortens our vision. However, outside of this semantic space, heterosexual women, and by extension fems, have been an oppressed and exploited group. To suppose that the lives, networks, communities, neighborhoods, bonds of friendship, and cultures of women have no redeeming qualities of resistance is to endorse the "dumb woman theory" of heteropatriarchal thinking. The categorical rejection of femininity and a reading of passive dumbness into the activities of women are the psychic vestments of masculinism. I suggest that if butches be given the privilege of resistor status that we also allow for a different and a less judgmental reading of some fem behaviors. Resistance to heteropatriarchal gender and sex semantics can take on a variety of forms. The question which should concern us is what terms of resistance are effective in jamming the codes of heterosexual policing and challenging the power of phallic domination.

This brings me to the concept of *resistance*. Resistance implies the presence of some obstacle, a pressure from the outside, a wall or confinement which must be shunned, pushed away or rendered ineffective. To resist assumes that one has been the target of some action or assault and one has withstood, survived or fought back. The body has *resistance* to infections. Oppressed people *resist* the efforts of their oppressors. We *resist* temptations that are not good for us. Butch girls *resist* fem training. Resistance implies the existence of agency or causality that is often goal-directed. "Resistance," for the context of this discussion, can be defined as action done by and for agents against obstacles and forces which act against the better interests of these agents. "Lesbian resistance" thus becomes action done by and for Lesbians and in the best interests of Lesbians against obstacles that thwart these interests.¹⁵

The importance of bringing the concept of "resistance" into focus is that it gives us a different set of questions to consider: what are the

obstacles to Lesbian existence and Lesbian desire, how do Lesbians make choices with respect to these, what responsibility do we take for our actions, how are our personal values and interests related to Lesbian interests, to whom are we accountable, and what are the best interests of Lesbians? The concept of "resistance" enables us to give a different reading of women's behaviors. We can avoid "the dumb woman theory" and begin to perceive female behaviors under the rule of heteropatriarchy as active responses, involving at times creative and intelligent strategies within oppressive situations. These attempts at womanly resistance can have positive survival value, but they can also lead to indirect reinforcement of domination and even self-destruction.¹⁶ Within a Lesbian context one might argue that these modes of resistance are no longer necessary, but one could also argue that at least something of value can be learned from the millenia of female struggle for survival and mutual aid. A blanket rejection of all female heterosexual behaviors, even white middle-class het fem behaviors reproduces a dead semantic space in Lesbian realities.

These concerns bring me to a different way of thinking about Penelope's characterization of heteropatriarchal gender semantics. In her article on heteropatriarchal semantics she presented the following diagram, to which I have made a few minor additions.

LEVEL	CATEGORY	Feature	
		+MALE	-MALE
I	BIOLOGICAL	Male	Female
II	FUNCTIONAL	Man/Father	Woman/Mother
III	GENDER BEHAVIORAL	Real Man Masculine Manly	Real Woman Feminine Womanly
		Womanish	Mannish
IV	SEX BEHAVIORAL	Sex with Females	Sex with Males

TABLE I: Heteropatriarchal Semantics (after Penelope, 1986)

The Biological Level of this semantic grid represents the division of human beings into biological kinds; the Functional Level represents the division into sexually dimorphic breeders; and the Gender Behavioral Level represents the division into two seemingly oppositional modes of gendered behavior. I have added to the table Level IV, Sex Behavioral, and qualified Level III as "Gender Behavioral, a distinction that was missing in Penelope's original.

As Penelope has pointed out, human beings do not fit neatly into these dichotomous boxes, but these misfits are either somatically reconstructed ("sex-change" operations), medically stigmatized, or conceptually discounted. This schema of sex and gender is presented as a normative mirror of reality. The relationship between levels is one of mutual entailment, since any level entails the meaning of the others within its own column, the exception being "womanish" and "mannish" which are derogatory terms applied to cross-gendered behaviors.¹⁷ The usual semantic entailments, such as "being female" is to be "woman" (breeder), "feminine," and "heterosexual," are often perceived as biologically determined within patriarchal ideology. Hence the entailments appear to be natural and causal. This way of presenting the heteropatriarchal gender/sex semantics is helpful, and it enables us to see that the "butch" female uncouples the logic of this system by disjoining entailments between levels 1 and 3, 1 and 4, and also 1 and 2 in some cases.¹⁸

What is missing from Penelope's original diagram, which I have added as a new Level IV, is a category for Sexual Behaviors. This is required since the Biological, Functional, and Gender Behavioral Levels also entail, within heteropatriarchal semantics, heterosexual behaviors. Being a "real man" or "real woman" implies opposite sex preferences. By leaving out this category Penelope's diagram of Heteropatriarchal Semantics fails to take account of the common heterosexist assumption that homosexuals (Level IV) can't be breeders (Level II) and also fails to acknowledge that fems, who may at times apparently comply with all aspects of the heteropatriarchal code on Levels I, II, and III, have subverted the code by their sexual behaviors. This act of resistance, small though it may be, is not perceivable using Penelope's original schema, nor do I think she would want to include it.

