



















*Lesbian Ethics*



Volume 3 No. 3



***Lesbian Ethics***

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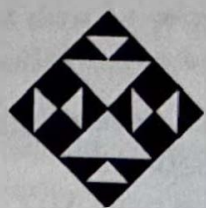
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# *Lesbian Ethics*

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A very unfortunate error occurred in the last issue (*LE* 3:2). Seven lines were inadvertently omitted from Dicey Yates' "Dear Dyke Separatist Strangers," due to last minute computer mess ups. Please see page 107 for the corrections (as Dicey chose to do them).

Another error in the last issue was due to a no doubt playful trick by an Amazon ancestor who told us she was the spirit of Margaret 'Chase' Smith. Well, of course, she couldn't have been, since Ms. Smith is still alive.

I'd like to emphasize, since Forum contributions seem to be getting longer, that short pieces, even very short pieces, are appropriate for the Forums. The Readers' Forum topic for the next issue (*LE* 4:1) is Betrayals (When We're Not as Ethical with Each Other as We Oughta Be). This Forum is meant to be about lesbians who are, in some way significant to us, part of our "communities," rather than about lesbians we know we don't want to try to interact with seriously. The guidelines for this Forum are: Stay real and personal, describe concrete acts and actual feelings, describe your own poor behavior as well as that of others. Try to put yourself somewhere in the middle between Judgment and Silence. Deadline is October 31, 89.

The Readers' Forum topic for *LE* 4:2 is Class: How It Affects Our Lesbian Interactions. *LE* also starts a regular column on class, by JMax, in this issue, and I'll refer you to it as an inspiration for and description of this Forum. (The column will not appear for this one Class Forum issue.) And I'd like to encourage middle-class lesbians to take the risk of being honest; just remember we mess up the worst when we try to have the perfect line. Deadline is April 30, 90.

Class (specifically, lower class realities middle-class lesbians seem ignorant of) was also the subject of a fine workshop by Lee and Shoney at the Separatist Conference. We decided that next year we would have sessions for each class separately and also a combined session.

Another subject which has come up around me recently is editing, and what do I think I'm doing anyway? Maybe it's time I said something about that. As a way of focusing the discussion. I'll describe and comment on some remarks on writing in a recent issue of *SEPS* (*Separatists Eroding Patriarchy*) by *SEPS* publisher Sheila Bowles. (*SEPS* comes out

3-4 times a year, ask a separatist friend about a subscription.) Neither Sheila's remarks nor mine are all either one of us has to say on the matter.

Sheila wants to increase "the possibility of hearing many different voices and different ways of saying things." She says that many dykes "silence their own ideas and work" because they think they have to write in a professional way and think they don't know how to. She wants to break down the dichotomy between readers and writers in our Lesbian publications, she wants a more "participatory culture." She values longer, structured and researched papers but is also "advocating for much more informal writing—just sitting down and jotting off ideas, impressions and suggestions."

I very much agree with Sheila's goals. Both the Readers' Forums and Nexus ("an information exchange, a place to ask questions, to make suggestions, to report on things that have worked or haven't"), as well as the Letters section, are explicitly there to encourage dykes to send in shorter, less formal pieces. From the beginning I've intended *LE* to be a place where we talk to US about US. About what is REAL. My primary commitment is to IDEAS (about US), and not to the package they come in. In fact, my goal has always been to make the lesbians who are published in *LE* and the kinds of styles that are used as varied as possible along the normal/professional continuum. *LE* has no "house style," and I care little about grammar and punctuation (as some frustrated proofreaders can attest), as long as ideas are not obscured. Language belongs to the lesbians who create it by using it, not to grammarians.

I also agree that lesbians silence our own work. I don't think (and Sheila may agree) that the silencing is due only to, as Sheila puts it, "the crap about writing." Too many times I have seen lesbians who I know are not inhibited about writing (other than in the ways we all are) *not* sit down and jot down interesting ideas, *not* sit down and write Nexus about actions all dykes should know about. There is an incredible richness to lesbian existence and so much of it is not communicated beyond our small geographical communities. It seems to me often that lesbians don't value ourselves enough, take ourselves seriously enough. We don't think what we do is worth writing about. I have wanted *LE* to be a journal which *takes lesbians seriously*, so that anything that appears in her, whether short or long, formal or informal, *has weight*.

In order to avoid reinforcing elitist values and to encourage "participatory" writing Sheila then commits herself to print all "separatist

#### 4 Jeanette

positive" pieces exactly as they come in the mail, and she asks, "who has the right to alter or omit any Lesbian's words?" I will try to give my answer as best I know it.

First, of course, there is the whole matter of deciding which pieces to print and which pieces not. Sheila commits herself to all that are "separatist positive," i.e., she will decide to accept on political terms and then do no further editing. I, on the other hand, commit myself to IDEAS I hope will inform and inspire radical lesbians. My experience is that these seldom come in a political package that I completely accept. In fact, there are no pieces that I have published that I thought had no significant political errors. A lesbian may have something really important to say about class, for example, but be ageist by arrogance and/or ignorance. I would do my best to convince the author to modify her ignorance/arrogance, in print at least, and usually (not always) we would reach some compromise. All of us, I believe, have areas in which we have skill and expertise—truly something to offer, and areas in which we are wrong/prejudiced/ignorant/unethical/harmful/damaged.

Second, if I did no editing, the short and/or informal pieces in *LE* would change little, but the percentage of *LE* pages given to the work of lesbians who have little trouble writing *would increase a lot*. The repetition of ideas between pieces would also increase. The bulk of the editing I do is to tell the writer of a longer piece to MAKE IT SHORTER. (Articles you thought were long were likely even longer when *LE* got them.) The principle seems to me much the same as that which pertains in group discussions: No one should monopolize the talking. Especially if she is repeating herself, or repeating at length points others have already made. (Some shortening I ask for because I know what else is going to be in that issue and am trying to achieve a balance.) This is quite a gut level issue for me. When I am typing up a piece for *LE*, if I find myself typing the same ideas and words over and over, I get mad. Why should I do this extra work, pay this extra money, why should other lesbians have to pay the extra money, take the extra time? Some other lesbian's words could be typed, paid for, read instead. Of course, some repetition is necessary to make a point or can be a component of style. These facts I appreciate and accommodate. Nonetheless I believe the basic issue is one of respecting each other.

The third kind of editing I do is for clarity, and this can be extensive. An important part of this to me is encouraging the writer to be more concrete, and more personal if she's willing, to ground her ideas in concrete

observations of others and in her own experience. Many times when the lesbian accepts this suggestion, the richness of the piece comes out. The deep grounding of the lesbian's knowledge emerges, and her writing connects with and validates readers who have had similar experiences.

I will also ask a lesbian to *write more* when I think she has a good idea that should be developed and expanded on, when I suspect she has more knowledge and information than she's put on the page.

When editing for clarity, I suggest ways in which paragraphs and ideas can be reordered and sentences can be reworked *in order that* the writer's ideas come across to the reader. And in order that she does not contradict herself (unless that is her intention). This kind of editing I do at least as frequently with 'professional' or academic writers as I do with others.

Writing and being published is only half the way there, being read and understood is the other half. When I commit to an article, I commit to bringing out what the writer is trying to say. *In her own voice*, I'm not interested in changing her vocabulary or intonation. *I also commit to the reader*, that she will not find the piece frustrating and confusing to read; and this in turn is a commitment to the writer, because if readers throw down *LE* in confusion and annoyance the writer is not served.

Sheila says, ". . . once we send . . . [something we've written] . . . to be shared with other dykes—it should be considered to say what we wanted it to say and how we wanted to say it." In fact, often when lesbians send something to *LE* they know quite well that it is *not* how they "wanted to say it," and they only send it when they are sure I know it is 'just a draft.' Also, because a writer's perspective is so close to the piece, she may not know whether or not the piece makes the impression on a reader that she, the writer, "wanted."

In my opinion, it is cruel and oppressive NOT to tell a lesbian that her writing needs work in order to communicate. She has very important things to say. If in the future she gains a different perspective and looks back at an unedited piece published in *LE*, she may well feel made a fool of, may regret that more was not made of the publishing opportunity, and may, rightfully in my opinion, be angry at me for having lied to her. Once a lesbian has put something in print, she has to live with it for the rest of her life. (And so do I and *LE*, for ours.) Lesbians who are skilled at putting ideas into words did not get that way by being given no feedback.

I know that I have my own biases—I'm middle-class and have personal idiosyncracies—which I try to keep under control and am continually learning more about. Editing, especially for clarity, isn't a fun thing for me to do with other lesbians. (It can be rewarding afterwards, when we both agree that the piece has been made even better.) I do it because I think it is the best of some poor alternatives. I don't like being edited myself, although it is much easier when I feel the editor truly appreciates my ideas and is on my side.

How would we do writing and publishing in our Dyke Future? Certainly we would have more opportunities to learn, practice, and publish. But what else? And what could we do in the present? What occurs to me is that we should try for a variety of journals with a variety of editing philosophies as well as political approaches. I'm very glad that *SEPS* exists. I would welcome reader responses—formal or informal—about any aspect of editing.

Jeanette

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# Compulsory Performance: Rescuing My Lesbian Self from the Shell of the Prodigy

*Eileen Anderson*

*Thanks to Patrice Mathews, Carol Yamasaki and Elisabeth LeGuin.*

Four years ago I came out as a Lesbian, and at that time started to question my vocation as a classical musician. All my life I had been hearing about how lucky I was to be able to do something as creative and expressive as playing music, and I had indeed lived a life of comparative luxury and extreme privilege. But as a baby Lesbian and radical feminist, I started applying the same scrutiny to this aspect of my life that I had learned to use for the rest of my experiences in the world. Having been duped into heterosexuality and many other patriarchal institutions, I now tried to question **everything**. Regarding music, I stopped liking what I *observed*. I stopped liking how I felt. I stopped playing. And that act of stopping taught me more about society's beliefs and assumptions about artists and what they do than I ever learned from being one.

I offer here my analysis of art and the artist under patriarchy, from my experience and observation. I have found that the patriarchal concept of the artist has been subject to surprisingly little criticism—it has a mystique, even among Lesbians. Though my criticism focuses on classical western music, since that is where my experience lies, I believe that much of it can be applied to other types of music and art. Finally, I am suggesting ways for Lesbians to create art and interact other than the damaging ones we have learned from the patriarchy.

Playing and performing hurt me very deeply. Far from being a place of freedom, outside of and superior to the rest of society, the role that mainstream musicians and other performing artists play in our culture is that of high priests and propagandists for heteropatriarchy. Women who are seduced into these roles by the amazing perks we are offered are turned

against ourselves and each other at such a young age that there is rarely any escape. I believe that not only the performing establishment but the very music itself is deadly to women.

## The False Self

Women have low self-esteem. The process of socialization that devalues us and separates us from our Selves starts at birth, or *in utero*. We are rewarded for certain behaviors, punished for others, and are taught to perform, to play a role. For middle-class women, by the time we are adults, we have usually blocked off our memory of this process and deny that it is our skill at roleplaying that largely determines whatever privileges we have in the world—which privileges we also take for granted.

So what happens to the little girl with an aptitude for music?<sup>1</sup> If her parents have the means and the inclination, she is 'encouraged' or forced to practice and study music, sometimes from as early as the age of two. What can parental encouragement, even in its mildest form, mean to a two-year old? And if she is 'successful,' that is if she plays music in a way that her superiors approve of, how can she distinguish the pleasure she may get from playing from the relief she obtains by receiving adult approval? How especially can a girl child be expected to be able to do this? Her talent becomes a life preserver that offers partial salvation from the woman-hatred that is a shaping force in her life.

The word 'choice' does not describe accurately the way in which a child comes to play an instrument. My own family was a bastion of comparative progressiveness in the bible-belt area where I grew up. My mother taught me that girls could do anything. (This was in itself a clue—why would I need to be told this repeatedly if it were actually true?) She gave me much freedom, enrichment and encouragement, without being overtly pushy. But she didn't have to be pushy for me to be pushed. Her desperation about her own life pushed me, along with everything that I observed when I went out our front door, and even much of what was inside this 'free-thinking' household. My older sister, who can remember when she started playing music (I can't), consciously recalls the absolute delight and salvation she felt when our mother suggested that she take piano lessons. She applied herself in the conscious hope that for once,

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<sup>1</sup>From here on when I say music I am referring to classical music, unless otherwise specified.

something about her would be good enough. Music looked like a ticket to freedom.

Teaching a child to perform anything is child abuse. And it is an intrinsic part of the grand tradition of patriarchal parenting. I have witnessed a mother refuse to let her child get up from the table until she sang a little song for the guests. I have heard the phone message tapes of 'progressive' parents which feature the voice of their two-year-old saying words she probably doesn't even understand, with her mother audibly coaching and urging her on in the background. Many of us have observed what happens to children who are photographed frequently. And countless youngsters start performing on instruments at such a young age that they cannot remember a time when they weren't playing, much less remember whether or not it was something they wanted to be doing. The violin prodigy Midori, then 15 years old, was asked in a 1986 interview whether she had liked playing when she started at the age of four. "I probably liked it, I guess," she said. "I never really noticed."<sup>2</sup>

Learning to perform is the creation of a false self. For me it meant being a 'good girl,' denying and mistrusting my own desires, and learning to think of them as bad. And since I felt like a fraud, my false self felt 'bad' too. I couldn't win. My own spontaneity was buried in fear and disgust.<sup>3</sup>

Performing not only separates women from our own selves, but from other women as well. When the definition you are offered for yourself is that of being exceptional, bright and special, you spend your time trying to prove, over and over again, that you are different. You become elitist and ravenous for validation. (It is rare, however, to realize just who it is you're supposed to be so different from.) One who has been raised to believe that she can (and therefore should) do anything lacks a clear

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<sup>2</sup>"Unstrung but Unfazed," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 29, 1986, p. 38.

<sup>3</sup>Alice Miller, a strong advocate of children and critic of all the hidden cruelty in 'normal' childrearing, has written movingly about the pain that children endure as they are chiseled into achievers and performers, and about the crushing effect of formal training in the arts. In *Pictures of a Childhood* she recounts her discovery through painting of the hurt but still whole child in herself. She is able to let the child speak through painting precisely because she had no tutelage in it and forces no discipline on herself, even to the point of never planning ahead what she's going to paint. Alice Miller, *Pictures of a Childhood (Sixty-Six Watercolors and an Essay)* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1986); *For Your Own Good* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1984).

view of all the strikes against her and also of what exactly this 'anything' does to her. She will not only despise herself when she fails, she will despise anyone who fails. It is in the ranks of these achievers, these parentally- and self-appointed exceptions that we find tokenism at its most extreme.

In a world which polarizes masculine and feminine, subject and object, artist and audience, for a woman to be a performer is a bid to be on the violators' team. She gets to be the 'Subject' for once. In return for her discipline and self-denial she gets to feel superior to other women, but the price is high even during the 'pay-off' of performing. When I see women performing classical music I see nervous demeanors that spell out, 'Look, I'm earnest, I'm serious, I'm a good, good, good girl, almost a boy, certainly not one of them.' Just to go out on stage and do something 'serious,' i.e., associated with the male gender, is to proclaim yourself not one of them, to request an exemption. The fear of them is often quite visible on the faces of women performers.

I remember well the 'joys' of being a token. You get to feel so superior to those whom you consider 'lesser.' You start believing that you have created your own reality, and that we exist in a meritocracy. You absolutely refuse to consider the racist, classist and ableist content of this belief, since you are a liberal, after all, and therefore immune from such nasty prejudices. And you are positively adored by the boys in power. In your anesthetized state you can't even feel your pedestal.

As a teenager and budding musician, I went through *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* under the topics *music, genius, talent* and *loneliness*, and copied down quotes I liked and put them in a box on file cards. I knew on some level that my 'talents' made me lonely, so I made a virtue out of it as I had been taught and put it down to the role of suffering artist. I had been duped into believing that the separation and alienation caused by being a token were just natural results of my being 'different,' read: superior.

Some time after I stopped playing, I went for an interview for an accounting job at a mainstream theater company where a friend worked. Wendy, the woman who was hiring, really impressed me. She was passionate about her job and obviously took great pleasure in doing it well and in the global ways of thinking it stimulated in her. This was a revelation to me, since I had learned to look on anyone who would actually take pleasure in that kind of work as a pretty boring person. Wendy was

not boring. I was fascinated and engaged during the interview, and not a bit nervous.

Then I went home and had an anxiety attack. At first I thought it was just delayed nerves, but digging deeper I got to the root of it. For one thing, I was terrified at the idea of working regular hours, 50 weeks a year. The worst of it though was a voice that kept saying, "If you take this job, you won't be special anymore. You will be a boring accountant. You will be one of them!" Hearing this voice was a big step in unmasking and unlearning the propaganda I had been fed about 'artists.'

I have found as many firm believers in the sanctity and freedom of the artist in the ranks of those who were denied artistic training as among those who have been allowed it. It makes sense that those who are oppressed, and know it, would want badly to hope that some women, somewhere, are free, happy, and validated for their efforts. I do not believe that such freedom is happening or can happen in establishment art.

Yet how can I, a privileged white woman who has 'been there' and is now downwardly mobile, go around telling women who are less privileged than I that they should avoid this profession on grounds of their mental health and morality? It's easy for *me* to say. I don't like my choices much, but I have choices. And I have had a real taste of certain privileges before renouncing them. All I can do is urge women to ask questions and keep vigilant. The privileges do have an enormous price. While I do not believe that the system is reformable, maybe individual women can survive in it with souls intact if they can remain conscious of what is being attempted on them.

## Art as Transcendence

The tragedy of war is not the loss of human life, but that irreplaceable art works are destroyed.

—Ronald Johnson, one of my college professors, 1977

Try this exercise: Ask a classical musician what she thinks about the sexist content of much classical music; how can she justify playing it? After you define "sexism" for her, she will probably say that music transcends its culture and content. Most musicians are so set in this belief that they will laugh at any attempt to question it.

What does it really mean to say that music is transcendent? The *Oxford English Dictionary* (1979) gives the following definitions of *transcendent*:

Surpassing or excelling others of its kind; getting beyond the ordinary limits; pre-eminent, superior or supreme; extraordinary. Eminently great, good or excellent. Elevated, lofty. Obscure or abstruse. According to Kant: altogether outside experience; unrealizable in human experience. Of the Deity: exalted above and distinct from the universe. Originally often connoting the denial of divine action or interference in mundane affairs.

A word that means better than, outside of, distinct from, exalted above, is rife with hatred and disapproval of something. What is it? Who is the matter in mind over matter? Who is the nature in man vs. nature? Who is the earth in heaven and earth? Just who or what is it that we are trying to transcend?

Our mundane, earthly, earthy bodily selves. The ones from whom mankind has been trying to disassociate itself for several thousand years now.<sup>4</sup> Women. Art which seeks to transcend is art that is based on hatred of the flesh, the body, the female. Arguments that art is transcendent employ stunning contradictions: that something that is made by us is better than us and doesn't affect us.