What is also missing from this picture is the extensive force and violence used to maintain these semantic entailments and prevent slippage between the categories. These entailments are not something that occur in the free head space of heteropatriarchal culture. To keep humans aligned within these categories requires continuous and redundant coercion, violence, and pressure, as can be seen in the deliverance felt by any individual who crosses over. It also requires a full array of motivational rewards to keep things straight. Penelope's schema reflects a reality in which the powerful institutions of reproduction, child-rearing, heterosexuality, compulsory coitus, and male domination with its investment in phallic symbolism supply the force and material division necessary for these ideological entailments.

Resistance within this gender/sex semantics involves the uncoupling of these entailments. Such acts belie the "naturalness" of the entailments, bring into visibility the existence of choices and alternatives to the tracks of strict entailment, and make the contours of socially constructed gender and sexual behaviors more palpable. This semantic disruption involves a somatic reorganization of bodies, and without a critical mass of compliant bodies heteropatriarchal economies lose power. By disrupting the semantic/somatic entailments, we lay bare the force that hides the arbitrariness of these social divisions and the perversions of phallic power which hold them in place. Such a schema provides a constellation of ways in which Lesbian resistance can occur. Butch resistance is only one possibility.

When Penelope suggests that one can be "gentle, kind, tender, interested in fabric and texture or a host of other personality traits" without having to defend "femininity,"⁹ it seems that what Penelope is also advocating is a rejection of heteropatriarchal semantics. This I believe is the right move. Lesbian plurality must be allowed a full expanse of sensual freedom and creative pleasure. Without the exhaustive and exclusive categories of "masculine"/"feminine," our descriptions of self may become wordy and cumbersome, but we gain a less rigidly set possibility of self, where one can nurture the playfulness and pure bodily pleasures we perhaps once felt as infants reaching for and touching the world of objects for the first time.

Seeing the body as an entity with set meanings, born to fit the categories "feminine," or "masculine" is motivated by the need to control and dominate over bodies. Such bodies are seen as static, ordered, manageable, recognizable, and lacking ambiguity. Phallic domination would have a more difficult time holding down bodies which are excessively fluid and uneven, ungoverned by the social laws of gender and sex, and guided by a differently spirited response and playfulness. In short, "wild" bodies. To volley our discussion around the categories "feminine" and "masculine" may be our last allegiance to heteropatriarchal semantics. To continue to oppose butch to fem is perhaps the supplementary text. I want to encourage us to think of Lesbian resistance as multiple and inclusive rather than exclusive and dualistic.

Notes

¹Relevant essays in *Lesbian Ethics* include Linda Strega, "The Big Sell-Out: Lesbian Femininity," 1:3, 73-84; Paul Mariedaughter, "Too Butch for Straights, Too Femme for Dykes," 2:1, 96-100; Mary Crane, "Letters," 2:1, 102-103; Julia

Penelope, "Heteropatriarchal Semantics: Just Two Kinds of People in the World," 2:2, 58-80; Ruston, Bev Jo, Linda Strega, "Heterosexism Causes Lesbophobia Causes Butch-Phobia, Part II of The Big Sell-Out: Lesbian Femininity," 2:2 22-41; "Femme and Butch: A Reader's Forum, 2:2, 86-106. The two articles written by Linda Strega and Ruston, Bev Jo, and Linda Strega, I will refer to as the Battleaxe writings, as I have inferred that name from the footnote on p. 73 of Strega's first article.

²Strega, p. 74.

³Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Anne Snitow (London: Virago Press, 1984), p. 227.

⁴I will capitalize the word *Lesbian* when the word carries new meanings created in Lesbian contexts and when it refers to a people with distinctive culture and past. I will use the word "lesbian" in lower case, when the word is still heavily encumbered with heteropatriarchal meanings, usually negative.

⁵For my use of the name "Battleaxe," see note 1.

⁶Strega, pp. 78-79.

⁷Strega, p. 84.

⁸Strega, p. 75.

⁹Strega, pp. 76-77.

¹⁰Penelope, pp. 58-59.

¹¹Strega, p. 77.

¹²Ruston, Bev Jo, and Strega, p. 33.

¹³Strega, p. 83.

¹⁴I find Joyce Trebilcot's distinction between "responsibility" and "accountability" helpful here. "Taking responsibility" refers to giving reasons for one's actions, and (I might add) claiming some relationship of agency ("ownership") to the consequences or one's actions. "Accountability" emphasizes relationships, "in emphasizing those to whom one is accountable — one's community friends, lover." To become accountable is to take on membership in a community or to make a commitment to a relationship. *Taking Responsibility for Sexuality* (Berkeley: Acacia Books, 1983), p. 20.

¹⁵Penelope, see note 1. For the individual Lesbian, engaging in Lesbian resistance might be related to how my personal interests overlap with my normative personal Lesbian identity interests or how they coincide with the normative interests of Lesbian collectivities to which I belong. I realize that I have not defined, except in a very general way, the concept of "Lesbian best interests"

and that the whole concept of "resistance" may vary from community to community, in a larger dialogue of collective and consensual struggle. My point here is to shift the discussion away from the more superficial aspects of Lesbian role-playing to the deeper question of resistance, which I intend to take up in later writing.

¹⁶For further analysis of "femininity" as a category of resistance, see Sarah Lucia Hoagland's "Femininity, Resistance, and Sabotage," *Femininity, Masculinity, and Androgyny*, ed. Mary Vetterling-Braggin (Totowa, NJ: Littlefield, Adams, 1982).

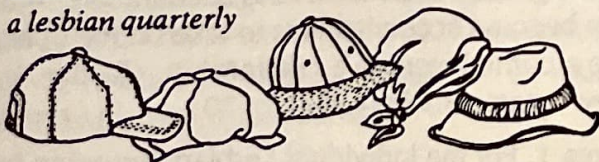
¹⁷Where cross-gendered behaviors are displayed, the heteropatriarchal entailments resort to these pejorative labels. Thus the "same behavior" displayed by different sexes will receive a different evaluation and description within this economy of meaning.

¹⁸Two points need to be added here. It should be noted that the enigma of the "butch" with her lack of straight alignment, is often realigned by cross-sexing her "inner body," her "real sexual identity" being male. This adjustment preserves the logic of entailments. Secondly, my analysis suggests a rank-ordering of Lesbian heroism similar to the Battleaxe and Penelope position, which is only partially true. Clearly, the "butch" strikes against this semantic system on several different levels. On the other hand, one of the covert operations of this semantic is to "box in" behaviors, so that fem resistance in its more subtle forms is often not perceivable because of the crudity and generality of language of gender difference. Thus a fem's apparent compliance with the categories of her sex-assigned column may be just that, an appearance foisted by the language used to describe her behavior. Her resistance must be silenced.

¹⁹For a full elaboration of the relationship between Lesbian semantic authority and somatic reorganization, see Marilyn Frye, "Some Reflections on Separatism and Power," *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (New York: Crossing Press, 1983) 95-109.

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Two Pieces on Dis-Ability

zana/Raven

And What of Those Who Remain Unhealed?

at the equinox circle, one womon sang:

*i am whole and healthy, my body has no illness
my body is a perfect self-healing organism
a beautiful being
who purifies all toxins
all toxins are out of my body now
i am in radiant health¹*

another gave thanks for her healthy body, and a third did the same. i'm disabled. i felt jarred by these sentiments. my experience named negative. my presence invisible.

would wimin in a spiritual circle thank the goddess for being young, for having light skin? here i am in a supposedly safe space hearing wimin i love giving thanks they are not like me.

i searched for the difference. why is it that any of us would see it as rude, hurtful, and politically incorrect to give thanks for youth or skin color, or thinness, or money privilege? now, in lesbian-feminist groups of the 80s, crones, lesbians of color, fat lesbians, working class lesbians, can be proud of who they are — as we all can now be proud of being lesbians and wimin. but no one's proud of a body that's ill or disabled. right? even those of us who live every day with such bodies have a hard time finding our pride. i wondered if i could say, when the rattle was passed to me, "i thank the goddess for my disability and what it has given me." probably not.

¹ "Affirmations" by Bethroot Gwynn, on the tape *Strong Women Singing Down Home*.

but i would like to. a big reason i can't is other wimin's beliefs. there would be a sharp silence. i would feel my nakedness and my aloneness — not sure, at all, that the other three disabled wimin in the circle would be with me. they might hate their own limitations too much, and therefore hate me for naming those limitations good. it would not be the first time i've clashed in such a way with disabled sisters.

i said nothing in the circle about these feelings.

in the days following, i thought: why is it that we *all*, myself included, can't conceive of disability or illness as positive? is it possible to change that? even our words for these concepts are all negative: *disabled* (or *handicapped* — ugh!). *ill*. *sick*. the body's failures, malfunctions, insufficiencies. "what's *wrong* with you?" people say. people continually refer to my arthritic knee as my "bad knee." even the new term, *differently abled*, insists that there is a norm one differs from.