It is no coincidence that such unquestioned contradictions resemble those in patriarchal religion, or that musicians defend their art with the fervor of the religious. The history of western art music is the history of church music, almost exclusively, for the first thousand years or so. At first considered a mathematical, abstract art (composition was sort of a working out of puzzles for the glory of god), it gradually became a vehicle for shows of dramatic power and splendor in the church, and later, with the birth of opera, outside of it. Although secular music has always existed, flourishing as serious art especially when the power of the

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<sup>4</sup>Marilyn French, *Beyond Power* (New York: Summit Books, 1985) and Sarah Lucia Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics* (Palo Alto: Institute of Lesbian Studies, 1988). Both books have much to say about the patriarchy's deliberate separation of body and spirit. French's book is historically oriented, and her thoroughness in tracking down concepts like transcendence through many cultures, eras and disciplines was very helpful to me in my search through my own mind. Hoagland goes way beyond describing the problem, and actually has ideas as to what we Lesbians can do about it.

church waned and the ruling classes had money to spend, its roots were always in the sacred tradition. In the middle ages, vocal pieces were sometimes written with three simultaneous texts: one coming from a part of a catholic mass in Latin, another a Latin hymn to the virgin mary, and another consisting of bawdy words of 'courtly love' in French (exemplifying men's obsession with the virgin/whore dichotomy). In the 17th century, composers such as Monteverdi wrote vocal works with two alternative sets of words, one sacred and another secular. And J.S. Bach, when not writing gory, necrophilic lutheran church music wrote secular works for the court—works which were often stylistically indistinguishable from his sacred music and used many of the same musical ideas.

Secular music flourished in the 'humanist' setting of the 18th century, and in the 19th century began seriously to overshadow sacred music. However, this trend of separation from the church, culminating in the so-called Romantic period, did not make music non-religious, but made it a religion in itself. The glorification of the male individual and his suffering (jesus on the cross), which is the overriding theme of romantic music, did not take god out of music, it made music and the musician *into god*.<sup>5</sup>

This is the tradition which classical music has inherited. To its practitioners and apologists music is religion, is sacred, and its validity is **not** to be questioned. It serves the same role and purpose to the liberal as christianity does to the conservative. It purports a higher power, the existence of a 'higher' realm of Platonic permanence, a mystical affirmation of personal sacrifice, dichotomized genders, original sin and hatred of the body. It allows a person to become numb to the realities in the world in her pursuit of processed, synthetic, self-aggrandizing crap, while believing that she is doing **good**.

The view that music is somehow exempt from socializing us is particularly illogical. A musician will maintain that, while his<sup>6</sup> art is the pinnacle of our culture's achievement, with wondrous mystical powers to move and transport, it at the same time has no effect on us in, for instance, reinforcing male supremacy. Opera is nothing but one long

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<sup>5</sup> Among the composers who wrote about this: Ludwig von Beethoven, Richard Wagner, E.T.A. Hoffman, Robert Schumann, Gustav Mahler.

<sup>6</sup> I sometimes use the male pronoun to refer to a typical artist, especially when I am saying something negative about that role. That the whole idea was invented by men, for men, and about men should make us wary.

glorification of hetero-sexism, and so is church music, yet supposedly our minds magically filter the content out while we are transported into ecstasy. This is ridiculous. We are moved by sexist art because we are sexist. Those 'truths' that are magically speaking to us are the same old lies we were brought up on.

Some musicians will admit that while opera and other forms of music with words or dance are sexist and therefore to be approached with care (they will never go so far as to suggest **avoiding** them), they will claim that instrumental music is pure. Never mind that it is in the same style, and that we have already been exposed to enough music with words to associate certain ideas and images to certain sounds. In an attempt to prove that 'pure' music is natural and universal in the ways it speaks to us, they sometimes argue that since the harmonic series is a natural phenomenon (the harmonic series is the set of mathematical, vibrational relationships between different musical pitches), we respond to music because of an inherent contrast between consonance and dissonance, tension and release. This concept of the polarity of tension and release so obsessively appealed to is grounded in the heterosexual feminine/masculine dichotomy and is, I think, a lot of bull. And although the harmonic series is a natural phenomenon, what is considered consonance and dissonance varies from culture to culture. In other words, our responses to musical sounds and our interpretations of them are **learned**. Who could possibly question this? We aren't necessarily touched by the music of other cultures, and even when we are, it doesn't mean that we are hearing the same thing that natives of those cultures hear. For that matter, white protestants today are not hearing the same thing that natives of Bach's time heard in his music either.

Also lurking in the 'music is universal' claim is more than a little western supremacism/racism. When pushed, musicians may admit that music of other cultures doesn't speak to them, but many still believe that music of their culture should speak to all others, and that if it doesn't speak to others, that is because *the others* are flawed. A similar attitude was turned on me more than once after music stopped being sacred to me. I would say to a musician friend that my emotions did not fit into patriarchal music any more. The most common response was a sigh of relief and a comment such as, 'Yeah, you have to be feeling pretty strong and clear to play Bach.' They could relax once they had decided it was *my* flaw and not Bach's, i.e., not God's.

Music is a language, like any other. It is learned, like any other. It is all the more dangerous because we believe it to be somehow pure and beyond reproach. And with its power it can desensitize us to very dangerous content. Phyllis Chesler put it well, speaking specifically about a painting, but what she said could be applied to music as well.

Michelangelo's *Creation* is so grand, so exquisite, so compelling, that no one ever wonders: "How can a child be born without a woman being involved? In fact, where is that male God's mother?"

This is the great power of Art and Naming: it blinds us to the simplest, most commonsense truths we know; it allows us, it commands us, to reject our own realities, to reject *ourselves*, in the belief that spiritual perfection is foreign to our personal, mortal consciousnesses.<sup>7</sup>

## The Artist as Privileged

The veneration of "Art" and "Culture"—besides leading many women into boring, passive activity that distracts from more important and rewarding activities, from cultivating active abilities—leads to the constant intrusion on our sensibilities of pompous dissertations on the deep beauty of this and that turd. This allows the "artist" to be set up as one possessing superior feelings, perceptions, insights and judgments, thereby undermining the faith of insecure women in the value and validity of their own feelings, perceptions, insights and judgments.

—Valerie Solanas<sup>8</sup>

Artists are the last to recognize the whole system of tokenism and are generally unaware of the privileges they have. I think that I would never have learned to perceive and distrust these privileges had I not stopped playing music and thereby lost them. (My first lesson in Separatism!) They included: having control over my time and energy and working at home, being paid to do something that felt like an expression of myself,

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<sup>7</sup>Phyllis Chesler, *About Men* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), p.43.

<sup>8</sup>Valerie Solanas, *Scum Manifesto* (London: The Matriarchy Study Group, 1983), p. 25. The *Scum Manifesto* was originally published in New York, 1968, by Olympia Press.

being paid to travel, and most important, being treated with respect and being heard. How many women are afforded these great privileges? I got to sit in a room full of hundreds or thousands of people who were all silent in order to listen to me, and then applauded afterwards. On a day-to-day level, also, I was heeded. I was an expert, someone whose ideas mattered, and this felt natural to me. If in any given situation I felt I wasn't being treated with enough respect, I could always trot out the fact that I was a highbrow concert artist and get an immediate response. No wonder I wasn't led to question the world. Even having these perks pointed out wasn't enough to shake me out of my somnolence, since I had been taught to believe that I deserved them and, therefore, underneath it all, that others didn't.<sup>9</sup>

I remember one time when I used my privilege very deliberately. I was playing in Italy, knew only a bit of the language and had no acquaintances with me. I was shy and uncomfortable with the idea of dining out alone but had no access to a kitchen. Trained always to look for protection outside myself, I deliberately created a relationship with the staff of a particular restaurant and became a regular, so I would not feel so vulnerable. The first time, I took some music with me, laying it out prominently on the table and pretending to pore over it. Of course the waiters asked about it; and upon revealing that I was playing in a local opera production, I immediately became a known and favored customer. They would let me take up a good table even though I was alone. I felt comfortable there, even though their 'protective' role never was tested because I was never harassed by any strange men. Of course I had to put up with being teased and patronized by my protectors, the waiters, but I was used to the trade-offs inherent in protection rackets.

I did not question my belief that as long as I made it clear that I was someone special, I was immune to most of the threats 'average' women had to endure. For a woman whose role as an artist is much more valuable than her self as a woman, the role becomes inextricable from her self. It cannot be questioned or the world comes tumbling down.

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<sup>9</sup>I believe that the very concept of 'deserving' is firmly attached to an external-ly-referenced value system which rewards some talents at the expense of others and encourages us to take any privileges for granted. I have been taken to task for this claim by those who say that everybody 'deserves' respect and goodies, that just because they feel they deserve something doesn't mean that they believe others don't. They have reclaimed the word *deserve*, I haven't.

## The Artist as Addict

The role of the artist incorporates much behavior that is considered typical of an addict. The *primo don* who must be catered to, who flies off the handle at small inconveniences, who demands to be the center of attention at all times, and who considers other human beings only as satellites to his wonderful self, is an obvious example. The frequent usage of terms such as 'the high of performing' and 'coming down after a concert' is no coincidence either. I believe that performing is truly an addiction.

We are lucky enough to live at a time in which addictions are being taken seriously and studied as debilitating illnesses. We know now that one can be addicted to things that in themselves are healthy, such as exercise or relationships, although such a person does not have the physical burden of chemical dependence. When something becomes an escape, a security blanket, a protection from life and spontaneity, it serves the same function as alcohol or drug abuse, leads to similar behaviors, and can have similarly disastrous results.

Performance under patriarchy is an altered state. Endorphins and other chemicals are released by the body into the bloodstream, partly because of the physical exertion involved, as in vigorous athletics, but also because almost all performers experience nervousness and a surge of adrenaline upon playing or singing for an audience. I do not know if performing in a non-patriarchal setting would be different, in quality or degree, not having played in one. (Who has?) In any case, the dichotomy between audience and performer, one that I find unnatural and unhealthy, contributes to the creation of this altered state. The performer is active, high, the center of attention; the audience is passive, not allowed to communicate except at assigned moments, and then only in the form of a yes or no answer—applause or lack thereof, or, rarely, active disapproval—boos, hisses, and objects thrown.

Nothing resembling a dialogue has occurred. The audience may experience a 'high,' a short exhilaration during and after the concert. The performer may claim that the audience's energy was valuable to him, that he 'felt' them and 'used' them as a springboard. **What this means is that he is feeding off their approval.** I believe that the off-stage temperamental behavior of some artists, the societally-sanctioned brattiness and

pickiness, is largely an attempt to duplicate the on-stage attention, to maintain the high.<sup>10</sup>

There are many possibilities for addictions and addictive behavior for musicians. While I was still playing, I did not feel an extremely strong need to perform frequently. I was addicted to practicing, though. Between the ages of 16 and 26, when I was most immersed in the study and performance of music, I alternated between two mental states: a depression which manifested itself in junk-food binges and escapist reading of pulp novels, and complete self-discipline/self-denial, which I called "going into the army." The latter state was a reaction to the former. The only way I knew to end my depression was to become very regimented and "commit myself to my Art." Only when I was practicing many hours a day could I really like myself. Since practicing—this selfless activity that was all for the good of the world—gave me such self-confidence and an instant structure for my life, I had no idea that it was just as escapist as the other binges.

When I practiced, I was rarely drawn in or caught up in what I was doing. My regimen was to play for fifty minutes, rest for ten, for as many hours a day as I could stand. During the technical exercises especially (scales and other finger exercises that are not necessarily pieces of music) I was dead inside. They were my favorite, since I did not even

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<sup>10</sup>Here are two ways of looking at the relationship between artist and audience:  
*Perspective 1:* The Artist/Performer is subject, the audience is object. The audience has no input during the performance as to what the performer does. It can communicate only at breaks in the performance, and then only by applause. The Performer is the center of attention; his job is to transport the audience. He is elevated, superior, knows things that 'regular' people don't. He is active, they are passive. They take what he dishes out. They can't ask him to stop playing or to play something else.

*Perspective 2:* The Artist is utterly dependent on the public, and in this sense he is its victim. He gives of himself, while they give only money. They risk nothing personal, he risks much. If they don't come to his performance, he may lose money. Or he may still get paid, but he won't be asked back. The only acceptable reasons for his not playing are illness, injury or death. If he simply doesn't want to play, he cannot withdraw; he must act as if he wants to play, compromising his emotions. He is as trapped on stage as the audience is in its chair. He must smile or at least look gracious—feminine rules.

These two perspectives are sides of the same coin. I don't think anything about the deal is attractive.

have to think. My learned protestant work ethic, internalized woman-hatred and unconscious belief in original sin all caused me to feel forgiven only when I was being thus annihilated. This relief, along with my pleasure at the approval I got from the outside world for being a musician, made up the 'high' I got from playing.

When I used to speak of my love for music I meant it absolutely and sincerely. I felt so attached to it. I was also speaking with complete ignorance of what love is and can be. I have no doubt that others who claim to love their arts are telling the truth they know, yet I observe so many of the same symptoms of self-delusion that I must ask them to question their claims. Anything that provides an escape or protection from perceiving the problems of the real world and acting on them is easy to 'love' and hard to question.

I remember consciously pulling the security blanket of being a 'musician' around myself many times when my assumptions about the world were in danger of being shaken up. Once was for a period of about a year during which I heard lots of disturbing things about the government from some friends who were 'radical' civil libertarians and constitution-ists. I felt a moral dilemma: I knew that if things were 'that bad,' I really should be doing something about it. I felt grateful and relieved when I remembered that what I did in the world was important enough that I could put this 'political' stuff out of my mind and not feel guilty about my lack of action. Such gyrations and rationalizations are embarrassing to recall now. At the time I clung with the tenacity of an addict to my belief that art was above and beyond politics.

## **The Artist as Martyr**

The massive and complicated 'great' works most frequently performed demand an enormous amount of practice and repetition. In the patriarchal musician's world this is not questioned. It is taken for granted that any musician has spent a large portion of her life in a practice room, and the remainder of her time in classwork and research. Any spontaneity that survives is in spite of these strictures, not because of them. Admiring someone who can be 'creative' under these circumstances is symptomatic of a sado-masochistic society. A similar emotional journey must be made each time one plays, whether one is in the mood or not, and one learns to treat one's very self and emotions as objects to manipulate into a shape chosen by a dead white male composer.

The sado-masochism is not only psychological. Earlier I stated that one can have an addictive relationship to something that is in itself healthy. I did not mean to imply that there isn't anything physically unhealthy about playing or singing classical music.

Being injured as a result of playing an instrument is common, not exceptional. Violinists and violists suffer from the constant pressure of the instrument against their chins and necks, which frequently causes abscesses and skin irritations. They and most other instrumentalists can fall prey to tendinitis (inflammation of the tendons) and other debilitating injuries to their hands, fingers and arms, along with secondary, tension-related ailments such as neck and back problems. When I was in school, a man making a study of musicians' ailments had a much harder time finding uninjured musicians for the control group than he did finding ones with serious injuries.

The goal of evenness of playing is especially deadly, as one must learn to make those notes and registers of an instrument which are naturally weaker sound as if they aren't, and one must strengthen weaker parts of one's own body in an attempt to match the rest. For example, pianists spend a lot of time strengthening and developing independence in their naturally weaker fingers. But the amount of independence that is possible for the ring finger, for example, is directly controlled by the layout of the tendons themselves and how far up the hand this finger's tendon splits off from the one next to it. A great many keyboard players have permanently damaged their hands by demanding more of this finger than is physically possible for them. Yet you will still hear many performers and teachers of the piano claim that anyone who gets tendinitis was 'playing wrong' and must merely learn to 'stop being tense.'

In a profession that is traditionally associated with suffering, it would be unthinkable to suggest that we have gone too far, that there is nothing wrong with our bodies, that it is the instruments that must be changed. A culture that hates bodies and their 'limitations' teaches us to scoff at the idea that the discipline and pain required to succeed in the arts is unnatural and wrong. It must always be our bodies and selves that are wrong, that are matched in battle against the good, the absolute: art.

Music medicine is a new field very similar to sports medicine, and a recent article in a San Francisco newspaper about a special clinic for musicians sheds much light on the attitudes toward musicians and their injuries. For a musician to have to stop playing is considered the worst sort of tragedy, which of course it can be from a financial point of view,

but it is clearly much more than finances that are at stake here.<sup>11</sup> Explains a cellist, "Playing is an incredible addiction in a way. You're used to using your hands and stirring up your emotions all the time. When you have to stop, it's like going off a powerful drug." Indeed. Much emphasis is put on how hard it is to get musicians to stop playing, even if their health depends on it. Says Michael Charness, the founder of the clinic, "Performers work very, very hard, probably in the interest of maintaining their health and sanity. That's what we're after. We want to keep them going." In other words, we have to help them keep playing, no matter what the cost, because if we don't they'll go nuts.

In a final confused utterance, Charness states, "Art is the most healing force known to mankind. It is the duty of the medical profession to help performing artists in their intense physical fight against pain and disease. . ." Is it not strange to refer to something which causes such hurt as a "healing force"? It is apparently **not** the duty of the medical profession to question the system under which musicians must do unnatural things to their bodies for unnatural lengths of time. It is apparently **not** the duty of the medical profession to question the ethics involved in keeping a self-confessed addict going. It is apparently **not** the duty of the medical profession to realize that a person who is so alienated from herself that her mental soundness and physical health are in opposition to each other is **ill** and that the kind of 'care' they are giving her is **keeping her that way**.

But it's not only the system that harms us. Yes, the instruments hurt us, the tokenism separates us. But the same values that have created the system are intrinsic to the music. The music is not redeemable; there is no baby in the bathwater. Western music is hetero-sexist, sexist, racist, classist, fascist, and necrophilic. Why would we want to keep it around unless we don't think we can do any better ourselves?

Music **can** do something special. It reaches deep, non-verbal parts of us. For this reason patriarchal music is extremely dangerous. Classical musician friends ask me from time to time whether their music still holds any attraction for me, whether I am moved by it. They seem to think that such an 'admission' from me would be a point for their side. I do admit that I'm sometimes moved by it. But this doesn't prove that there is intrinsic value or goodness in the music. It only shows how well I have

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<sup>11</sup> "Curing Musicians' Ills," *San Francisco Examiner Image Magazine*, August 17, 1986, pp. 9-10.

been taught. I have spent a large percentage of my waking life listening to, playing, concentrating on that music. It has made its grooves in my psyche; I have been deeply conditioned. All the practicing I did imprinted *physical* habits and responses in me; that music is in my very muscles. If we can be trained to respond sexually to degradation, we can also be trained to respond spiritually to fascism. So it can still move me. But that is the best argument of all for avoiding it.

## Quitting

My separation from playing music was largely parallel to my rejection of heterosexuality: quitting classical music was a part of becoming my Lesbian self. Performing became very uncomfortable to me. I hated the rules, the formal ritual of putting on a mask, bowing, disgorging men's music for men and their women. I kept thinking, "What has this music to do with me?" I felt like a smiling puppet; violated. When I started voicing my misgivings to my musician friends, I got the biological determinism arguments: "You have to play, you're so talented." I got the phase arguments: "You just need to take a break from it. You'll come back eventually." I got the "Music transcends its culture" arguments by the bundle. Their defensive, scared reactions were so similar to their reactions to my new Lesbianism that I knew I was threatening one of patriarchy's sacred tools.

I became more and more angry about the privileges we musicians were granted. The trade-off felt identical to the great middle-class het contract: wo-man grants unlimited access to her body and energy, man (supposedly) provides money, security and protection from other men. The wo-man usually has a contract with herself too: to pretend that this sell-out doesn't hurt her. It was only when my Lesbian self emerged that I started to feel the pain of having had my body and soul invaded and colonized by the boys—by their bodies *and* their music—for all those years. Performing became physically and psychically painful. It felt like het-sex. My body, becoming wiser by the minute, knew she was being used.

There was hardly anyone I could share this with. My family simply could not believe that I, their little success, didn't want to play any more. I got sick of the regret new friends showed when I said I used to play. I was furious whenever I would reveal my past to someone and her respect for me would visibly grow. Most disappointingly, even most of

my new dyke friends were quite sure that I must have been happy playing music for a living and didn't want to hear why I quit, even after I insisted that I was now happier and more creative than I had ever been.

Playing *hurt* me. It was part of an assault on me, and I don't want to experience your tears about how I am denying the world something precious by refusing to play. Don't believe you would magically "know me better" or perceive some profound truth if I were to play for you. You would encounter a marionette. And spare me your agreement with the patriarchy—that just because I have talents that happened to be valuable to it, I am therefore someone special. Specialness is a patriarchal polarization: please don't praise me at the expense of Others!

Musicians always ask me whether I don't play for myself, home, alone. I don't. They think they understand the moral side of my rejection of music but figure that it must still have some secret allure for me. It doesn't work that way. My body is at least as smart as my mind on this subject, and she is honest about the harm that has been done to her. I have been damaged in such a way that I *can't* take any pure pleasure from sitting down and playing for myself. Even when I'm by myself, I play for a hidden audience, a hidden watcher. "How about that?" says a voice inside me. "Wasn't that clever? Did you hear how I turned that phrase?" It's clear that I never was playing for myself. If I am ever drawn to finding a way to play music, it will be on an instrument of my own invention, and the music will be my own. For now, there are other things which engage me.

My decision to quit playing was the first integrated decision I made in my adult life. It involved no 'self-control,' contrary to my musician friends' assumptions. My body, my carnal self, my guts—whatever you want to call them—these were all in agreement with my thoughts and ideas and were adamant that playing was bad for me. Over the years, I have had half-hearted desires to play once in a while, but they feel similar to the (quite more frequent) urges I have to eat junk food, when the old conditioning breaks through and my body forgets what makes it happiest.

I have tried the reformist solutions. I didn't plan it that way, but the last concert I ever played was with the Bay Area Women's Philharmonic, an all-woman orchestra that consists largely of Lesbians. It was a congenial setting. But the goals of this organization—to promote women composers of all eras and to play music by women, for women and with women—held no attraction for me, since they were playing music

written in men's styles on men's instruments in a male-dominated tradition. There was a real feeling of, 'Look, we can do it just as well as men!' I wasn't interested in male standards anymore. A symphony orchestra is as fascist as music gets: a few dozen people playing instruments which often do them harm, all submitting to the authority of one person: the conductor. I don't believe there is any way to radicalize that situation, except to do away with it. The experience was madly disappointing to me.<sup>12</sup>

Shortly after I stopped playing music I got a 'straight' job in a theater company. I can't describe how thrilling it was at first to do clerical work and get a weekly paycheck. I had never before been able to move a muscle without considering the approval I would get for it. I believe that this is one reason being downwardly mobile is so attractive to women of my class background: the respected, well-paying jobs we are leaving have such strictures and demands on our behavior that we head straight for anything that looks different.

I was not unaware that I was still in the arts, selling tickets to propaganda for the patriarchy. But what was most immediately important to me was that I was no longer selling my emotions and identity. I was taking it a step at a time. Now that I have learned the obvious, that there is no real freedom in (male-controlled) straight jobs either, I am especially motivated to try to move again. I dream of what I could learn if I put all my energy into a Lesbian project.

One of the more painful parts of quitting music was the angry reactions I got from women who had never had my opportunities. Many women felt I was spitting on their dreams, while I in turn felt ganged up on by their prodding me to play music and enjoy it because they had been denied it. But those painful conversations were very important. They made me realize, for starters, that it was just as much an expression of privilege for me to be able to quit music as it had been for me to be able to play it. And that I *still* had great advantages over many other women. And most important, that I couldn't expect women who had

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<sup>12</sup>I should mention that what I played with this orchestra was a program entirely of Baroque music, which is not their specialty. What they do best is contemporary music, and they have commissioned and premiered many non-traditional works by women. I think that this is valuable. I just do not share their enthusiasm for using traditional instruments and the symphonic format.

been denied the privileges I had had (and had for so long been unconscious of) to simply turn around and drop their aspirations because I said they should.

In those early days I really did think that every woman should immediately quit playing classical music. It was incredibly euphoric to become woman-identified, to feel our common ground. My middle-class confidence and ignorance of class differences made me jump a little too far. I assumed that my experience could be applied to all women. I don't think that anymore. I would not deny any Lesbian an experience that can be a permanent boost to the ego and pocketbook; I just hope that those who try it are more conscious than I was. And it is my continuing dream that someday soon, all Lesbians will be able to withdraw their energy and support from men's noxious art.

## Lesbian Art

I believe that as Lesbians we can create a new kind of art. An art which does not fragment our bodies and feelings, thoughts and attention. An art which is part of our lives.

It is hard to turn our backs on the patriarchal arts. Music, for example, often affects us whether we want it to or not. Perhaps this is because we live in such a sterile world, full of words, intellectualizing, fragmentation; music, even the 'bad' music which I have been describing, is one of the few things which can go straight in and touch us. Feelings are harder to unlearn than ideas—it takes more than thoughts and talk to unlearn them. I believe they will only be unlearned, let go of, when we have something more precious and real to us: our own art.

The white male 'serious art' tradition epitomizes to me the worst thing art can be. Stiff, self-conscious, pompous and fragmenting; "this and that turd," as Valerie Solanas put it.<sup>13</sup> The art of other cultures (and the other gender!) has many more promising aspects. Women of native cultures all over the world have made beautiful pots *to be used*, sung songs as part of daily life—for planting and harvesting, for instance. White male patriarchal art elevates the non-functional, the ornamental, the bodilessly 'spiritual,' and despises women and all things carnal. As Lesbians we can know better. But unless we grew up in a cultural group with strong traditions of harmony with the earth, we have no real experience of

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<sup>13</sup> *Scum Manifesto*. Refer to Note 8 and p. 15.

such an integration. Just a longing for it, a longing which will not be quenched merely by studying and hearing the arts of other groups, magical as they can be. For that matter, as Lesbians, in most any culture we are still on the outside looking in.

There are Lesbians making art from their lives. I have experienced the wonderful works of Lesbian potters, jewelry makers, paper makers, poets. But I have not been as thrilled by what I have witnessed on stage. I think that the performing arts are intrinsically problematical. Performing has a falseness about it, a rigid set-up. I think we should break the barriers that performance traditions create between us. I would like concerts to become anachronisms; I would like us to rethink and perhaps discard the concept of performing.

From the performer's standpoint, performing almost always requires control over oneself and one's feelings. In this day and age of renting halls, selling tickets, or even just working out a schedule with your colleagues, compromise of a most serious kind is inevitable. You have to go out and play or sing whether you feel like it or not. You have to reveal yourself, or create a false self to reveal. For me these practices actively prevented me from being real to myself and others.<sup>14</sup>

Audience members must also control their behavior. There is a ritual to follow, alternating applause and passive listening. Certainly Lesbian concerts are not as stringently formal as, say, an opera performance. Audience participation is possible to some extent, although I wouldn't count as true participation the kind of coerced 'singalong' often instigated by performers.<sup>15</sup> By doing this, performers may actually be trying to fight the formality and the performer/audience split, but giving someone a tune to sing (and insisting to the point of her humiliation that she sing it) if anything exacerbates the power differences. There is still a stage, with someone on it, and a lot of people off it. Any spontaneity occurs *despite* the set-up, even with good intentions from all.

The arrangement is tainted further by the economics involved. If the artist doesn't want to play, someone will be hurt. If she is forced to play by a contract or her own guilt, she suffers. If she doesn't play, the audience members, who have expended their time, effort and money to

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<sup>14</sup>Of course this was partly because of the content of what I was performing—it was not Lesbian. But I believe the format of performing is plenty harmful whatever the content.

<sup>15</sup>Communication, Jeanette Silveira.

get there, suffer. When we appoint someone to make our art for us, this situation is inevitable. If Michigan is disappointing one year, we are angry and devastated, especially if Michigan is the only time we get to associate with each other and share our art.

I'm not saying we should do away with Michigan. But I think that every step we take away from staged concerts is a good one. Let's not appoint 'experts' to make our music for us. Certainly those who are making Lesbian music are precious to us, but making stars out of them is denigrating to the rest of us. True respect and attention to one another precludes awarding privileges for talents. In a way, those of us who have learned music in the patriarchy are at a disadvantage: we have much more to unlearn. I know that I would never even consider trying to make Lesbian music on the instrument I know how to play. I would rather start all over again.

Let's make new instruments; make new sounds and share them. Make our own music, out of our Lesbian lives. Let's break the barrier between teaching and performing, and those who express themselves through music can share it with others in jam sessions. We can discover our own cycles and interactions and sing them. We can make up songs and teach them to our friends; we can sing and dance and make a big racket when we gather instead of going to a concert one night and a meeting the next.

Group improvisation can be magic. Something great can come out of chaos, or chaos can simply be great. You can be a part of something big without losing your identity. You can play, listen, drop out, stay in the background or vie for the limelight. I have not heard this kind of magic often, but I know that it can happen, and I think that as Lesbians we have a head start toward making it. We have, after all, the example of Lesbian sex. There is that miracle when desires run parallel and converge, when to be touched feels like touching, and to reach out feels like being embraced, when you're neither giving nor receiving, but Be-ing together. We have the examples and, I hope, the desires to interact with one another in new ways. I believe we can cooperate without losing our identities.

I hope that in our Lesbian music we will not make goals of transcendence, universality or permanence. Perhaps we can love ourselves and each other enough to celebrate the smallest aspects of our lives—and know that these are worth celebrating. I hope that we can let go of the attractions of discipline and martyrdom, and not play instruments that hurt us. I hope we can learn to tell the difference between spending our time

on something because we find it attractive and invigorating and spending our time on it because we are fleeing other demons or pursuing Discipline. The music we make doesn't have to be easy—but it should feel good to do it. And it's all right if it is easy!

I hope that our music is improvisational, unscheduled, spontaneous, free of charge. I hope that it is consensual, that participation is welcome but no participation is forced, that any participant can stop at any time or decide not to play at all. I hope that we cooperate with one another and listen to each other out of respect and interest, rather than because of any set of rules. Certainly in a large group of people a certain amount of 'background quiet' is necessary, but the extremes common in patriarchal settings are body-denying and reverence-enforcing. We don't need that.

I imagine that our music could express the wealth of feelings we have, and maybe teach us something about them. Our songs needn't be dominated by a specific emotion; I dream that they can express many thoughts and feelings in quick sequence, or even simultaneously. I think we will be surprised at how our ideas and feelings can weave together and interact.

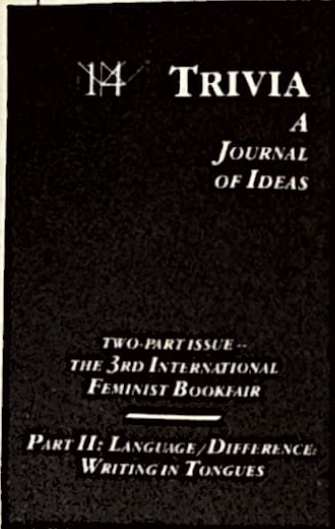
I know that records and tapes of performances are important to us now, especially those of us who are isolated from other Lesbians much of the time. But I hope we fight that isolation, and I hope that as we work together, inventing new art, we grow away from the aspiration to permanence that making recordings of events can encourage. I do concede that documenting our history is important. But I believe that the act of making a recording, just like the act of using a camera, is one of the most effective ways to leap out of the here and now. And recordings encourage us to look upon our art-creations as things, commodities.

I realize that the results of many of my imaginings—that art be free of charge, that we not make recordings, that we have no experts—would mean that in my world there would be no paid musicians. For a while I worried that this would not be fair to 'talented' musicians; why shouldn't they be able to make a living at it if they wanted? But I think that's a patriarchal voice worrying; why should we equate being paid with being respected or with survival? In a Lesbian Nation I hope that nobody would be paid to do anything, since we would have made money obsolete!

In conclusion, two things are the most important to me. First, that we reject the idea of the superhuman artist, who deserves special treatment

and privileges. This idea divides us, and hurts us all. I was terribly hurt by it, and I was on the 'right' side of the barrier. And finally, that we recognize and seek out the art that can be in our everyday lives. A famous male 'critic' once frantically claimed that in a "world without men" there would be no art. I believe, on the contrary, that in a world without men, life would be art.

*"Writing which addresses the root assumptions... the very ground on which we're standing..."*



**RADICAL FEMINIST THEORY**  
**Experimental Prose**  
**Translations**  
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# Hippo Cream and Car Spray

*Anna Livia*

## Blushful Hippo Cream

About ten years ago I was part of a 'Woman and Language Group' in London. Having gone round in circles with how women are constructed and constricted by language, how a male/positive female/negative dualism underpins the very foundation of the distinguishing process which is language, we decided to concentrate on the structure and mechanism of humour. Every week for a couple of years we met, seven women: all white and middle-class, both lesbian and heterosexual. We talked about how men use humour to put women down; the insidious messages of jokes we ourselves had laughed at; how men's jokes were often formulaic attacks on women, passing off torture, rape and murder as logically deserved—and required by the formal structure of the joke itself. We looked at humour women use against men to 'get our own back,' where even one well-known for biting sarcasm must plan her comment with split second timing to prevent it backfiring.

After about two years of this, and some really sickening jokes, we began to wonder what women's humour, humour by women for women, was like and we began to worry why it had taken us so long to reach for it. We looked at each other perplexed, a little embarrassed: what does a woman say to make another woman laugh? We suggested, tentatively, that women's jokes are non-competitive, have more open structures (less of the 'Knock, knock,' 'Mummy, Mummy,' 'I tell you my mother-in-law is so ugly . . .'). We had read that co-operative collectivity characterised other areas of women's activity, so perhaps this would prove to be the case with humour too. We set ourselves the task of finding examples of female to female humour for the next meeting.

Me and Trista, light of my life, rode home on our bicycles, exhilarated, through the two a.m. South London streets. We asked each other what

made us laugh, perhaps that would be a starting point. At a red light half way up Lavender Hill, Battersea, we saw what had been glaring us in the face all this time: for two years seven women had been meeting weekly and laughing our heads off together and only now had we stopped talking about men long enough to wonder what was so funny.

Next weekend at Linda's in Wivenhoe we decided to go for a walk along the estuary while the fish cooked. Trista, walking back through a dry field in uncharacteristic sunshine, cried out,

"Oh for a beaker full of the warm South,  
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene."

—Keats, Ode to a Nightingale, 2nd stanza

I smiled indulgently: darling was thirsty. We walked on. Five minutes later, Kath asked: "What is hippo cream?" And so we began, all of us, to make up ancient Greek and Egyptian traditions to spare a hippo's blushes, detailing the circumstances in which a hippo might be likely to blush; why it would be so important to forestall such an event; how one made, and indeed applied, the essential hippo cream. We had a wonderful time and it was quite irrelevant which poem by which poet the lines had come from, or even what they really meant.

Mulling this over later, we decided we preferred the almost nonsensical story which anyone can add to, which has no punchline and no necessary end. It left us with a warm, buoyant feeling of having put the world back in its small place and, even, despite the ludicrous flights our fancies took, of being understood by the women we were laughing with. The lack of a formal structure meant we had to pay much closer attention to each other in order to follow the rules which we made up as we went along. There may have been a small amount, at first, of teasing Trista for quoting such high falutin poetry, but that certainly wasn't what made the episode so enjoyable. Eva, who is Hungarian, said it took her a while, when she first encountered English women, to work out that this kind of joke is not dependent on a hidden meaning of the word *hippo* (a sexual *double entendre*, for example, which does not, of course, exist), but on absurdity, extravagance.

The group continued meeting, and we managed a few more conclusions, in between bouts of laughter. Most humour is bound to its context. Most of us have tried to relay an incident which had all the participants in stitches, only to find that our listeners are nodding politely and

looking a little blank. We end up assuring, 'It was terribly funny at the time; if you'd been there you would have laughed.' Those male jokes which can be told equally well in a south London pub as at an Australian Northern Territory rodeo are usually underpinned by the sexual subordination of women or on racist stereotypes. As a group of white women we knew our insights into humour were already specialised, that we could do no more than offer our own perceptions rather than assuming they were common to all women. We felt, indeed, that this preference for stressing and exploring the particular (making theory, each one of us, from our own position) was the same preference that militated against non-contextual humour (a humour of universals). Following this line of reasoning we argued that because women seem to have no obvious laughing stocks—no parallels to the 'mother-in-law,' 'foolish virgin,' 'money-grubbing whore'—our humour is more likely to consist of funny stories rather than one-liners. When telling a story we can develop the context, it does not have to be assumed. We did not try to put this idea into a multi-cultural context; we were talking about white Western English—though it did seem from Eva that much of what we said would be true in Hungary. The group felt, also, that our humour allowed for greater equality among teller, told and told about and that the three roles were fairly fluid, even while a particular story was being invented.

Then I left the group. I wanted to concentrate on lesbians and to move on from analysis to creation. Our conclusions, never more than tentative and exploratory, no longer satisfied me, although I had gained enormously from our group reasoning process which had prodded me into questioning many of my assumptions. (And, of course, the love of six good women is rare and precious). I felt that our statements about the lack of universals in female humour came more from principle than observable experience.

But, naturally, my observable experience changed as soon as I joined a lesbian (writers') group. Certainly, there is no universal dyke experience. But dyke humour does consist of more than the curious anecdote of the moment. Any recognisably lesbian experience can be the stuff of lesbian humour: coming out; fancying straight women; dyke-spotting; trying to live up to our image of ourselves as butch or femme; discovering we are not the only dyke in the world to strut about our bedrooms belting out Figaro's operatic send-off to the precocious transvestite, Cherubino; discovering we are indeed the only dyke in the world to strut around our bedrooms, etc. . . . In fact humour is, in some ways, a litmus

test for how well shared our assumptions about lesbian experience are: if dykes don't share the same assumptions, we don't laugh at the same jokes.

As for radical dyke humour . . . Well, it depends what we mean by 'radical.' Can a band-aid be radical? After more than two years examining both form and content of innumerable humorous instances, my 'Women and Language Group' concluded that humour was incapable of bringing about radical change, of introducing an element which did not exist before. In cases where it seemed very much as though humour had introduced a new idea, when we examined it more closely it always turned out that in fact the 'new idea' had already been articulated elsewhere, e.g., in the form of linear, logical theory, and the humorous remark served only to reinforce that idea. We decided that this was because humour relies on recognition and is, in that strict and narrow sense, basically conservative. Humour acts, often, as a populariser, making the radical theory more palatable, making us feel more familiar, more comfortable with it. Can comfort be radical?