certainly, i've wanted an end to my physical pain and limitations. i've been angry at having them — very angry. i've wished and prayed to be "better," to be "well."

yet i *have* received good things from these physical challenges: the opportunity to understand life in a deeper manner. the opportunity to develop compassion and wisdom. the opportunity to learn new skills and knowledge. (i say "opportunity" because, as with all life experiences, it is up to us what we do with the material we're given.)

i discussed my feelings with one of the wimin who had given thanks for her healthy body. she hadn't thought of these things before. (i doubt many of us have.) she said she was attempting to be thankful for the things she does have rather than pray to have other things.

yes. i like that. i do that.

and she pointed out to me that her body is not 100% healthy. and that there is health in my body. this is true; but she is able to function easily in a world set up for the able-bodied, while i must carefully plan every detail of each day's activities, and there are many things i cannot do at all.

she says she's working to be healthy, to eat healthy food, live a healthy life. of course. so am i. in fact, she and i have spent many hours exchanging ideas on such things.

and yet . . .

illness and disability have been a strong pattern in my life. to reduce these to "bad," to something to be eliminated or escaped from, is to deny some 31 years of my experience. when lesbians push "cures" at me, when they speak of my physical limitations (or anyone's) as horrible

and intolerable, they assume i'm a victim. that i would be like them if i could. that i have not made choices. in fact, i feel i have made choices. not, perhaps, on a conscious level, but in some part of my being. the one most obvious to me is that, at a highly stressful point in my life, i believe i chose physical breakdown over mental breakdown. (for me, that was positive. for someone else, mental breakdown might have been more positive.) and i believe i will be "healed" if and when that's the right thing in my life.

actually i have experienced "healing" of unexpected kinds — kinds that may indeed be worth more to me than being able to walk easily. soul-healing. forgiveness. gratitude. happiness. a oneness with my body that lessens my fears of her actions. acceptance - not as a giving in, but as a way of knowing and being and living the truth.

if illness and disability are purely "bad," then how can i be a worthwhile lesbian without being "cured," "fixed," made "whole"? perhaps illness is an inherent part of some lives — lives that may be rich and full, lives in which the physically-challenged person opens doors that others, limited by the *non*-challenge of their good health, never even perceive as there.

i think again of the circle. maybe what i'd like to hear is all of us being thankful for our experience, whatever it is, without assuming that what we're thankful for now may also be right for us at another time, or right for someone else.

i'm thankful for being childless, for the freedom that has given me to travel and paint. and i'm thankful for the wimin who give their energies to raising the new generation of children.

i'm grateful for having a lover, for being able to work through some of my old fears in this relationship.

i give thanks for my celibate state, for having the chance to be my own lover.

i'm thankful my body runs smoothly right now; this is a peaceful time in my life and i appreciate having this rest.

i'm enjoying so much being 68 years old! i hope others of you will love your old age as much as i do.

a wise counselor once told me that she believed my healing would come when i had fully accepted my disability. contradictory as this statement sounds, i have found deep truth in it. and i expect that the same is true of us as a lesbian people: when we accept physical chal-

lenge simply as that — a way some of us are challenged — our collective well-being will increase regardless of missing limbs, blind eyes, or brain cells that move slowly.

ultimately the question is how we work toward healing without assuming that good health is always best and without being oppressive to those who remain unhealed. the answers we must find together, sharing our ambivalences and our fears.

zana

The Perfect Matriarchal Future

zana asked me the other day how I felt during the Equinox circle when wimmin gave thanks for good health and able bodies. It's not an easy question. My first reaction is envy, which of course clouds my perceptions. What is going on in dyke society that I'm envious of able-bodied wimmin? Would I like to feel energetic and free of pain, or am I envious of privilege? It is valid for wimmin to want to give thanks for the *gift* of an able body, but how often is this the same as saying thank goddess I'm not sick? Without questioning the wimmin praying, I can't know.

The womyn before me gave thanks for her strong body. What if I had taken the rattle from her and given thanks for being disabled? The gesture would certainly have had shock value. There's no way I can sincerely do this from my heart. I hate being sick. In saying that I am saying that I hate a huge aspect of myself, an attitude that no doubt slows down my healing. I, too, give thanks for the mobility I do have, especially for that which gave me the choice fourteen years ago to move to the country. I do feel blessed in this. If my injuries from the auto accident had kept me from walking out of New York City, I do not know where I would be now. I was so isolated at that time that I had no way to leave but on my own. I needed to break out of my self-destructive patterns. If I had not left the city, I don't believe I would have survived.