On the same day I received Jeanette's letter accepting my article, Linda Shockey (of Wivenhoe, hippo cream and Women and Language) handed me a thesis on lesbian humour by Dorothy Painter. Dorothy's main conclusion seemed to me to be that lesbian humour is characterised by 'in' jokes, i.e., jokes inscrutable to heterosexuals, by which we defend ourselves against the onslaught of straight society.\* A more common idea of lesbian humour is that it consists of jokes on *us*, i.e., jokes we make against ourselves, gently, tenderly, fondly, laughing at lesbian customs, keeping each other affectionately in line. The two ideas—lesbian humour as jokes on lesbians, and lesbian humour as jokes on the straight world—would appear to be at odds. They do, however, express the range of 'traditional' humour: humour as a joke against someone. This kind of humour, whether its content be lesbian or fascist, is the most apparent in any culture and the easiest to analyse: Who makes the joke? Who is the target of the joke? Whose status is enhanced by the joke?

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\*Dorothy Painter, *A Communicative Study of Humor in a Lesbian Speech Community: Becoming a Member*. Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1978. For example, "Breaching humor normalizes specific breaches of lesbian social reality. . . . The breach is normalized by laughter which indexes straight knowledge as naive" (p. 174); and, "Stereotyping humor normalizes anti-lesbian stereotypes. . . . The laughter constitutes the straight stereotypes as incorrect and reinforces lesbian knowledge" (p. 175).

Those of you who dislike literary analysis should jump straight to "Car Spray" and form your own conclusions. To the rest of you I will say that the humour in "Car Spray" includes both the idea of jokes on ourselves and Dorothy's idea of defense against straightdom. It also includes my favourite brand, which is neither of the above. I would love to prove that my favourite is also the most lesbian, but I may not be allowed this indulgence.

### Kinds of humour in "Car Spray," complete with examples.

1. *Direct or indirect references to lesbian culture:*  
Discussion of lesbian politics, p. 40: for Minnie, who has just said she's a radical feminist and even a reluctant separatist, the worst thing a potential lover can confess is that she's a socialist.
2. *Direct or indirect references to gay culture:*  
The famous 10%, p. 39: homosexuals are said to be 10% of the population but gay men and lesbians do not have anything in common apart from this statistic, and might be said to compete for their place in it.
3. *Challenges to heterosexual assumptions:*  
Heterosexual assumptions about AIDS, p. 45: Beryl, Minnie's mother, is led into making the paradoxical observation, "heterosexuals worry about AIDS, lesbians worry about anti-semitism." AIDS is more commonly considered 'a gay plague'; what makes Beryl's observation funny is that it is not only surprising but true in the story's terms. Of all those at the party Chintz was the one least likely to give Minnie AIDS.
4. *Jokes against men:*  
At the party, p. 38: The male physicists at the party can think of nothing to say unless they are allowed to talk physics, hence they huddle around Beryl's shortwave.
5. *Mother jokes:*  
Chintz mother, p. 41: Chintz' mother drove 500 miles to cook her daughter lasagna because she knew she'd be hungry. There is an unfortunately strong strand in lesbian feminism which berates mothers for the care they lavish on their daughters.
6. *Sex jokes:*  
Minnie and Chintz, p. 43: Minnie quotes a line from a lesbian poem; Chintz, whose nipple is in Minnie's mouth, comments on her misplaced articulacy.
7. *Oneupsmanship:*  
Minnie and Charles, p. 38: throughout this passage, Minnie puts Charles down according to mainstream rules of oneupsmanship. She proves herself

more knowledgeable, more widely read and quicker witted in traditional literary areas.

8. *Heterosexual jokes:*

Restaurants, p. 44: The reader fills in for herself the sort of jokes heterosexuals make on restaurant names like 'Hung Long.'

9. *Anti-semitic jokes:*

Restaurants, p. 44: The reader fills in for herself the sort of jokes anti-semites make on restaurant names like 'Da Kow.'

All are examples of humour which lesbians could laugh at. They are arranged in order, I suppose, from least to most offensive. Examples 1 to 3 are fairly exclusively lesbian; example 4 is a 'woman's joke'; example 5 is an oppressive 'woman's joke'; example 6 could easily be put into a straight context; example 7 is almost a set piece characterised by dead-pan one-liners; example 8 reminds the reader of the innuendo underpinning most heterosexual discourse; example 9, like example 8, is the kind of joke which is made so often it's only necessary to allude to it.

From lesbian 'in' joke, via humour reversing straight assumptions, to traditional heterosexual and anti-semitic jokes, the range is wide, but all are examples of humour of which the questions can be asked: Who makes the joke? Who is the butt of it? Whose status is enhanced by it? As such they are all instances of reversible humour: one can retain the structure, pour in new content, and thereby reverse the target. There is a long tradition of this in the mainstream: Reagan, "Seen one redwood, you seen em all." Wit from the back of the crowd, "That's what I say about Presidents." There is a joke told by lesbians, even by some separatists: "How many men does it take to tile the bathroom? . . . Only one, if you slice him really thin." I think this points up very clearly the limitation of 'reversal' jokes. In most people's lived experience the bodies of men as a sex are not used to make domestic items. The most recent western example of such use is the Nazis making the skin of Jewish men and of course women into lampshades. I find it impossible to listen to the bathroom tile joke without thinking of lampshades made of skin, thus the joke remains anti-semitic because of its structure, despite its new content.

Well, you have been being good for a long time now, so I shall tell you my favourite brand of humour. You have examples of it on page 31 and pages 41-42. The 'car spray' incident is a development of the 'hippo cream' incident. They are a light parody of the search for, and creation of, lesbian rituals and questionable historical antecedents. As such they

amuse me only slightly. What I enjoy is their absurdity, their open-endedness: anyone can start such a fantasy, and anyone can add her piece. If there is a 'target,' it is the world itself, the established order. Yet the fantasy is more enjoyable the more closely the players are following each other. The rule for establishing 'insiders,' who understand the joke and can continue it, and 'outsiders,' who shrug or get impatient, is how well anyone is listening: it is other women's own decision to place themselves inside or out. The 'Anne Bancroft' exchange, pages 38-39, can produce similar results. While men are able to understand quite fast that they must offer a question to which Minnie's previous answer would have been correct, they do not, in my experience of step-fathers and brothers-in-law, follow when the pattern is altered by one of the participants and is no longer about movie stars or in question and answer format.

As I said, it would be lovely to assert that this superbly anarchist structure is truly lesbian. I have an uneasy feeling, however, that examined more closely and more critically (I have, after all, just admitted to being one of its devoted proponents) it might turn out to be no more than 'Oxbridge scorn'—U.S. readers may prefer to think of this as 'Ivy League scorn.'—which depends to a certain extent on a view of the world as patently absurd and in need of being taken down a peg or two. This seems to work only if one can establish a certain distance between ourselves and the world, especially if that distance places us above the world, in an ivory tower, perhaps. The ability to use distance as a ploy is always something of privilege; those of us under direct attack cannot merely disengage, though we can refuse confrontations as a political tactic. Do lesbians of all classes use the humour of distance and absurdity? I don't know. I recommend care, constant vigilance and lashings of that universal panacea, hippo cream.

## Car Spray

[Minnie, London lesbian, is visiting her mother in Australia. Her mother's husband, John, has invited the entire Physics Department of the Uni. of W.A. to a dinner party for which he will spend the entire story cooking.]

- Minnie Any of them dykes, Ma?  
 Beryl Well, they do say Charles may be gay.  
 Minnie Think I'll take the ghost freeway to the beach and watch the sunset.

- Beryl But you're the guest of honour. And there's the doorbell now.  
[She answers the door.]
- Beryl Minnie, this is Charles.
- Charles And this is Cinzia.
- Cinzia Call me Chintz.
- Beryl Are you another physicist, Chintz? The room is filling up with  
physicists.
- Charles No, Chintz is a lawyer, aren't you, Chintz?
- Chintz I'm a lawyer.
- Beryl You must be clever then. I expect you're clever.
- Chintz Charles and I were discussing that in my car on the way up  
here.
- Minnie What was your verdict?
- Charles No. Not enough room for two brains in one car.
- Chintz So you're a writer, Minnie?
- Beryl Oh yes. Let me show you her books. Look, this was the first  
one with the yellow cover. And this one . . .
- Minnie Ma, I love you, but don't you think it's a bit like showing  
people my baby photos?

[Beryl kisses Minnie on the top of her head and goes off to have her nice bath in peace. She thinks she might take *Crime and Punishment* (in Russian) with her, and maybe a large glass of brandy, seeing as the young people are now chatting so nicely together. Much though she admires her daughter's books, Beryl can't help noticing that none of them is *Crime and Punishment*. Her own, almost irreplaceable, copy of the Russian text has a large brown burn mark through it from when Beryl sat sunning herself in the garden the time the laundry and the ironing and the cooking and the cleaning all got done on time and there emerged no unforeseen emergency of bloody noses, or premature infants—let us recognise that her daughters are all three over twenty now, and one is eight months pregnant, not Minnie, one hastens to add. Beryl sat in the garden reading her favourite Russian novel in her favourite language with a large magnifying glass because her eyes needed a lot of help these days, when suddenly the page began to smoulder and burn before her and it was not with the repressed passions of Sonja and Roskolnikov but the dear old sun itself. So now, when Beryl can catch a quick quarter hour she usually takes it in the bath.]

[This has been a long diversion from the central, lesbian plot, but Beryl is tired of appearing in her daughter's stories in the role of provider and forehead kisser. She would like it known that she does have a life of her own in which she plans a return to Leningrad where, perhaps, she

can make friends with a nice middle-aged Russian lady who will give her an unburned edition of *C & P* and maybe some help with those complicated idioms.]

Charles [Reading the cover of the yellow book.] Sounds like one of those French novels where someone goes somewhere, does something, meets some people and writes about it.

Minnie Pretty standard plot.

Charles You know what I mean.

Minnie That must be most reassuring.

Charles Short. You know, how French writers specialise in short novels.

Minnie [Nodding.] Like Proust, you mean.

Charles So you work for the same company who publishes you? I thought only the most mediocre writers get published by their friends.

Minnie I guess Gertrude Stein and Virginia Woolf were pretty mediocre.

Charles Do you only write for women? Doesn't that cut off a lot of your sales, economically speaking?

Minnie Statistically speaking there are a few billion people in the world of whom at least 52% are women so, financially speaking, if no man ever read one of my books I'd be laughing.

[The women in the room are all laughing. Minnie hopes she has finished with Charles so she can get back to Chintz. Life among the lesbians has made her forget that men interpret put-downs as come-ons.]

Charles So what do you think of Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*?

Minnie Charles, let's get one thing clear. I am not going to reply to any question to which the answer is not, and never has been, Anne Bancroft.

[Charles looks disgruntled and goes off to join the men. They, physicists all, are staring fixedly at Beryl's short wave radio and pondering all possible and potential climactic and other factors which may have caused it to stop receiving Radio Moscow.]

Chintz Psst, Minnie, what was the stage name of Anna-Maria Louise Italiano?

Minnie [Grinning.] Giss a clue.

Chintz She starred in *The Graduate* with Dustin Hoffman.

Minnie Blimey, this is hard. [Pause.] Rita Hayworth?

- Chintz Close. Very close. And that's a good position to be in *vis à vis* Rita Hayworth.  
[Did Chintz really say that, or was it a product of Minnie's fevered brain?]
- Chintz Now, who takes her gloves off in *Gilda*?  
Minnie Elizabeth Taylor?
- Chintz Nearly. Who starred in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*?  
Minnie Lily Tomlin.
- Chintz Very good. Not right, but very good.  
Minnie I was hoping there might be a question about Whoopi Goldberg?
- Chintz Next time. I think you need to be rationed.  
Minnie Okay. Let's get back to you. You're a lawyer . . .  
Chintz An Italian lawyer.  
Minnie Italian?

[For the next 20 minutes Chintz tells Minnie the story of how first her father, and then her mother, and then most of the inhabitants of a little Italian village outside Bari ended up in Western Australia. As Chintz may well want to tell her story herself, we won't repeat it here. We will, however, say that when Chintz asked her, three days later, how Minnie knew she was a lesbian, Minnie replied: "You know the old joke about how you know who the dyke is? She's the one who fronts up to you in the bar, asks you how you are and listens to the answer? Well, when I asked you about yourself you looked me straight in the eyes and answered at length, without giggling, trivialising or letting your eyes wander round the room in search of the real thing. And after that," Minnie added, "I just hoped."]

[That was three days later. Let's not anticipate. Chintz is short and has short hair and wears a leather jacket and she is curled up in Minnie's mother's armchair in such a way that Minnie suddenly finds herself imagining she is wrapping her arms around her and kissing her. But Chintz is in Minnie's mother's living room and so cannot be a lesbian even though Minnie, who is also in her mother's living room, is indeed a lesbian. Minnie counts. There are only twenty people in the room and already she and Charles are homosexual so, even if it were not for Minnie's mother's living room, Chintz still could not be a lesbian. Minnie resents the fact that a gay man should have used up half the precious quota.]

[The other women are sitting in corners in their smart jackets while the men discuss inverse sub-semi groups. Beryl signals to Minnie and Minnie and Chintz split up and rescue the women. Chintz leaves early.]

Minnie wants to run out into the driveway and jump on Chintz' car bonnet and yell, "Take me hostage," but she is much older (ten years) and much taller (two inches) than Chintz (although her hair is much longer) and so, roles being what they are, it is impossible, it is all quite impossible.]

[Charles, four hours drunker, is declaiming the complexities of his sex life to all and sundry. He is about to start on Chintz' sex life but Beryl is not going to allow it. She has a strong sense of propriety.]

Charles Chintz has started reading Genet to try and understand me better, Minnie. Do you think she's picked the right author?

Minnie [Who has realised that snubbing Charles only eggs him on.] I think the best way to understand anyone is to talk to them.

Charles But do you think it a useless project for a lesbian to try and understand a gay man?

Minnie [Who wants to say "Yes," but has just realised a) that Charles has just told her Chintz is a dyke and b) that he is now her only way of contacting the woman.] Lesbians have many skills.

[As everyone leaves, Minnie gets Chintz' phone number from Charles.]

Chintz Like to come to dinner Friday?

Minnie Love to.

Chintz I've only just got back from work so we're eating out. Indian okay?

Minnie [Nods.]

Chintz Jeeze, it's cold in here.

Minnie Here. Have my jumper.

Chintz You came prepared.

Minnie It's my mother. Won't let me borrow the car unless I've a woolly jumper on me. She frisks me as I go out the door.

Chintz [Kills a cockroach.] Bloody cockroach.

[It takes them an hour and a half to get fed. It takes them an hour to notice.]

Minnie So yeah, like I was saying, I'm a radical feminist and if you want to call me a separatist it won't bother me.

Chintz I have a confession to make.

Minnie What? You're a socialist?

- Chintz I don't know what a separatist is.
- Minnie You sure?
- Chintz Well, I just don't understand how they can hate men.
- Minnie You sure?
- Chintz Yes. And stop asking if I'm sure. Charles is a good friend of mine, I have a lot of time for him.  
[Minnie thinks maybe she should back off before their obvious incompatibility drives home.]
- Chintz Anyway, wanna go to a session at the Blue Room, Sunday?
- Chintz I'm sorry I'm so late. My mother turned up from Albany and made me lasagna.
- Minnie She drove five hundred miles to cook you lasagna?
- Chintz She knew I'd be hungry. Three months ago I told her I was a lesbian. She told me that never would have happened if she hadn't come to Australia. She's convinced there are no other Italian lesbians. Just her daughter.
- Minnie Course there are. There's Nicole Falda, Karen Liverpool, Betsey Enrico . . .
- Chintz What part of Italy are they from?
- Minnie Brooklyn.
- Chintz I don't think my mother would count that as part of Italy. She was okay, though. I told her I was going to have my car sprayed and I was a bit worried that she'd object because she's very superstitious.  
[It's noisy in the pub. Minnie wonders if she heard right.]
- Minnie Why should she object?
- Chintz She's very religious. She might think it was tempting fate, going against the church or something. But she offered to pay for it so in the end me, my mum and my sister all had our cars sprayed.  
[Now Minnie knows she heard wrong. She decides to ask strategic questions.]
- Minnie How did it go?
- Chintz Well, mine said there were big changes in the air, a long haired stranger and possible heartache.
- Minnie [Laughing.] I heard you say you were having your car sprayed, not your cards read.

[Chintz laughs hysterically and for the next ten minutes makes up old traditional Italian ceremonies for Minnie where the mother solemnly sprays the dyke daughter's car lavender as a rite of passage. She

describes the food, only eaten on that occasion, for which the recipe is carefully guarded and passed from mother to daughter awaiting the birth and driving licence of the dynasty's dykes. However old the daughter is, the ceremony always takes place exactly three months after she has come out to her mother. Chintz' mother's certainty that there are no other Italian dykes in the world must be read as a statement of pride, of the specialness of her daughter and the long time lapse between this car spraying and the last. Minnie suggests, tentatively, that perhaps this Italian custom is simply continuing a much older, more widespread custom dating from the time before cars.]

Chintz Oh yeah? What did the proud mother do then?

Minnie Anointed her daughter's hippo with blushful hippo cream.

[And so Minnie explains to Chintz about the hippo cream; the old Egyptian tradition of sparing a hippo's blushes takes on new meaning with the new dyke insights.]

Chintz Well, I suppose I ought to be going.

Minnie You in a hurry?

Chintz Why?

[Awkwardly Minnie leans forward, takes hold of Chintz' chin and kisses her. Chintz moves toward her to ease the angle of the kiss. There are a lot of couples in corners at the Blue Room and they are all kissing and they are all awkward.]

Minnie Your place or mine? [Is there much point avoiding cliches when cliches are on your mind?]

Chintz Not mine. I couldn't cope with passing one of my ex-lovers on my way to the toilet.

Minnie Not mine. I couldn't subject you to my family's brand of liberalism. I've always had this fantasy of borrowing my mother's camper van, parking in King's Park overlooking the Swan and doing it there.

Chintz Slumming Australian style? My fantasy is checking into a . . .

Minnie Sleazy motel?

Chintz Five star hotel . . .

Minnie With a swimming pool on the roof?

Chintz With a swimming pool on the roof and champagne on room service.

Minnie I don't drink.

Chintz Don't worry. I'll drink. You swallow.

[They drive to the hotel. Minnie puts coins in the parking meter. Chintz goes into the lobby.]

Minnie I can't afford this.  
 Chintz Don't worry. I'm a lawyer, my services are worth \$100 an hour and my firm gets a discount here.

[Later.]

Chintz You're still worried. We've worried about our clashing politics; we've worried about how young and impressionable I am; and we've worried about the ethics of one night stands. What's left?

Minnie The parking meter. It'll run out at 8.30 tomorrow morning and my mother will get a parking fine.

Chintz I would like to say for the record that you are the only dyke in the whole world who connects parking meters with sex.

Minnie Oh I don't know, some of them run "down Christopher Street caressing the iron breasts of parking meters."\*

Chintz It is amazing how articulate you remain with someone else's nipple in your mouth.

[Pause.]

Chintz Alright. What's the registration?

Minnie No idea. It's my mother's car.

Chintz [Shaking her head.] Hello, Room Service? This is 221. Have someone stick a couple of dollars in the meter of a white Kingswood parked outside the lobby. And if there's more than one Kingswood, fill them all up.