I look forward to a time when more country land is accessible to any womyn and any womyn can have the help she needs to grow and change and move wherever she wants.

I say these words to myself: Thank you, mother spirits, for this body, for all the things that I can do. Thank you also for the lessons I have learned through sickness and pain. Thank you for the blessing of life in this body just as she is.

As I reread these words I feel in my heart and throat chakras it would be easier to pray for healing, to ask to be well. I know that wellness comes after acceptance. Not acceptance as in giving up, but accep-

tance as in, OK this is who I am, and now I can try to change what I don't want. In other words, to try to "get better." Acceptance and gratitude together are another step, one that I can intellectualize, but not yet feel in my heart.

I look at the words *get better*. As kids we went to Mom with our cuts and bruises and she would make them *all better*. Obviously *all better* is preferable to *all worser*. Even as a child the language trapped me. My cuts got *better*, but my allergies got *worse*. An ugly word. No wonder I don't like being sick.

In her book *Womonseed*, Sunlight explores a vision that I basically share. However, I am bothered by the scene where one womyn explains to the younger ones how they used to do healing. Now they don't need to do it any more. Everyone is well. All better, cured like an olive, forever preserved at a certain stage of ripeness. Why is it presumed that in a perfect matriarchal future all wimmin are able-bodied? What if one womyn had not been healed thru their magic? Would she be blamed for her resistance? Would she be left behind when everyone else spiraled to the highest hill? I envision a scene like this.

Perfect Matriarchal Future

Raven lies on her bed. She is felling particularly achey and tired, but desiring companionship. She doesn't have the energy to actively seek it out. Woodpecker, an able womyn, appears at Raven's door. She says, "I felt you communicate that you are in discomfort today. Here is a pot of hot tea. Do you want help with breakfast?" Raven replies, "I would enjoy fixing my own food, but thanks for getting me going. I feel cheered by your presence as well as by the tea. Because of the care I get on my uncomfortable days, there are many more days that I'm active." Woodpecker smiles, "Sure would be boring if we were all alike in our physical abilities. Can I give you a massage later? I'm glad to do it. I know I'll be cared for when I'm feeling uncomfortable."

The End

Even in writing this I know that, like Sunlight, I want to envision a perfect matriarchal future where I am well. It's a big leap to imagine a society free of stigma and myself free of self-hate for my sickness. These changes alone would be some pretty great magic.

Nexus

Lady, We Never Knew You

She can't remember when she first realized she was not like the others, but as early as five or six she fantasized about women, those innocent asexual fantasies that are a part of every little girl's beginning. Somehow, though, even in those early years, she knew hers were different. As she grew older the fantasies didn't change, they were still about women, but she learned without ever being told that they were not the right fantasies, were in fact to be kept hidden and were not to be allowed to intrude into her real life. By twelve or thirteen the boy-girl games were fairly well ingrained in her and she enjoyed them. Looking back, those years were probably the most heterosexually comfortable of her life. By sixteen she was doing the right thing and saying the required words, but her fantasies were still about women, only now these fantasies were about her classmates and by instinct she treated them as temporary and did not allow them to roam outside the boundaries of romantic friendship.

One day she was twenty and she still lived at odds with her fantasies, fantasies which took the form of sexual conquests where she pretended she was a man because that was the only way she thought she could love a woman. Cloaked in that role, her imagination wandered where she could not allow herself to tread. She did not think of herself as one of the tragic or pathetic 'perverts' she encountered in films and books, and so she was able to cling to the illusion that she would marry and do what was expected of her. That was the way of the world. And that world was so ingrained in her that she thought that was the only way it could be.

Inevitably she turned to drugs and they helped her in her escape from herself, helped her to play the game by the rules she had been taught were the only rules. Pretty soon she couldn't manage without the pills. They made everything blurry. Now when she closed her eyes she was almost able to pretend that the man in her arms was a woman. So she searched and she stole, copping drugs from every medicine cabinet,

copping money from her grandmother to fill the illegal prescriptions. She did it so that the hard places would feel soft and the rough skin smooth. She did it because it allowed her to breathe the alien air of heterosexuality. Simultaneously, she ventured further into the place that was forbidden to her, the bars where women openly loved, the realities she had always assumed existed only in the realm of her fantasies. But the time of liberation had not yet come and she could not acclimate herself to the life of duplicity that seemed such an inherent part of that world. She had neither the courage nor the vision to see that the years of hiding were coming to an end.

She delved further into the gay world where she stood quietly in the corner of a bar or listened longingly to the stories of her gay friends. All the while she denied she was one of them and desperately tried to believe the denial. And the drugs held her hand and whispered in her ear that she needn't be afraid, that she would not succumb to the stuff of her fantasy, that she would never be one of them.