[The day after passes in something of a daze; Minnie finds it hard to believe how easy and inevitable it felt. She wonders who Chintz is. Sex seems a good way to get to know a woman. When you know her already. That night she meets Chintz in a Vietnamese noodle house and feels that either they should be having sex or they should be complete strangers. Minnie suggests they have coffee, hoping to prolong the evening until she has pinpointed her anxiety. She drives to an Italian cafe, drops Chintz off and parks the car in a side street. Inside the cafe are all the people from the party, except Beryl, who is at her Russian class where Minnie left her earlier in the evening, and John, who is still cooking.]

Charles Hello you two. Where've you been?

[Minnie does not want to join them but they are Chintz' friends and this is Chintz' town.]

Minnie Vietnamese noodle house.

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\*Elana Dykewomon, *Fragments from Lesbos* (Oakland: Diaspora, 1981), p. 15.

Charles Which one?

Minnie It was called the Hung Long.

[The inevitable jokes are made. They seem to Minnie to last a long time.]

Chintz Where've you been?

Charles To the Da Kow.

[As soon as she hears the name Minnie senses trouble but feels unable to forestall it. She looks across at Chintz wondering what her reaction will be. Someone, not Charles or Chintz or Minnie, makes a joke about cooking with gas.]

Minnie [Gabbling.] Don't say that. Don't make that kind of . . . I hate that kind . . . It's horrible . . . It's not funny.

Charles I think what Minnie's trying to say is that kind of joke is cruel and stupid and anti-semitic. It trivialises the torture and death of six million people.

Someone Well hey, what I say is, if you've got a line, use it.

Charles You don't have a line. You don't have a brain cell. You don't have an ounce of . . .

[Minnie has just seen something which makes her feel sick.]

Minnie I um. . . I er. . . have to go now and, um, pick up my mother at her Russian class.

Minnie I wasn't going to pick you up for another hour. What happened, did the class get cut short?

Beryl No. They went off to a casino with some Russian sailors but nice Mrs. Katz and I didn't want to go. She stayed and helped me with my dark *ls*. Darling, you're driving all over the road. Are you alright?

Minnie No, do you know a restaurant called the Da Kow?

Beryl Yes.

Minnie Well, Charles and them had just eaten there and they made this horrible joke about the name and then, well, Chintz laughed, at the joke, and I was making love to her last night.

Beryl Mmm. It's an unfortunate name for a restaurant. People do make jokes about it.

Minnie People you know?

Beryl Oh, we had a works dinner there and they made the sort of jokes Charles' friends would make.

Minnie But what did you do?

- Beryl Observed what sort of people they were and decided not to go out with them again. What more can one do?
- Minnie Tell them what you think.
- Beryl What are you going to do? Ring Chintz up and ask her why she laughed at an anti-semitic joke?
- Minnie Yes of course. That's just what I must do.
- Beryl You lesbians are funny. I can't imagine ringing up a man I'd just slept with and accusing him of anti-semitism when I'm not even Jewish.
- Minnie I can't sleep with someone who could laugh at genocide.
- Beryl I thought you already had. Does sex make you moralistic?  
Life's rich tapestry: heterosexuals worry about AIDS, lesbians worry about anti-semitism.
- Minnie Chintz, I don't know how to put this so it will sound decorous, but just now, at the cafe, that friend of Charles made that joke about the Da Kow . . .
- Chintz I know. It was stupid. But Charles shut him up.
- Minnie But you, I thought you, I mean you laughed, didn't you?  
[Minnie knows Chintz laughed. She saw her. She was watching her the whole time. Minnie prays that Chintz will not simply deny it now that she hears Minnie is upset.]
- Chintz I didn't laugh at that joke.  
[Minnie feels sick.]
- Chintz I was feeling very nervous.
- Minnie Why?
- Chintz All evening, like you were testing me; did I measure up to your high standards. Then when we walked into the cafe, I could feel everyone tense up. No. When I came in, it was fine. Then they saw I was with you and there was this tension.
- Minnie Why? Because they had to recognise us as lesbians?
- Chintz They already know perfectly well that I'm a dyke.
- Minnie Then why?
- Chintz Because you were so short with Charles at the party. They thought you'd try to put them down.
- Minnie How do you know?
- Chintz I don't know. I just sensed it.
- Minnie They didn't have to make anti-semitic jokes because I made them uneasy. [And you didn't have to laugh at them, Minnie thinks but does not say.]

- Chintz Some of them are creeps, agreed. Have you rung me up in the middle of the night to accuse me of anti-semitism? Aren't you meant to be sending me roses or do you feminist dykes do everything different? I wasn't laughing. My face was smiling nervously. I'd been smiling nervously all evening only you didn't notice.
- Minnie I'm sorry. I'm glad. Thank you for explaining. Did you get home alright?
- Chintz Yis. Charles gave me a lift.
- Minnie Bully for big buddy Charles. You know I put him down at the party because he walked in the door declaring you were stupider than him.
- Chintz My noble protectrix. That was just one of Charles' jokes. He was being ironic.
- Minnie You didn't mind at the time. After you left, dear old Charlie was dead set on telling the world all about your sex life.
- Chintz So you rang me in the middle of the night to chat about Charles? I mentioned this before but you didn't take the hint. I am not going to reply to any question which is not, and never has been, accompanied by half a dozen red roses.

[Chintz hangs up.]



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# Mary Plumb Lightning\*

Dacey Yates

Of course I'm Mary Plumb Lightning. Didn't they tell you I live out here by myself?

And how to get here?

Who else would I be, then. Listen, I charge two dollars for talking to you two minutes. You can pay me or you can go away, whichever you want.

No, I can't change a five. Dig around some more, you can prob'ly rake it together. There, see? You collect Native American artyfacts, right?

Then you're a graduate student.

Folk tale collector?

Turquoise? Free-lance writer?

Well whatever, I'll save you some time. You can't tell it for all this different paint on my face, but I'm not one-fourth Indian, see how curly my hair is? And my hair's white, but I'm not all that old. It's premature, I got it from a grandmother. Plumb Lightning is a made-up name. I don't know one worthwhile Indian story, and I don't have any old baskets or blankets or pots, stuff like that. Or mushrooms, I don't know where to find any funny mushrooms.

Oh. One of those. Not sure why you came. I should have known by the look in your eye. Let me tell you: about once every six months somebody I never saw before in my life straggles out here, rattles my door, gives me this real confused look and says that to me like it's a secret code. What the hell do y'all expect me to say?

Listen, we're just stumbling around here. Tell you what, make you a deal. You give me twenty-five dollars and I'll give you a twenty-five minutes innerview. Anything you want to ask, right here and now.

The *truth*? Tell me a reason *I* would have to lie to you!

---

\*From a novel in process.

Cash. Only.

Sure you don't have any more ones? I like ones the best.

Okay, I'll take what you've got. You can sit up here on the top step in the shade if you want to, and we'll dye a log. Olive, would you want to scoot over? Now. Wait, lemme look at your watch. Now. First question.

Yes, I am a medicine woman.

What do I do? Like, I cook, I eat, sleep, have visions, milk the goat— anything in particular you had in mind?

Hmh! Good question! Right to the bone. Okay, the most important thing I do is keep the three worlds in balance. How about that?

The material world and the spirit world that go together to make up this world. (That was a good question, too, by the way.) Each one has to stay enough balanced of itself, and both of 'em have to stay enough balanced of each other.

No, that's *not* something Agnes Whistling Elk said. You read a lot, do you?

Well, you might want to go back and read Agnes closer. She didn't say exactly what I just said.

Hell no, I'm not saying she was wrong! What's the matter with you?

Something higher than a medicine woman? Sure there is, something's higher than everything. You did know *that*, didn't you?

Well, you can stop being unsure about it. I just told you. What is it you really wanted to find out there, whether I'm someway special besides being a medicine woman? The answer is Yes.

In Agnes's system, I'd be a Great Deceiver. And higher than that, a Great Trapper. And higher than that, a Great Hunter. And higher than that, a Great Warrior. And higher than that, a Great War Chief. And higher than that, a Great War Chief In Three Worlds. (Her system stops at two, I b'lieve.) And some things higher than that in some other ways that stand alongside. Olive, *please* move over, you're hot! Well? Out of questions? You can stop if you want to, but no prorated refunds.

Oh no, I picked all of that up on my own, I've never been a disciple or anybody's apprentice. Had some warnings against that a couple of times when I was younger, before I'd had time to see for myself I wasn't likely to find anybody who knew as much as I did already.

Nope again, never took on an apprentice myself. You ever meet anybody who disciplined themselves to a woman? Sure, it's just men they'd follow around. Like Bagman Roger's Niece, Oh Leery, Hey Zeus,

Kerchief, Carload Castanets, all of the Molehammets, Rum Dum, Sun Moon, and so on.

I know it's Ram Dass, but his father called him Rum Dum. Surely you read that. He must be the one you trailed around after the most. Or the last. No, a few lost souls have come sniffing around me—I told you that—but they're just on vacation. If they look like they have an ounce of sense I'll tell 'em right away who I am. That does it. They get this same disappointed look you've got, and leave as soon as they feel like they can. Listen, I wouldn't try to pet Olive if I were you. She's sort of not as tame as she looks with her eyes shut. You can pet that other one.

Certainly is, Olive's a real odd color for a dog. For anything.

I'm not exactly sure; she's too big for any kind of fox, don't you think? And too little for a coyote. Sleeps nearly all the time. Except at night. And takes spells when she hibernates. She'll stuff herself fat as a pig and then go practically into a coma for two or three weeks. Far as I know she doesn't even wake up to use the bathroom.

Totem creature? You know you're in the wrong part of the country for totem poles, I hope. Out here you're supposed to say medicine creature. And if you mean do I try to psych myself into doing my business the way Olive does hers, the answer is NO. For sure. Next question.

Good for you! Most people wouldn't tie in their idea of a familiar with their idea of a medicine woman: Yes, Olive's close enough to what you sort of mean that I'd say yes.

Gosh no, she's not the only one. Sometimes I wish she was. She *is* the only doggy one, though. Right now.

You mean exactly how many right now? Oh, I'd have to count, they come and go. Exactly how many's not important, you're running out of time. What time is it?

Okay. In three minutes don't expect me to say another word. If you're the kind that needs to make small talk before you go, better start that now.

That's a sweet thing to say. I can appreciate it.

You're just as welcome as you can be.

Goodbye to you too.

Sixty dollars. Well! You want to go in the house?

Watch out, it's dark in here after you've been outside. The kitchen table's in that direction. Do you want something to drink? I've got a little something special.

I'll have some by myself, then. Tell me if you change your mind, you've had a hot and dusty drive. Now then, what did you want to know?

Sometimes to answer questions the way you ask them, bothers me. You'd take the right answer wrong because the question was half off. Like the one you just asked. I don't *consider* anything to be my purpose for living. I *know* what that is. Some things I consider and some things I know. Two different things entirely. So do you want me to tell you when the question is off, or just answer it anyway?

Okay, and then do you want me to tell you what the right question is, or let you figure that out? For you, either way has its ups and downs. One way saves time in the short run, and the other in the long run. In your case.

Hey, good! That's what I'd do, too, in your place: get all the information you can. You can always figure it out later. I hope. Okay, that's how we'll do it then. Now: back to the purpose of my life. I know for a fact that the purpose I live for is to celebrate my power.

How do I do that. Well, here we go again. Really you've asked two questions without knowing it. Do you want me to tell you when you've done that? Like, what you really asked just now was, one, what do I do when I'm celebrating my power? and two, how do I manage to do it? See, you didn't know that.

The most possible information again. Good. Listen, do you have one of those tape recorder things?

If ever you come back, you might think about bringing one. Some things I say, you don't remember because you don't hear them. But later you might. You'd get more for your money. Now:

The purpose of my living is to celebrate my power. The more I celebrate it, the more the worlds get in balance. And believe me, there's lots of opposition to balancing power. Whenever something or somebody opposes my purpose, I oppose back. And I win a lot more times than I lose. And when it's a man or a woman trying to oppose me, usually they're trying to do it by taking something away from me; and then, usually, it ends up I'll do like Robbing Hood: keep what I had and take something away from them that they had no good business to have. I really celebrate when I do that. I like doing it so much that if they didn't provoke me first, I might provoke them. But that's not likely to come about in this lifetime. (Did you know, I read where they're beginning to think, now, that if Robbing Hood was real it was a woman?)

Anyway, that's the hawk's eye view of what my life is for and what goes on in it.

Examples of who and what opposes me! Give me an example of something or somebody that *doesn't* oppose me. Or you. After you walk out my front door, you won't find yourself floating off into the wild blue yonder. That's because of the thing they call gravity, that opposes you. And if you don't oppose *it*, you won't be able to get to your car. See. That's the way that goes. That's balanced opposition, right opposition. And then there's wrong opposition. But there's no condition where there's no opposition. If you like that or not. You can play like you're not opposing anything or anybody. That's as smart as playing Russian roulette. Especially lots of women get killed or kill themselves, one way and another, playing 'Let's pretend there's no opposition going on here.' And it's no shame on a woman to do that if she can't possibly know any better. But once she knows, that's different. Then it's a dishonorable way to live or die. If I were you I wouldn't play that game anymore, now that you know better.

Do I agree with Agnes that there's no such thing as competition; listen, your mind is wandering. While I'm telling you what you asked about, you start thinking on something else. The reason it bothers me is, I keep having the feeling you really want to know what you ask. Can you help yourself?

I *know* competition and opposition seem closely related. To you, lots of things seem closely related to lots of other things. It's good that you have that feeling, because they are. Kind of an unusual sign to see in somebody, and I'm glad to see it. But when it keeps you from paying attention to what you've decided on, you're supposed to know it's out of balance and you're supposed to oppose it. Otherwise you won't have enough learning power that you'll feel like celebrating while you learn. I'd hate for you to miss that. In some ways you're getting to be a challenge to me. Listen, while we sit here I might as well smish up these berries for juice. I can talk and do that too, but don't let it interfere with your concentration. Be extra careful not to let what I'm working on interfere with your concentration, or you might find yourself concentrating on those berries and not paying too much attention to the words I'm saying.

They do, they do make a gorgeous juice, the most attractive purple in the world, don't you think. Looking down at that purple inside that yellow crock bowl, you can get absorbed in it it's so attractive, totally

absorbed. If you want to notice, it's kind of a velvety color, velvety and soft. You could just let yourself ease right into it, don't you think, be right in it and next it's like that purple would let you be it, if you want to. That would be the nicest feeling, being that purple. Don't you think.

.....

Hey! What's your name?

Sure, you. You've never told me what it is.

How about that. Anybody ever call you LuLu before?

I don't know why they would, I just wondered if they did. Since they didn't, you have any objection if I do?

Okay then, LuLu, the hour's up.

It is, I looked at your watch.

A minute or two ago, didn't you notice?

It does fly. Well, you said when you gave me the sixty, that this would have to be it, so I guess it's goodbye. You can find your own way out, can't you?

What's the matter, your foot go to sleep? No? Get your bearings there, then, before you try anything complicated . . . see, what did I tell you; you okay? Okay, bye bye, LuLu.

Whoeee, LuLu, what happened to you? . . . you *are* LuLu, aren't you? Gosh! Oohh, I bet I knowww. it's that berry juice, isn't it? It got *on* you. But how could it get on your hands and face like that?

Well that *is* a mystery, you're right. Good thing you like the color, is one way to look at it.

Not a thing I know of, around here, will take it out. Guess you've already tried everything *you* can think of?

Oh me. Yes, I can see. You've rubbed yourself raw. That stuff is the dye to end all dyes. The most fascinating purple in the world, and its little millicules will just take right up with anything. Would you believe, it's wetter than water. What it wants, is to be part of whatever touches it. Talk about power, that's what I call a *powerful* dye, because nothing could begin to make a dent in its purpose except a strange gathering of the rarest things.

No, I don't know what those things are. I have a pretty good consideration of what they ought to be, though. But getting them all together at the same time and place . . . it'd be simpler—and sure cheaper—just to let it grow out . . . 'course, the human skin's got three entire layers . . . let me see that up close again. Listen, did you notice this sort of looks

like a *design* of some kind, the way the shapes are and the way they're spaced? Weird!

Hey, you're a little testy this morning, aren't you? That's perfectly alright, you didn't hurt my feelings. I can understand how you might feel. Half the night scrubbing your face, and you must have rolled out 'way before daylight or you couldn't get out here this early. What was your hurry, by the way, why didn't you sleep in?

Airplane! Where do you live?

Oh gosh, to get from here to *there* by airplane, you'll have to . . . Mother in Heaven, do you realize you're gonna have to walk your way through an international airport in Dallas Texas looking like this?

I apologize, I apologize. Gee, you really *are* festive this morning. Okay! Okay! I promise. I won't say you're testy one more time.

Dear LuLu,

Yes I did promise to write you and Boltizzare wants exercise. How do you like this ink? Last summer when you drove off it hit me to thicken some you-know-what with water and see if Boltizzare would like it. Did she ever! Soon as I shot the juice to her she turned loose as a fan dancer. The writing comes out so much better than with old black. Early in her life she was ignored and mistreated. But fortunately no permanent damage was done. In fact after we had been together a while she wrote down for me what her full name is, which is Boltizzare Pen Of Power. You two are about the same age.

I liked the tales you wrote me of your times wearing the celebration paint. That's what I call it. Sounds like you had more fun in the long run than if you had managed to get it off before it wore out. Good for you that you can laugh. Even better you didn't let it stop you in any direction. Is that right opposition or is that right opposition. Ha Ha. See I do too remember what we talked about.

I don't like checks. I never directly said so but you know it. It is against what they call the law to send dollars in the mail but chances are they won't lock you up for it even if they catch you. So in this case I consider it is a safe enough act for you to commit. I want you to do it right away. And don't get caught. Don't look guilty when you put the envelope in the slot or before or after. Look some other way if you feel like you are doing something wrong. That is one of the first steps toward being a Deceiver. In this day and age.

For right now all of the big boys know I will get two dollars per traveler they send out here, and right now that is all they know about, and right now all of them are willing to let me have that much. Cashing checks would be like waving red flags at a field of horny bulls, and right now I don't want to do it. More than once or twice of that and they would start trying to find out about it. They are very nose. And they own the post office and the bank. Especially they would make it their business to find out if I am selling something and what that is. They want to do all the selling. Maybe you have heard of customer protection. They think they have what you would call a monopoly on selling, but they are always afraid it might spring a leak. The big boys' club already has a place for doing all the kinds of business they know of that can be done around here, goods and services. In town and on the reservation.

See I have thought this out. I am giving you the gist of it but not for free. It might have taken Bolt and me more than ten minutes to write this letter but ten is enough roughly to say. Send ten ones wrapped up in two thicknesses of brown paper sack. With no return address. Mail in the night.

You seem like the kind of traveler who might find out you like breaking what they call the law with your eyes wide open once you did it once. I am here to tell you it is more fun than the usual way people have to do it all the time which is only half looking or trying not to see. If ever you want me to write again send cash in advance.

Love,

Mary Plumb Lightning

Dear LuLu,

This month would not be a good time for you to come. Next, either, but it would be better. I will still be here then.

You are mistaken. I *would* believe it that after more than a year I am more and more on your mind.

I am 46. What difference?