One day the drugs stopped coming to help her. She felt as if she had awakened a thousand miles from the road she thought she was on. And the realization came then, the realization that she was one of them, had always been one of them, and, more to the point, would always be one of them.

It would be nice to say that at that moment she stood up and the socialized and internalized taboos fell from her and she glorified in her new found freedom but it just didn't happen. In fact, she flew further from the truth and ran as fast as she could back to the lie, back to the safety of her suffocation.

She now experienced something similar to the seven stages of death, and each stage was prolonged and she fought as those who know they are dying must fight and she even tried making deals with God. Please, she was not one of them. As a matter of fact she had very little in common with them (knowing from her real world education that they were all alike and what they were she was not). She had been told they could be spotted a mile away and it took her years to realize that, yes, they could be, but not by the stereotyping she had been taught and not by outsiders.

Finally, she accepted the truth about her feelings and she succumbed to the gentle touch of a woman although she attached to that acceptance all the shame and guilt she felt was its price. She continued also in her other world and she said nothing when that world ridiculed or condemned. This was her way of proving to herself that she was not

as good as those she perceived as normal, not anything in fact, except a social and sexual deviant. It was also her excuse for doing nothing with her life. There is no point in achievement when one sentence, one word actually, would always be the total sum and substance of her existence.

The years progressed more quickly now and before she was even aware of it the time that she had in which to make that ultimate commitment of heterosexual marriage was gone and she cursed the abnormal fantasies of the five year old girl who didn't know that they were the wrong fantasies. She cursed the drugs that had fooled her into thinking she could play in both worlds and leave the one she truly belonged in for the one she had to believe was right. She cursed the woman who touched her in a way no man ever could. And ultimately, she cursed the kind of god that could be so cruel.

And then one day, one day long after the time that is allowed for such things had passed, one day when she had given up finding even a semblance of that necessary cloak of respectability, he came along. He was far from perfect, he wasn't even particularly interesting but he was a man, and she knew that this second chance was her last chance and she took it, she grabbed it without a thought for love or happiness and so finally she gave that commitment to the real world, that ultimate commitment to the American dream.

She became a pillar of society and fought harder than most for the preservation of the status quo. When the changes came, when the sixties and seventies brought forth their legions of feminists and gay activists, she reacted strongly against these social movements, the social movements that negated the suffering she had endured when she had aborted her fantasy. Reagan and the eighties brought some vindication of her choice and her adopted lifestyle. I wonder if it was enough.

My sister died last week. She must have forgotten about the diary. Or thought she had thrown it away. I thought she just didn't approve of my gay activism. I never knew that the censure in her eyes wasn't for me. It was for a five year old girl who grew up believing that things had to be the way they'd always been.

Margaret A. Define

Athena Remembers Her Mother

"ATHENA REMEMBERS HER MOTHER" is a sign I have on my wall. Its meaning, as I explain to visitors, has its roots in the obfuscation of the original story of Athena's parentage, an obfuscation which reaches its height of indignity — and influence — in Aeschylus's *The Eumenides*.

This play is a tour-de-force of rationalization for cultural male dominance, first in the Ancient Greek world, and now in the highly Greco-Roman influenced European and non-Native American world.

Here's the story: Queen Clytemnestra killed her husband, Agamemnon, for very good reasons of her own, which I haven't got time to go into here. For this, she was subsequently murdered by her son, Orestes. All the Old Crones of the Ancient Matriarchal Way were enraged, and hounded Orestes everywhere for his crime of matricide. Orestes, on the other hand, claimed that his act had been justified; he considered that to leave his father's death unavenged was a far worse crime than matricide. It was agreed that the conflict, basically a debate over whether one's mother or one's father was more important, would be brought before Athena. She would judge the case with a jury of twelve men. Here we have the roots of our own judicial court system, comparable farce that it is.

Both the Crones/Furies and Orestes state their case. The jury votes a tie. Athena must then break the tie with her vote.

She explains her position on the case thus: It was a matter of common legend that Athena was born fully grown, in full armor, from the head of her father Zeus. She was therefore naturally biased in favor of men, since it was a father only who gave her life and wisdom. She had no loyalty to mothers, never having had one; and so the disastrous vote was cast for Orestes' acquittal

But take another look, another look at the older version of Athena's parentage; remember what Athena forgot.

Metis was a goddess of Wisdom, raped by Zeus. She conceived Athena, and Zeus then turned her into a bumble bee and swallowed her alive. Athena was *not* born motherless and fully grown; she was born of Metis in Zeus's stomach. She was taught and nurtured by Metis, and burst free when she grew too large to be contained.

Imagine how it would have changed things if Athena had remembered her mother! Orestes would not have been acquitted of the crime of matricide, and justice in this civilization would be not patro- but matro-centric.