You said you are terribly afraid I might move without telling you. You are mistaken about that too. I might move, but if I were you I would not say that any more. When you just slap at it and say any old thing about what your feelings are, you tend to believe it yourself no matter if it plainly is not true. That adds to being confused. Usually it confuses whoever you tell it to, too, but in my case that does not apply.

If I were in your place and I knew what my true feeling was I might or might not say it, but if I didn't know I would for sure shut up about it until I did and in the meantime talk about something else if I felt a strong need to talk. Especially if I felt a strong need to talk to the person I was feeling about.

You said after you were here something tilted inside and now you feel like a strange different person and don't know what to do with yourself, and your husband doesn't know what to do with you either. You said you think I had some connection with that, and even though you don't expect me to know what, you feel it is urgent you come back here to see if you can think what happened and what to do next. You said your husband is worried about you and insists on coming with you, and it would be better not to mention the money you send for my letters—just the two dollar fees.

That is plainly what you said on both sides of five pages of your letter. You did not say that you are even more confused because you think I am crazy. Keeping from saying that is what made your letter so damned long and hard to make sense of. I ought to charge you for reading it, and I would if it was in cursive. For the future—if there is one—you can just spit it out. My feelings would not be hurt over you wondering if I'm crazy or conning you. I am a little disappointed you think maybe I could be both, but it is not me I am disappointed in.

You are mistaken #3: You don't have to come here to see if you can find out what happened and what to do next. I can tell you that for the package of dollars you sent in advance for this letter. I will just have to leave out some other things. Here:

What happened is that you had to wear the purple so long it forced you to figure out you belong any place you decide to be, no matter who else thinks you don't or how many there are of them. You learned to break what I call the law of belonging. And in mailing me dollars you broke what I call a courthouse law. All of the bad so-called laws come under one or the other, courthouse or belonging. Whenever you break one of those, if you do it on purpose with your eyes wide open it is a Power Act. You accidentally made Big Power. If I do say so myself I am proud of you.

(Also you probably shook up your husband. A husband usually finds it hard to pretend he loves you just the same when all he can see is that you look for sure different from other women.)

As to the tilt you felt inside, I could have told you about that even before now but you would not have believed me. You are one of the mystery beings and you have a kind of power scales inside you to weight power in and power out. As soon as you had made enough Big Power the scales tilted a different way than ever they had been before in your life. You can check this out for yourself. If it feels like a pinball machine is inside you or a table, you can say I am wrong. Those are the only other things people usually have in the back of their minds when they say tilt for any reason. If it feels more like a scales you will know I am right. In case you don't know where you are feeling the tilt it is not in your head, I hope I don't need to tell you that. On second thought maybe I had better draw you a map. It is in the middle of you, from low in your chest to high in your stomach.

Having more power in that is going out is like what you might call having money in the bank. Learning how to keep it is the next thing I would do if I were you, you said you wanted to find out what to do next.

Learning to keep power is a lot harder than learning to make it. Remember Aggie Doubleyou said something like that too. For you in particular it will be, because you don't know how you lose it. And you will not believe me right now if I tell you. So I won't tell you.

You have what you would call my sympathy. I know you are stuck for awhile between a rock and a hard place even if you don't know it yet. When you lose your power the scales will tilt back and you will not like that either because then you will find out that what you used to be used to was just going around out of balance without knowing any better. Going around out of balance once you have been in a better balance is a horse of a different color.

I am going to say this plainly for a second time. There is nothing else I can do to help you right now or later this month or I consider probably even the next month. There is no use for you to come. I am busy and I have a sick aunt. It would be better if you just keep on sneaking money to me and let me hold it for you until I am in the mood to write again.

Love,

*Mary Plumb Lightning*

# Dyke Humor

## Readers' Forum

### True Stories

Blow dryers for your hands in women's rooms were invented by a man who never washed his face. I don't know anyone who has the patience to stand there for 30 seconds doing nothing but rubbing her hands together. We always just wipe them on our pants except for one obsessive compulsive lawyer who wipes them on toilet paper. The sign on the blow dryer tries to cool you out by saying it prevents germs caused by towel litter. There is no reference to the *N.E. Journal of Medicine* or any other scholarly publication. I never met anyone whose illness was caused by towel litter—have you?

### Chicago

Chicago, city of the broad shoulders, narrow heart and miniscule brain, lobbied the State Legislature so heavily that, at the last minute, after turning down an increase in funding for the Univ. of Illinois, the Legislature appropriated funds for a new baseball stadium for the Chicago White Sox. They claimed a world class city had to have two baseball teams—like Paris and London for example? We don't have our main city library. It was turned into a cultural center. For years most of the books have been stored in a warehouse.

This obsession with sports, men's secular religion, gave me an idea. In order to obtain desperately needed funds for battered women's shelters and rape crises centers, we should reorganize them as teams. We should call the shelters stadiums, e.g., the Greenhouse Stadium, Rainbow Stadium, Metropolitan YWCA Stadium, Edgewater Uptown Stadium. We could organize games pitting the northside vs. the southside agencies. And then we could go to the legislature and threaten to leave the city if we weren't funded.

Chicago is a city in which alleged feminists held a conference in support of Harold Washington's first mayoral campaign and called it "Bread not Roses".

### Theory of Surplus Therapists

In California you can be certified as a therapist after a two-year course in Marriage, Family and Child Counseling. Not surprisingly, given the shortage of meaningful and well paid work for women, many women have taken advantage of this program, resulting in a proliferation of therapists. At first I thought the solution would be that all the women would sit in a circle, do therapy with the person to her right and be in therapy with the person to her left. However the solution which emerged was cleverer. The term *addiction* was expanded to include anything you wanted or needed more than once. And for those not covered by that definition there was the label 'co-dependent.' You were co-dependent or an 'enabler,' i.e., you were nice and helpful and nurturant (anyone smell blaming the victim here?), if you were in a relationship with someone who was 'addicted' or came from a 'dysfunctional family.' [See below p. 67—JS] 'Dysfunctional family' is a tautology, or at least that's what we said when women's movement politics were more than just feeling good. Thus the entire population could be seen as patients or clients, depending on your linguistic preference. Instead of CR groups women attended co-dependency groups—whatever it takes, right—to deal with loneliness. As my friend Barbara Ruth said, "What we used to call sisterhood we now call co-dependence."

Following right along, as my process-oriented friends say, is the glut of pop psychology books telling women how they cause their own problems by loving the wrong man, implying that were they to love the right man their problems would wither away like the state after the revolution. Of course they can't find Mr. Right unless they solve their own problems, which are not structural but caused by their mothers, just like everything else that's wrong with the world.

Let me allow you a peek into my forthcoming book of this genre, **Women Who Breathe Too Much**. Men feel entitled to all the oxygen in the room. Therefore, to get your man, a house in the suburbs and all the appliances, matching of course, just like your luggage, without which life is not worth living, you have to allow him this petty foible. After all men are just little boys and must be humored. Of course, you keep a spare tank in your bedroom, cleverly camouflaged under a chintz ruffled

cover which clever you has put together; and when you need some you can duck into the bedroom and take a whiff. This is especially easy to do while he is watching sporting events, since he'll think you left the room to bring him some beer. There will be chapters on the wrong and right ways to breathe, including of course an invaluable section on faking orgasms. The trick here is to heavy breathe before, not after. There will be self-tests to see if you are addicted to oxygen.

### Conclusion

I came out when I realized that all the bad things in my life came from men and all the good things from women. After some years of interacting mainly with women I realized that all the good things in my life came from women and all the bad things in my life came from women. I have revised this analysis based on events of the past two years. There are very few good things in my life. All the bad things come from 'mental health' people: The Dept. of Psychiatry, where I am severely underpaid in order to convince me to leave; my mother's various psychiatrists who drugged her and mistreated her in many ways since her husband (aka my father) died; and my sister.

My sister calls herself a Marxist Leninist Maoist psychoanalytically oriented feminist psychotherapist in private practice on the West Coast. I was visiting her after reading Gloria Steinem's moving Ms. article on Linda Marchiano's abuse. I said I was depressed. First she said, "Why do they put 'Ordeal' in quotes?" and I said it was because that was the name of the book. She said, "I thought it was because she unconsciously sought out men who would abuse her." She then suggested that I stop researching rape because "You're just like the people who study the Holocaust." Right! Next she claimed that women abuse men as much as men abuse women. I asked her how women abuse men. She said women withhold sex. I said women didn't withhold sex. She said, "They withhold oral sex."

So women are battered and raped and incested and sexually harassed and men can't get all the free blow jobs they want.

A lawyer friend of mine is considering becoming a therapist. I told her she should do some honest work—like defending cocaine dealers, for example.

*Pauline Bart*



## Anthropology

We have been conducting an extensive footnoted annotated indexed & complicated study of the Caucasian culture hereafter to be referred to as the Cauks for ease in translation.

The most important religious ritual, one central to all groups, is the mixing of feces & urine with water. This rite occurs regularly on a daily basis & seems to be a cornerstone of the culture's belief system. The urns for this purpose are commonly porcelain, of various hues, although white is the most frequently used. The very wealthy rulers have receptacles of carved onyx or malachite with gold-plated fixtures. We have

been unable to determine what prayers are said during this ritual because of its solitary nature & the fact that the door to the prayer room is always shut.

The main function of the majority of non-city dwellers is the production of an object called a lawn. Numerous tools for the cultivation of this lawn are sold in the marketplaces. It appears also to have a sacred character, as no activity occurs on it & keeping it short green & square is a constant activity.

The main diet of the culture is available from pushbutton machines or orange plastic small markets & was found by our researchers to be completely inedible. It is truly amazing what the human animal can subsist on.

Another prominent feature of the Cauks is the construction of huge monuments built in clusters in the villages. These are not living quarters but are used about 5 days of the week for a ritual involving papers which appear to be sacred, given the life or death quality with which they are handled. The papers are passed about, often with consternation & eventually cast away when the spell is complete.

The mechanisms for healing disease appear to our eyes to be woefully complex & at the same time, inadequate. People who are seriously ill are quarantined in jails of pale green or white & often used to feed machines which appear to run on human blood.

Cauk children who are born deformed in any way are usually confined to jails built for the purpose. The elderly are also jailed, there being no value system of respect for them. Those passing through transitions are called "crazy" & also jailed. Animals from distant lands too are jailed. In fact, there is some discussion of an alternative theory of central religious belief—that the actual spiritual purpose of the culture is to jail as much as possible. Extensive use of fences is the key argument for this theory.

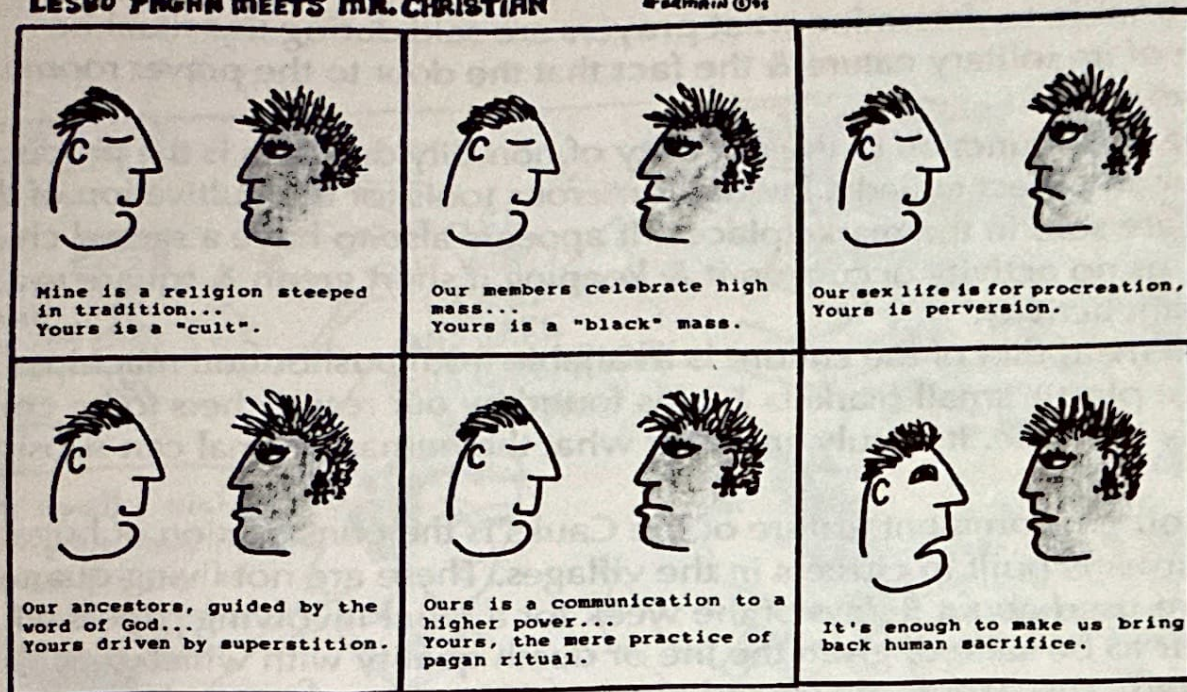
Our data is as yet incomplete. We hope by 1991 to have a more comprehensive overview, at which time a traveling exhibition of artifacts (including exhumed bodies to illustrate their burial practices) will tour for the education of all.

Their attitude toward all non-Cauk peoples is extremely hostile & violent. Many of our researchers have been massacred & yet, in the interests of science, we persevere.

*Chrystos*

**LESBO PAGAN MEETS MR. CHRISTIAN**

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## Lesbians Anonymous: 12 Steps for Co-Dependent Relationships

1. I admitted I was powerless over my lover, but that her life had become unmanageable.
2. I came to believe that I could restore her to sanity.
3. Made a decision to take her will and her life into my care.
4. Made a probing and fearless moral inventory of her.
5. Described to her and to other lesbians the exact nature of her wrongs.
6. Was entirely ready to remove all these defects of her character.
7. Humbly took it upon myself to remove her shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all her ex-lovers and the amends she should make to them.
9. Made calls to all these lesbians wherever possible, except when I could not find their phone numbers, so that she could make direct amends.

10. Continued to take her personal inventory and when she was wrong, I promptly pointed it out.

11. Prayed for the wisdom and power to continue to improve her life.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, I tried to carry this message to other lesbians, and to practice these principles in all my relationships.

Goddess grant me the serenity to accept  
the lovers I cannot change,  
courage to change the ones I can,  
and wisdom to know the difference.

Karen E. Davis

## Warping Our Way On-Ward

by *Andante Bel Canto*

The future is ours—if we make it ours. The patriarchy is obviously in its death throes/throws, poisoning its own air and fouling its own waters. The be-coming of the Lesbian-Centered World depends on us, on our taking ad-vantage of our special strengths as Lesbians to fore-see and fore-tell and fore-merge (form-urge) with the spiraling cycle of change beginning NOW.

Even now is not too early to heed the needs of the future World as it evolves into be-ing around us. Therefore I pro-pose this Warp\* to weave our way across the Woof of the present and into the future.

This Warp was in-spired by the writings of many bright-brained Lesbians, especially those whose Words I found in such journeying journals as *Lesbian Ethics* and *Trivia*—and ESP-ecially by the in-spiration I received from reading “Lesbians’ Choosing Pregnancy?!” by Bev Jo and Linda Strega in the Juin 1988 edition of *Amazones d’Hier/Lesbiennes d’Aujourd’hui*. Their main argument—as I per-ceive it—is that “Lesbian” mothers aren’t really Lesbians because no real Lesbian would let icky sperm (yuck!) anywhere near her body, whether in its original container

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\*Warp: yarns placed lengthwise in the loom, across the weft or woof, and inter-laced; a mental twist or bias.

or re-pack-aged in a more aesthetically appealing turkey baster.\* They go on to point out that "Lesbian" moms are wrong when they claim they're bringing up their children to be Lesbians or "non-sexist" men, because Lesbians, as everyone knows, come from het families, not "Lesbian" moms.\*\*

It was this insight that brought me to the Warp we need to weave into the Woof of the Future. As Bev Jo and Linda put it: "Future Lesbians are most likely to come from where the majority of us come from—het nuclear families." Not only do Lesbians come from het families, not from "Lesbian" moms, but children who grew up in "families" with "Lesbian" moms inevitably "will have . . . a great deal of resentment for not growing up in a 'normal' het nuclear family." So the off-spring of "Lesbian" moms not only won't be Lesbians, and not only *will* be hets, they'll be angry, resentful, anti-Lesbian hets!

So let's look at the implications of all that. For the sake of the Future, we have to dis-courage "Lesbian" women from having children (because they'll only produce monsters, as far as the future Lesbian World is concerned), and we have to en/in-courage the continued existence of "normal" het nuclear families (because that's where Lesbians come from).

It may seem difficult to condemn others to the pain of het wifehood, but as Bev Jo and Linda say (in response to claims that "Lesbian" moms have a hard life), "Pain and hardship are not the same as oppression." What we have to un-der-stand is that, to quote Bev Jo and Linda again, "Lesbian-defined self-love and self-respect is the opposite of male-defined femininity (wifehood and Motherhood)." Any pain and hardship Moms feel doesn't count, because as Moms they are acting as the agents of men. They are oppressing Lesbians, in other words. Moms can at least relax once in a while, whereas we real Lesbians have to work full-time at be-ing the opposite of male-defined femininity.

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\*One wonders how the "Lesbian" mothers who use these patriarchal appliances feel about the annual slaughter of millions of female turkeys. It's a staple of patriarchal ideology that "what's good for the gander is good for the goose," but you'd think "Lesbian" women who consider themselves feminists would be able to un-dis-cover the oppressive purpose behind this ideological sloganeering. Geez!

\*\*This is true. I've talked to all my friends and 99.8% came from "normal" het families. The only reason it isn't 100% is that Laura Rainhat thinks one of her father's sisters was Queer.

OK, but let's get down to specifics. What exactly does the Warp of the Future de-mand of us? How are we going to en-sure the survival of "normal" het nuclear families in the midst of a changing world? It won't be easy! Not only do we have to protect them from the collapse of Patriarchy, we have to keep them going somehow when the culture of Lesb-Biophilia takes over. One idea is to set up a system of het compounds, small enclaves in which the culture of "normal" het nuclear family life could be preserved.\* Perpetuating such colonies without too much in-breeding, and without having to force Lesbians into sacrificing themselves to sperm (ick!) would be a challenge. But there must be a way. The font of new Lesbians cannot be allowed to dry up.

As we Warp our Will-full Way into the Future, we must carry with us into the Brave New World of Lesbos a small but sufficient supply of het Lesbian-producers. Let our stir-ring credo be: Lesbians, YES; "Lesbian" moms, NEVER!

*Andante Bel Canto is a name Jane Meyerding uses occasionally, usually when she doesn't want people to take her too seriously.*

\*Thanks to Irene Wayside for the germ from which this idea sprouted.

## A Lesbian Romance Novel—The Short Form

It was Thursday, April 1st. Dee was born at 12:01 a.m. She gazed into the warm brown eyes of the midwife and fell in love.

At two she fell in love with her baby sitter, Ethel. At seven she fell in love with Miss Nelson, her art teacher. In fifth grade, she fell in love with Mattie, a new student from Arizona. Dee and Mattie would spend long hours planning their cattle ranch on the rim of the Salt River Canyon. During those long hours they also learned to kiss. The kissing was almost as much fun as pretending to be riding horses.