As I see it, there are two major lessons to be learned here, namely: 1) just because you may seem to owe a lot to your father, doesn't mean he didn't steal it all from your mother to give it to you; and, therefore, 2) just because you got something from your father — and we generally don't like male things — doesn't mean he didn't give you something really great. There are a lot of stolen goods, cultural, economic, and

otherwise, floating around; a male signature is in no way indicative of male origin. For instance, Athena was famed for her wisdom, chiefly of the intellect; hers was the logical, reasoning mind. Believing that her intelligence was her father's gift, she honored him. But it was *Metis* who was a goddess of wisdom and who imparted wisdom to her daughter, not Zeus! This is a classic example (no pun intended) of the stolen-goods-presented-as-a-gift scenario. Men use this maneuver to gain wimmin's awe and gratitude, and to make themselves look as though they have more to offer to wimmin than wimmin do.

Before the epiphany which prompted my ATHENA REMEMBERS HER MOTHER sign, I condemned and discarded a whole lot of stuff, just because it was traditionally described as being Of Male Origin. Logic is a good example. Intellect, logic and reasoning have, for a long time now, been designated as a male province, as a "male" way of thinking. In fact, Athena was allowed to get away with her intellect, and even to be praised for it, only because males defined her as a *total* Daddy's Girl, so totally a Daddy's Girl that she was a biological freak. This maneuver has the effect of emphasizing how unsuitable and/or impossible logical thought must be in a natural-born woman.

I used to believe in intuitive understanding as the Good Way, the Female Way. Conversely, logical thought was Evil, Patriarchal, and Male. I now believe that this is nonsense. Both ways are good, and are best when used together, indivisibly. *Metis*, Mother of Wisdom, was Mother of the Intellectual Athena. Logic is not a male trait at all, it is our own heritage, and as utterly natural to us as are our intuitive traits.

It is not always possible to know, as in the clear-cut story of Athena, exactly what was ripped off, from whom, by whom. Sometimes all we can do is *sense* a rip-off; and that's enough. You may be reading a book, and say, "Wow! This is great! . . . Oh, no! A *man* wrote it! Yuck!" When this happens, you can resolve the conflict by thinking of Athena. Discard the man (whose most impressive quality was being clever enough to recognize what was worth ripping off) and take back your mother's work. Even if the book you read, or the painting you see, or the concept you are introduced to was not plagiarized directly, detail by detail, from a woman, likely it was drawn from her words, her acts, or the example of her spirit. If it touches and resonates in your woman-center, chances are it is of woman origin. It was also probably built on her labor, which went into feeding, clothing, and housing The Male Genius, and even into creating the materials he used.

The same principle applies in economic matters. Most male money is female money, made off of wimmin's labor. Any money given or do-

nated to you by men, or by the Government, however "generously," is your own. You don't have to say thank-you, and you certainly needn't be grateful.

Of course, some wimmin have never been under any illusions about what they owe their fathers, nor about the origin or worth of those attributes and creations which men claim as their own. For me, though, these realizations have greatly un-complicated my political/emotional State. I hope that others will also find these reflections useful.

Thea ON



She is beginning to speak for herself.

Letters

Letter to the Editor:

Regarding Linda Strega and company's response to my article ("Biophilic Lesbian Separatism," LE 2:3):

I want to thank Linda Strega for putting me in touch with my true calling.

Starting next year I will be offering a new service from my suburban corporate headquarters. CHEER UP OR DIE PSYCHOTHERAPY CENTER, INC. will specialize in pummeling sick or unhappy lesbians. We will also offer artificial insemination, and support and encouragement for women who are making that difficult transition from lesbianism to heterosexuality. My fee will be \$200 per hour. Cash only please.

Smile!

Have a Nice Day!

Sidney Spinster

Editor, *Lesbian Ethics*

To the Dykes of the LA Separatist Gathering

As I browse through the new issue of *LEI* I come to the graphics of the Lesbian Separatist Gathering of LA, the "Easter Offering."
I am sad. I am angered. I am discouraged.

How long are some separatists going to insist on being just as violent, as hate full, as perverted, as the men we fight are.

Has the symbol of the cross (as gross as it is in and of itself), has that symbol so much power for you still, that you feel you need to ridicule it in order to feel powerful yourselves?

The tactic of taking what is most sacred to the enemy and trashing it is a well known one. It is also the most insidious, hate full, hate propagating and destructive tactic which violently assaults all that is good in all people. . . .

This is not fighting destruction.

This is fully joining the men in it.

I am revolted. I am crying.

I want my energy to be able to create.

I will fight them. I do not want to have to fight you too.