Mattie's family moved when Dee was in the seventh grade. Dee and Mattie wrote each other every week. Then Mattie's mother turned state's evidence against her boss and was put in the witness protection program. The letters from Mattie stopped.

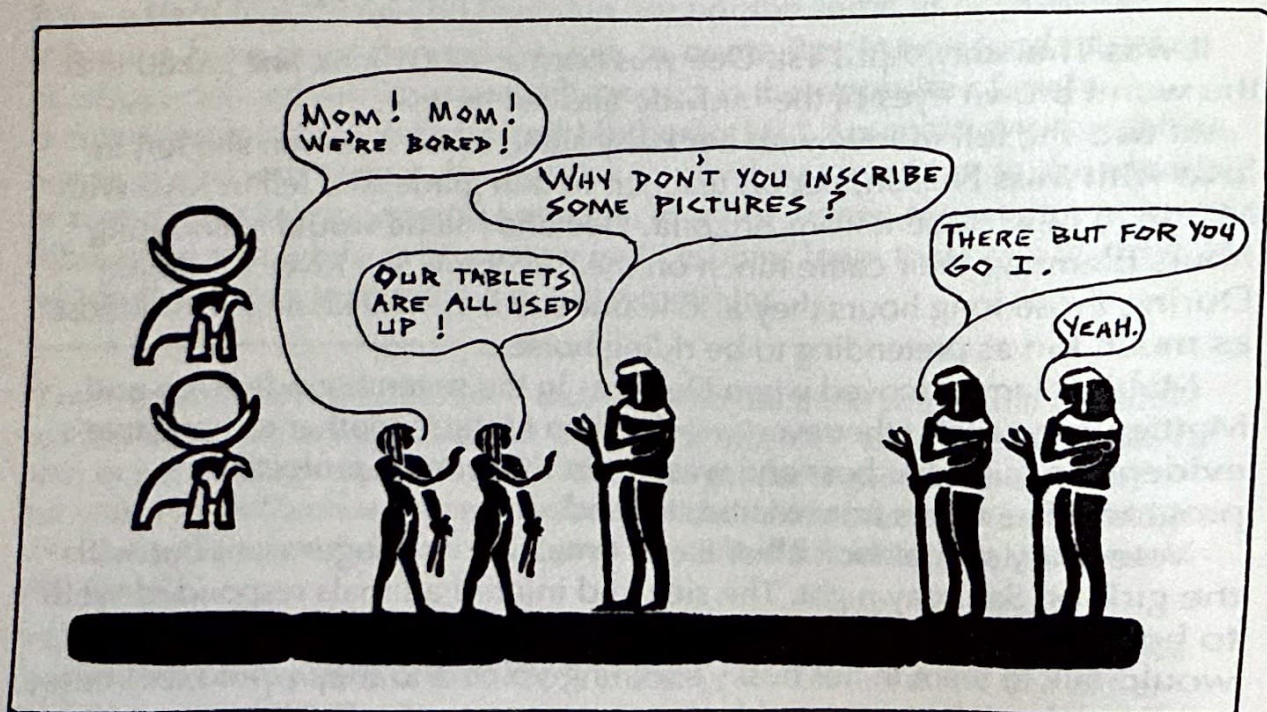
Veterinary school took all of Dee's time. She no longer went out with the girls on Saturday night. The sick and injured animals responded well to her care. Dee would gaze into their warm eyes and fall in love. She would talk to them in her husky soothing voice and they would feel better. Even the sickest cat would sometimes purr under Dee's gentle touch.

At graduation Dee got a job offer from a vet in Sholow, Arizona. She remembered the stories Mattie told her and decided to accept. Her first emergency call was a dangerous case. A rancher's bull was down. The thrashing animal was beyond medical help. Dee risked injury to help it out of its pain into an easy death. The rancher's young wife came into the barn with coffee. Dee's heart leaped. It was Mattie.

A year later, with the money from the divorce, Mattie and Dee bought a small ranch on the rim of the Salt River Canyon. They would ride out to a small secret cave for afternoons of delight. Many years of happiness later, they died of old age in each other's arms. The ranch became a retirement center for women veterinarians and their lovers.

Mary Morel

Author's Note: You have just saved \$9.95. I'm sure that you realize that to offer such a reduced rate, I had to cut some frills. I did not include a description of my heroines because Mattie is part Native American and Dee is well, rather homely. Neither of these heroines would be invited to a party at the homes of our more typical heroines. But they are quite happy just the same.



## Three (from a Vast Supply of) Messages from The Other World

The grapes of hope have turned into the raisins of despair.

—Jesse Jackson, speech to Democratic  
National Convention, 1988.

Ride in the big plane, dropping the bombs that pulverize  
the world below!

—TV ad for show on airplanes.

95% of American [sic] families are dysfunctional.

—Editorial in recovery counseling magazine.

## Beggars Are Choosers

Begging, that's it. That's what I want to do. Forget my M.A., and forget trying to compete with work incentives and changing rules. Why only last week, a disabled friend from New York City, who uses an electric wheelchair with an open bookbag on the back, arrived home from a twenty minute walk and found some forty-odd dollars in change in the bag. Just think what you could make in eight hours—\$960! And it's "off the books!"

The world needs beggars. They build self-esteem, alleviate guilt and keep people humble. In a way, they're sort of like therapists, only they make more, have less overhead and don't pay taxes.

So why spend your time filling out SSDI, Medicaid, and SSI forms over and over again, when you can be a productive person out on the streets? I mean, people pay taxes, which they hate to pay, and the taxes get given back to us in benefits (after we beg for them at the appropriate government agency), but they lose a bunch of our money in the process. I think we should eliminate the middleperson, provide services directly to "our consumers," and get paid directly by them. My disabled sisters, let us follow the path of our ancestors and do our begging in the streets. Let us take our rightful place on the lucrative corners and bountiful bus stops, and stop settling for the pittance they offer to keep us at home.

Connie Panzarino

Dear Ellie,

We never thought it would happen to us! As lesbians my lover and I thought we were immune to impregnation. Imagine our surprise to find we were both pregnant with the same child! We have so many questions! Is it medically safe to induce labor so that our daughter can be born on the same day? We don't want to use traditional delivery channels, does anyone know about burping babies? One time I looked in the toilet and I thought I'd miscarried, but I asked my lover and she just said, "No." How can I be sure? We have many more questions, but we're not sure what they are. We are so happy you exist, so that we can get our questions answered by other dykes with similar experiences. Keep the spirit!

Anytown, USA

## Macrobiotic Dining with Introductions

Tina and Liz were going out to the new vegetarian restaurant. Cindy and Elberta, and Steph and Johnnie, Tina's friends had come into town and were staying with Tina's ex, Connie, at the Juniper Street house and wanted to get together.

"I'm excited for you to meet them," Tina said. "They're real good friends."

"I'm excited to meet them too," Liz said. She had been living with Tina for a year, and was well aware that her friendships were quite complex.

"Maybe I should tell you, ah . . . . a few things first."

"What about?"

"Well, you know, Cindy is with Elberta, but she's been with Steph."

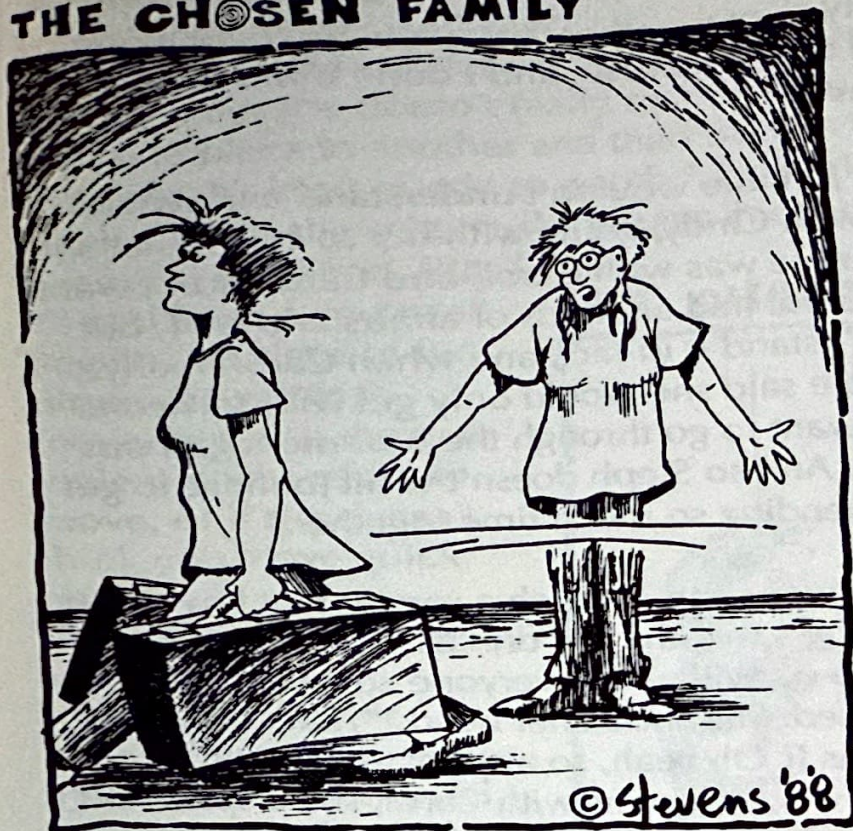
"I thought Cindy had been with Elberta Forever."

"She has been. You see, Cindy and Elberta got together about 16 years ago. And Elberta, well, she has some problems, and Cindy travels a lot, you know with her job. In fact she rarely comes here with Elberta. Usually she comes by herself and stays with Steph and Johnnie. Which is why this is sort of a big deal with Elberta here, and all."

"Cindy's a sociologist isn't she?"

"Yeah. And she's good so she gets a lot of grants and awards and gets invited to go and study different places, so she travels a whole lot. Anyway, a few years after Cindy and Elberta got together, Elberta's mother got real sick—she was apparently a pretty hard-core alcoholic, and crazy

THE CHOSEN FAMILY



BUT I LIKE LIVING IN A RUT!!

as a loon. Which is why Elberta doesn't drink. Of course, you haven't met her, but I would consider her sort of emotionally unstable."

"How come?"

"Well, she does real kind of odd things. Of course that's a whole other story," Tina said in her familiar tone.

"Huh," Liz said, knowing that this was just the beginning.

"So Elberta's mother got real sick and she didn't have any money or anything, and . . . well, Cindy is real into studying relationships and the way things work, so she suggested that Elberta's mother

come and live with them. Which she did. And Cindy ended up writing a paper on the cultural aspects of an alcoholic parental relationship. But that's a whole other story," Tina said.

"That must have been hard on the relationship."

"Well, at first, I guess it was okay, but then Elberta just kind of got crazier, and Cindy didn't have to put up with quite as much because she could go on these trips and stuff. Anyway, during one of these trips she had an affair with Steph."

"No kidding?"

Tina shook her head. "Well, Steph was with Lucy at the time, and felt real guilty afterwards, and didn't want Lucy to find out, even though it was a terrible relationship and they were going to break up anyway. So, it was a secret."

"Do they still sleep together?"

"Who?"

## 70 Readers' Forum

"Cindy and Steph," Liz said.

"As far as I know they only slept together that once, but everybody knows, except Elberta, and Lucy, of course, and I don't think that Steph has told Johnnie, her new lover."

"Why not?"

"Well, she was afraid that Johnnie wouldn't understand and wouldn't let her spend so much time with Cindy, going with her to study, that sort of thing," Tina said. "See Johnnie was with Carol, and Carol didn't want to be monogamous, and so Carol had all kinds of affairs and stuff, but Johnnie didn't like it, couldn't stand it in fact, and when Carol finally broke up with Johnnie, Johnnie said she would only get with someone who was faithful. She didn't want to go through the non-monogamous stuff again. It made her crazy. And so Steph doesn't want Johnnie to get crazy about her and Cindy spending so much time together."

"That makes sense."

"Anyway, so many people know and it's such a secret, that I'm afraid that it'll just slip out of someone's mouth over drinks."

"Does that have anything to do with why everyone sobered up?"

"What?" Tina asked, confused. She shook her head. "That's a totally different story. Now where was I? Oh yeah, so anyway, Johnnie isn't totally innocent either, because when she was with Carol, she slept with Elberta, and Elberta felt so guilty that she told Cindy. They were staying at the house on Juniper St., and Elberta woke up in the middle of the night and started confessing. Well, Cindy wanted to call Johnnie, but Elberta thought that they should just get us in on the conversation, to help them work it out, so . . . well, we were all up at 4:00 a.m. working out their relationship."

"Had Cindy already slept with Steph?"

"Yeah."

"Why didn't she tell Elberta then?"

"Well, like I said, Elberta is kind of emotionally unstable, and Cindy didn't think she could handle it."

"But wouldn't it have made it a lot easier on Elberta if she had said, 'Listen, no big deal, I slept with Steph?'"

"It's much more complicated than that."

"Why?"

"Well, Cindy was afraid that if Elberta knew, she would not only have a breakdown, but she would also have to call Steph over, and if they called Steph over, then Lucy would find out, and Lucy has psycho-motor

seizures, which are controlled, but, when she gets real excited or involved she has one anyway."

"Is she the one you talked about who starts rearranging the furniture?"

"Yeah. But she doesn't really rearrange it. She gets up and moves it from one place to another and then back in the exact place again. Over and over. It's kind of odd to watch," Tina said. "But she also claims that when she has the seizure she comes in contact with the Goddess. So she doesn't really mind. But it's real hard if you're sitting on the piece of furniture she wants to move, because she gets violent if you refuse to move, or if she doesn't think you move quick enough."

"Is she coming this evening?"

"Maybe, I don't know. I haven't seen her much since she moved in with Mary."

"Who's Mary?" Liz asked, and no sooner had she gotten the words out than she thought maybe she shouldn't have asked.

"Mary is Connie's ex. They were together for four years before Connie and I got together."

"I didn't know that. I thought Connie had been with that woman in the history department."

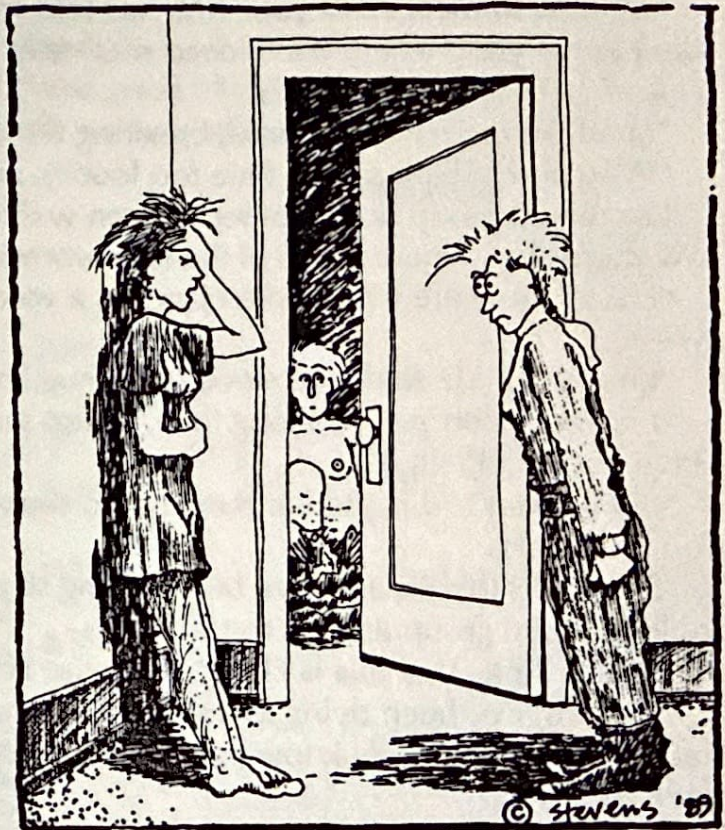
"That was during the same time, but it didn't last very long," Tina said. "It was just an affair. Both Connie and Mary had affairs then."

"They had an open relationship?"

"Well they didn't call it that. But they both had an affair."

"Really?"

### THE CHOSEN FAMILY



I THOUGHT YOU SAID 'MAHOGANY'

"Yeah. But that's a whole other story," she said. "Are you ready?" They had pulled up outside the new restaurant.

"Sure," Liz said, and they got out of their car and walked into the restaurant to find a table of women waiting for them.

"Hi!" Steph said from across the table.

"Hi!" Elberta said, sitting next to Cindy. Cindy had a concerned look on her face.

They sat down at the table and everyone introduced themselves. Liz was nervous.

"It's nice to meet all of you. Tina has told me so much about you I feel like I know you." There was a dead silence at the table, panicked faces looked at Tina and then at Liz.

"Shall we order?" Cindy said, breaking the uneasy silence.

"Why not?" Steph said, a little too loudly, and motioned to the waiter.

Just then a group of four other women walked in the door. When Liz saw them she gulped. Three of the four women came to Liz's side.

"Liz, hi, how are you?" asked Janet in a voice that seemed overly sweet.

"I'm good," Liz said, and stood up to hug her friend, Ellen.

"I haven't seen you in a long time," Ellen said. "You're looking good. Have you met Peggy?"

"No I haven't." Liz put her hand out to shake Peggy's. "Nice to meet you," she said.

"So who is this Tina you've been talking so much about?" Ellen asked, looking at the group around the table.

"This is Tina, Tina this is Ellen." They shook hands.

"Tina, hi, I've been dying to meet you. Liz has told me so much about you, I feel like I already know you." Tina looked quickly at Liz and then back to Ellen.

Liz introduced Peggy, Ellen, and Janet to the women sitting around the table.

"Who was that?" Tina asked after they were gone.

"Oh, that's Ellen. She and I were, err, very close friends when I was with Maggie."

"You were with Maggie?" Cindy asked. "Maggie Cook?"

"The same," Liz said.

"I know Maggie. She and I have done some research together," Cindy said. "How long were you with her?"

"Four and a half years," Liz said, and looked hard at Cindy, remembering Maggie's research, that kept her out late many nights when they were together. "Up until last year, about this time."

"You're kidding? Well, isn't that something," Cindy said. "Small world isn't it?" She turned away and began talking to Steph.

"So were you and Ellen . . . intimate?" Tina asked Liz in a whisper.

"I'll tell you about it later," Liz replied quietly.

"Who was the other woman, the fourth, who didn't come over to the table?" Tina persisted.