Johanna de Repentigny (Winnipeg, Canada)

Announcements & Ads

Lesbian Ethics ad rates are as follows:

Classified: 20 cents a word, \$3 minimum.

Display: 3 x 2-1/2, \$15; half page 4-1/2 x 3-1/4, \$25; full page, 4-1/2 x 7, \$50.

Discounts for multiple issues.

Announcements

Needed: Dykes with good reading ability to work on a committed basis with **Women's Braille Press**, to put *Lesbian Ethics* on tape. Contact LE, PO Box 4723, Albuquerque, NM 87106 or WBP, PO Box 8475, Minneapolis, MN 55408

GOLDEN THREADS, a contact publication for lesbians over 50 and women who love older women. Canada and U.S. confidential, warm, reliable. For free information send self-addressed envelope (U.S. residents please stamp it). Sample copy mailed discreetly, \$5 (U.S. \$)

GOLDEN THREADS PO Box 2416, Quincy, MA 02269.

Request for Proposals: National March on Washington invites grant proposals (maximum \$5000), at least one-half to lesbians. By June 1, 88. PO Box 7781, Washington, DC 20044. (202)783-1828.

Calls for Papers

Finding the Lesbians: An anthology on how Lesbians find each other in a society that wants us to believe we don't exist, that each of us is "the only one." By Dec 1, 88. Julia Penelope and Sarah Valentine, PO Box 606, Westford, MA 01886.

"Nemesis" seeks written work and photographs from Separatists, Lesbians, and Radical Feminists which tell our tales of heteropatriarchal disruption and womyn-positive reality building. By Dec. 1, 88. Info and contributions c/o Amber L. Katherine, PO Box 417042, Chicago, IL 60641-7042.

Anthology about the experiences of lesbians whose sexual assault by men was motivated by anti-lesbian sentiment. By March 1, 88. Write for extension: Sharon Vardatira, Box 2304, Harvard Square Station, Cambridge, MA 02238.

Sinister Wisdom issue #36, On Surviving Psychiatric Assault/ Creating Emotional Well-Being in Our Communities. By July 1, 88. PO Box 3252, Berkeley, CA 94703.

New Lesbian Scholarship, additional unpublished essays wanted for book, interdisciplinary, stressing new methodologies. Prestigious university press. Send essay or abstract, self-information, and SASE to Karla Jay, PO Box 1235, New York, NY 10008-1235.

Sage: A Scholarly Journal on Black Women, seeks papers for an issue on LEADERSHIP (by July 15, 88) and an issue on BLACK WOMEN'S STUDIES (by Jan 15, 89). PO Box 42741, Atlanta, GA 30311-0741.

Conferences and Workshops

Lesbian Studies Summer School: 22nd-25th July, Central London. Courses in Lesbian Sexuality, Film, History, Creative Writing, etc. Lesbian Archive & Info Centre, BCM 7005, London WC1N 3XX. Phone 01-405-6475.

Lesbian Spiritual Community: Imagine . . . a time of seclusion in the country, away from patriarchal institutions. Imagine . . . shedding all our beliefs and thought structures and starting new, opening to the spirit within us. 3 months in 1988. Lee Lanning, Word Weavers, Box 8742, Minneapolis, MN 55408.

Womyn and Witchcraft Conference: Developing Dianic Wicca, 3rd annual conference for women who define themselves as Dianic or lesbian witches, Sept. 1-4, 88, central Wisconsin. SASE to RCG, Box 6021, Madison, WI 53716. (608)838-8629.

NWSA (National Women's Studies Assoc.), annual conference, June 22-26, 88, Minneapolis, theme "Leadership and Power." Public Session, "Lesbian Alliances," June 25. NWSA, Univ. Minnesota, 315 Pillsbury Dr. SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455.

Guidelines for Authors

Lesbian Ethics is a forum for lesbian feminist ethics and philosophy, with an emphasis on how lesbians behave with each other. We welcome essays, reviews, Letters to the Editor (of no more than 1000 words) and responses to material which has appeared in *LE*. *LE* does not publish poetry or fiction. Only original material will be considered. Contributions should be based on lesbian experience, should cite lesbians - adequately referenced, should cite male authors only in extreme circumstances, and should in most contexts use the variations of the words *dyke*, *lesbian*, *woman* in preference to *human*.

The Readers' Forum topic for *LE* 3:2 is Separatism: Beyond the Debate. Deadline is August 31, 88. The Readers' Forum topic for *LE* 3:3 is Dyke Humor, tentative deadline Dec 31, 88.

Write to inquire about deadlines for articles. Type all manuscripts double-spaced. Include your phone number, for editing purposes. Send an SASE if you want your manuscript returned.

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