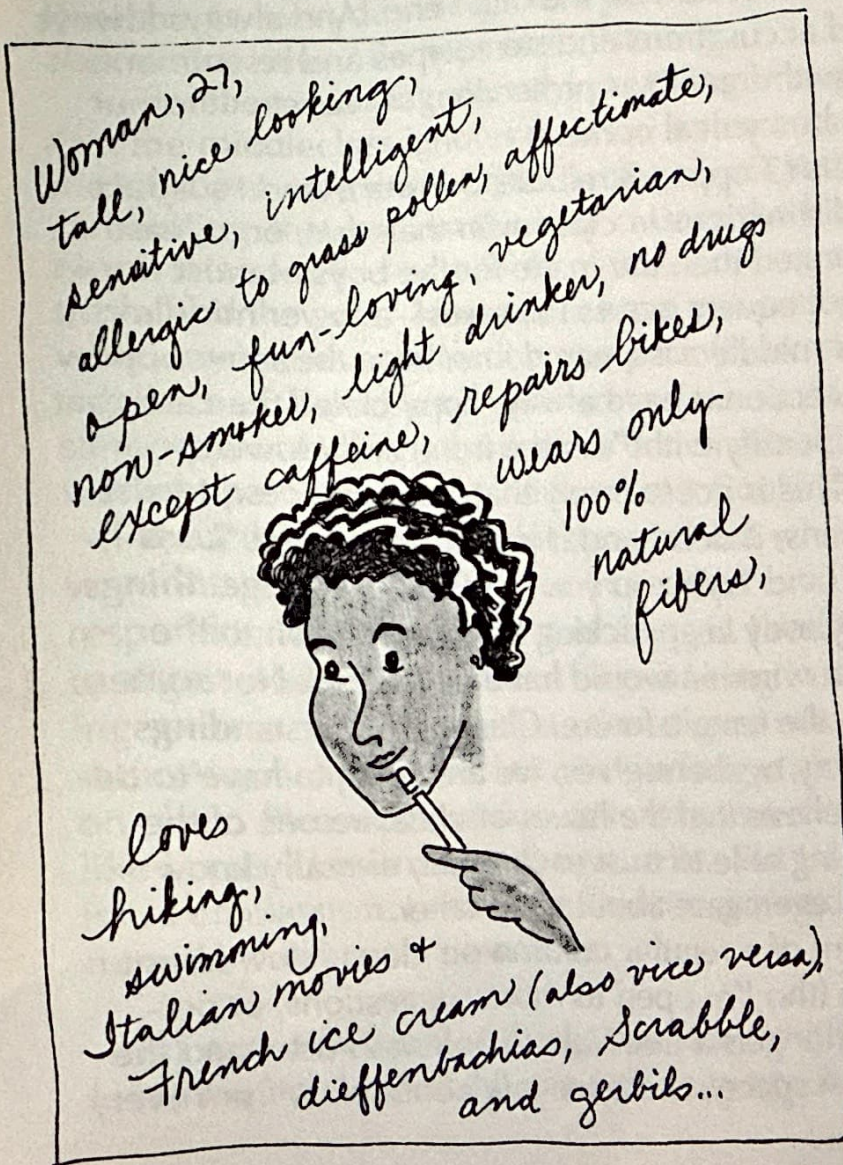
"Later," Liz said firmly.

The waitress brought their food.

"To long life!" Cindy said, "and good friends!"

And the women clinked their water glasses in agreement.

Alice Trabaudo



... seeks same.

Zara

## And In This Corner . . . .

JMax

So how are we going to deal with classism among ourselves? As far as I can see, as a group we only pretend to understand it—not that it hasn't been written on and talked about eloquently, and even good (haha). But Class remains a painful thorn. Torture for us on the bottom, denial and non-productive guilt and confusion on the other end. And always always always name calling and accusations and stereotypes and resentments and the quiet silence of withdrawal, as protection, as we retreat to our class corners—our separate cynical corners.

All nine of them corners (3 upper, 3 middle, 3 lower). And I suspect that there may be more distinctions in class even than that, or at least that class is more complicated than the made-for-the-boys Marxist model. For one, it does not equate across the sexes—a lower middle-class woman and a lower middleclass man do *not* have the same opportunities, privileges, or protection. I have always appreciated the card that says "What class do you identify with?" on the front, and answers, "Womon" on the inside. This is not to imply that classism doesn't exist among wimmin and lesbians; it does, and it is destructive. The "Lord-it-over I'm better than you," and "Who do you think you are to get things better than me," and everybody keep kicking til you get down to the dog, is clearly not a system wimmin would have developed. Nor something we want to take into the female future. Class misunderstandings and problems won't go away by themselves, we are going to have to do something about them. I believe that the issues of class are one of the biggest obstacles to our being able to trust each other, or really know each other, and sometimes even care about each other.

This is the first installment of a regular column on class. How about "Cynical Corners" for a title (tho I'm open to more suggestions, or perhaps a contest and the winner gets a free Valerie Solanas Poster and the runner up a silver spoon)? A space where we talk about class from every

every angle. REALLY EVERY ANGLE, no holds barred; at least as far as class goes. But lets try (and succeed) in not being oppressive in other ways. This column truly wants to be a dialogue. (Around class issues I often find myself defensive, hurt, angry, confused and choosing to protect myself instead of speaking—does everyone?) For this column to be worth it, I need lots of dykes from *all* the classes to send things, even if they are only one liners . . . as a matter of fact one liners are my favorites. Once in a discussion with Claudia, trying to determine what fits in what class, she posed the question, "What magazines did your family subscribe to?" Some said playboy, readers digest, world report, life, photography—I laughed, what do you mean, *subscribe to*? My family could not always pay the rent, there was never any thought of *subscribe to*. That one liner gave us some real practical, non-abstract, non-esoteric ways of talking about class. And that is what I want this column to be. Real things, everyday things, that promote us thinking and learning about each other. Perhaps even listening.

I often hear working class dykes yelling in anger at middleclass dykes that the middleclass ignores their existence and often speaks as if the middleclass were the "norm." I want to yell at the working class for the same thing; they are not the only class in the lowerclass scheme. In North America there are three of us—working class, welfare and white trash, and the poor. How much have you really heard about welfare/-white trash (the untrained) or the poor (those struggling for food on a regular basis)? And yet if you had to, you could come up with many stereotypes of w/w or the poor as demonstrated by Lee's and Shoneys' workshop on classism at the Separatist Conference.

I want this column to print things about what really bugs us and I want the rest of us to *listen*, as in perhaps even *STOP* doing it, and/or respond to *WHY* we won't stop doing it. I want to give readers a chance to digest what is said without fingers being in their face or them behaving so unaware or guilty that others figure what is the use. Short clear stuff. Anyone interested in writing a longer piece: the issue after next is on class. Please please do, we need some movement on this subject; like Lupus, classism eats its own cells. But I don't just want a special issue on classism, I want it to be an *ongoing* discussion. It'll be determined by what you all write in.

I'll start with some of things that piss me off. This friend of mine keeps lamenting to me that she can't move to my state because she could no

longer make 36,000 a year. My entire family (7) never made 36,000 a year, my lover and I together don't make 20,000—does that mean that our lives are not worthwhile and are unhappy and a blight? It doesn't to me but does it to her?? Nobody wants to take a cut in pay, and I've tried to empathize along that line, but she knows how much money I make, and she doesn't need to keep harping on how goddess awful it would be if she were in the same boat. Why can't she figure this out for herself? Why is it that I am suppose to tell her?

Then there is the one about how editing offends and oppresses the lower classes. Who is speaking here?? Personally my class would do almost anything to not appear stupid—especially stupid in print, where anyone can pick it up and laugh at you or snub you at their own leisure. That is the humiliation not worth risking; not the privilege of having somebody else seriously consider your writing and whether it says what you *think* you are saying or *want* to be saying. I do not know the person who exists that could not benefit from an editor. And who do you suppose it is that has such arrogance that they think every word that comes out of their mouth is/should be crystal clear to *everyone* else? And who is it that expects *all* of us to *have* the time and *take* the time to sit down and read (much less the money to pay for and print) ten of their pages when they could have said the same thing in five? From experience I know it is not the lower classes.

And what class 'foul paws' (faux pas) have I done lately? I just hate it when someone gets you talking about the stupid things you have done but never admits to any themselves—how are we supposed to learn from our own mistakes if we never admit to *making them*. When talking with this Native American lesbian I referred twice to doing something which hasn't been done a lot as, "we'll just have to 'pioneer' it." She said, "That word doesn't have a real good connotation to me." The second time I said it tho I could see this look of aggravated despair cross her eyes—the same look I feel when some classist remark is made by some hopelessly unaware higher-than-me classed dyke who doesn't even know she has just insulted me. Racism and classism—these two have in common the element of one-up-man-ship and insensitivity to some one else's reality. To know (or care about and show respect to) a class lower than yourself is not necessary to your own survival. Throw "pioneer" out!

How about you—what would you like to throw out? I am not so naive, however, as to think that we are ever going to be perfectly understood or appreciated by other classes. We have to leave room for shit

like resentments because they are there. It has also been my observation that classes right *next* to each other have a *harder* time with each other than those more removed; maybe it is the competition, or that it is easier (and safer) to be irritated by what is chaffing you than by something farther away.

It's a little scary for me to have only recently realized how angry I am at the "working class" for denying me and mad at myself for denying me too. I object to the term "working class" on two fronts; 1) they (wc) are NOT the only ones who do *work*, 2) they get an awful lot of mileage (hey ain't I great for going to work everyday) out of their piddly oppressive jobs. I'm pretty angry at social workers too who got paid for looking down on me and then wanted me to be grateful to boot. My upper lowerclass friends are surprised to hear that I identify as mid lowerclass because they haven't heard me talk about it much. Well I've never noticed any kudos for doing so; nor have I found anything prideful about poverty. Except from the sickos who seem to romanticize downward mobility, or make themselves feel more politically correct by finding some rotten thing in their childhood that they have in common with me. (Is this supposed to make me feel good?) And then use this information against someone higher classed than they, who didn't have *that* oppression, so they can feel good about themselves in comparison.

The lower middleclass and upper lowerclass may belong to the "clean plate club" but often my class leaves a little something on their plate, to make a point, if only to themselves, that they are NOT hungry and/or to deny that they ever have been. Also I don't believe that telling you are white trash is particularly safe (I'm learning from the Native Americans who now make up *only* 1% of the U.S total population.) When push comes to shove and there are too many people in this world who do you think they are going to start eliminating—not the ones who they have fit into their "working" systems, however oppressively.

Mostly the so called middle class and working class are so busy going at each other that there isn't time for me. I think we will stay confused and stuck about our class differences until we acknowledge that there are more than three classes. And what about the entire upper class division—Are you out there?—Or don't you know how to read because you never *had* to learn (haha).

My middleclassed friends wonder why I identify as "your basic white trash" because they say that that is a name put on me by someone else

and why am I choosing to accept it. Because I *already* have been beaten over the head with it; *plus* internalized it, I need to address it as *is*. To whose benefit would it really be to give it a more socially acceptable name? That is what you called me and that's how you treated me; so eat it—trash that is, that's what you thought was good enough for me. I have spent years of my life cowering from that phrase. Well I am taking it back! Mostly because I love to see the faces of those like me when I say it proudly and loudly—and like I finally know the truth: that the poverty was a set-up, and that it really wasn't my fault.

You can imagine how I feel about the "create your own reality" phrase being spouted at any lesbian functions. The u.s. government gave out powdered milk in the early fifties (probably left over rations from ww2) whose calcium content was non-existent—but they never told that to the wimmin waiting in the long lines who thought they were doing nutritionally right by their children. Neither us kids nor our mothers *created* our calcium-less reality but I now live with that reality (poor teeth and different sized spinal bones for starters) everyday of my life.

If I were in one of the middle or upper class divisions, sitting in a workshop on "Classism," I wouldn't be comfortable speaking either [which probably isn't a bad idea because 1) you can learn a lot more listening and 2) it gets very boring listening to middle class girls yell at other middle class girls for being classist]. But I wonder what you are thinking?? Do you feel guilty or hurt? Are you so busy being defensive that you are unable to think clearly at the moment? Do you fear for your lives with images of the French or Russian revolutions flashing before you? Are you liberaling out, you know, nodding and pretending to be hearing but not taking a thing home with you that you would change? Is the talk you *do* do just trying to cover your ass so no one will think you don't know what classism is? I've never known dykes to be so reticent to talk as when the issue of class comes up. So here is your chance—what do you want to show and what to you want to tell? And what do *YOU* want this column to be?

Can understanding class improve your lovelife and friendships? Talking about class isn't all painful and somber. Not only can it promote real depth and insight but is sometimes quite hilarious . . . more on this next issue.

# Guerilla Feminism

All the following information about actions in Massachusetts is from newspaper clippings and other material sent to LE anonymously.

## ⚡ Positively Revolting Actions ⚡

Hurray! Hurray! Hurray! Three big wommyfull cheers for our sisters who have been busy activating/agitating our local community. . . .

Last October, on Halloween Day, an unknown number of wimmin coordinated a massive wheat paste postering campaign in Northampton and Amherst. . . [Posters, shown on next page] . . were pasted in many places including Amherst and Northampton High Schools, wimmin's bathrooms and wimmin's dressing rooms. . . .

In early November, somewommon/wimmin went into numerous churches in Northampton and Amherst and stickered the prayer books with facts about violence against wimmin.

Another unidentified group(s) organized a stickering campaign of all the major drug stores in Northampton and Amherst. Reportedly, stickers saying, "Condoms may protect you from AIDS, but they won't protect you from MEN!" and, "Attention women! Stop sucking, start biting," were placed on all the condom boxes. In addition, much of the make-up soon bore stickers saying "This is women hating!"

Stop signs in the area have started sprouting additional spraypainted messages. Some examples include "STOP male terrorism," "STOP penis mentality," and "STOP rapists." The list continues to grow.

"Women's Revolution Now!" has been seen by many on several bridges in Northampton. . . .

Newsflash!!! . . [In] . . the March 3rd edition of *The Cynic*, . . [a] . . Univ. of Vermont newspaper, . . [a] . . full page Budweiser ad depicting three women in bathing suits lying on a towel was altered to carry the following message: "This ad exploits women." The added words were not discovered until after 5,000 copies came back from the printer. . . .

Excerpted from *Valley Women's Voice*, Amherst MA, April 88.

**Can you really trust**  
**How men**  
**really feel**

**FORCE** "The moment he grabbed the knife, I was terrified."  
**HOW IT HURTS** **Fear** **TOUGH GUYS** that pack a punch  
 "I didn't know what he might do next."  
**TURNING POINT** The Breakthrough.  
 not anymore  
**Demand more**  
**ATTENTION WOMEN!**  
**STOP SUCKING, START BITING.**  
**FREE** "We just didn't want to be around these parks anymore."

**Can you spot the penis in your local park?**

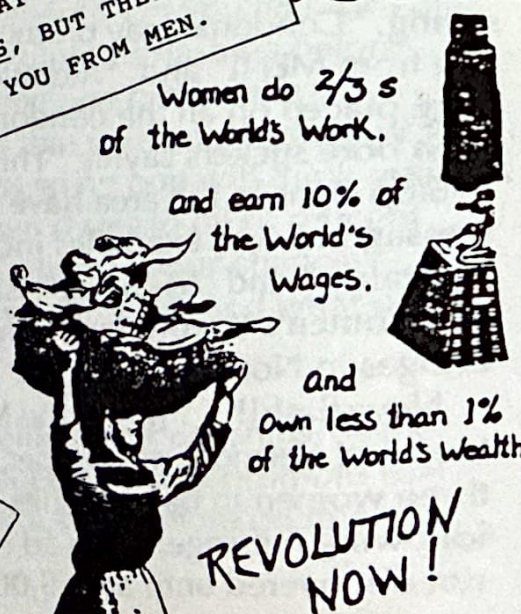
- A rape is reported every three seconds in the United States
- One out of every three American women will be raped in her lifetime.
- 45% of reported rapes occur in the home.
- 67% of rapists are known by the victim.
- 71% of rapes are planned. 90% of gang rapes are planned.
- One out of every four women are sexually abused before the age of 18, some say before the age of 12, 75% of the time by someone they know, 38% of the time by a family member.
- 2,000 women are raped every day in this country.
- 1 in 17 rapists are brought to trial.
- Men are three times as likely to rape non-white women.
- 95% of all violent crime in this country is committed by men.

**REVOLUTION NOW!**

His affections may be narrowly focused  
**SEX FOR SHELTER**  
 WORK AND MOTHERHOOD  
 Feel trapped  
 "STAND BY YOUR MAN"  
 IF YOU CAN'T RELY ON THE CHILD SUPPORT SYSTEM,  
 what's a mother to do  
 you can't live on love  
 a Healthy Pregn  
**ACE**  
**FUCKING MEN HAS ALWAYS BEEN DANGEROUS: NOW IT'S DEADLY.**  
**IT'S A WOMAN'S PREROGATIVE TO CHANGE**

CONDOMS MAY PROTECT YOU FROM AIDS, BUT THEY WON'T PROTECT YOU FROM MEN.

Women do 2/3 s of the World's Work, and earn 10% of the World's Wages.  
 and own less than 1% of the world's wealth.



**REVOLUTION NOW!**

## Valentine's Day cards defaced in Amherst, Northampton shops

Valentine's cards and other cards in two branches of the same store were torn up or were stickered with messages such as "Romance is a conspiracy against Women; Beware of the Rapist with the flowers in his hand," and "They say it's romance, but it feels like rape. They say it's love, but it feels like hate." In mid-January the Northampton store had put up a Valentine window display with a poster of Marilyn Monroe. Shortly afterwards a woman phoned the store to say, "This is a sign of rape." Later a typewritten note appeared on the window saying, "This is woman-hating." On Feb. 8 paint was sprayed on the window to cover the lower part of the poster. On the two days following the card trashing, eggs were thrown at the store window.

Info from *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, Northampton, MA, Feb. 15, 88.

## Magazines destroyed in protest of pornography, rape

While one woman distracted the store clerk, two others poured ink on pornographic magazines at The Newstand store and destroyed them. The damages were estimated at \$1000. That same night a message about pornography and rape was written on the store's front door. "Vandals" had been "plaguing" the store for several months by stickering the porno magazines.

In the same month "Dead men don't rape" was spray painted on a downtown wall. Later the word "Dead" was crossed out and the phrase "or you will die" was added.

Info from *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, March 9 and April 4, 88.

## A True Story

In March 88 women called a nighttime protest of the Delta Upsilon fraternity's planned bikini contest charity fundraiser. Five women wielding a banner with the blood red words, "DISMEMBER THE BOYS CLUBS," strode purposefully into the protest. The males shuffled and swore and yelled and grunted. They bullied other women in the protest,

some of whom tried to soothe them. However, when the men finally moved toward the women with the banner, other protestors formed a line in front of the banner.

The bikini contest was cancelled when the sponsor, Miller Lite, withdrew in response to the protestors' boycott of the club where the contest was to be held.

In September 88 "DIS-MEMBER THE BOYS CLUBS" was painted in large letters on the Delta Upsilon fence.

Info from *Valley Women's Voice*, May 88,  
and Univ. Massachusetts *Daily Collegian*, Amherst, MA, Sept. 9, 88.

## Feminist messages scrawled at churches

On easter morning members of the first congregational church were greeted with "Dethrone the male Gods" painted on their church's front steps. Parishioners of the nearby blessed sacrament church found this message and "She is rising" on their sidewalk and fence.

The pastor of st john's episcopal church found *his* church's message so 'crude' he asked that it not be published. Four years earlier the church had hung an easter banner saying "He is risen." In response a banner was hung outside a nearby Smith college dorm saying, "She is rising." Since then the church's banner has read, "Christ is Risen."

Info from *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, April 4, 88.

## More Positively Revolting Actions

"Rape is war" was spraypainted in various locations of the Univ. Massachusetts Amherst campus.

Flyers were posted around campus and in the center of town reading "Lesbians are everywhere" and "The reason men continue to rape is they continue to get away with it."

On April 13th "Rape is War" was spray painted on the ramp of the campus administration building. "Take a bite out of patriarchy" and "Dismantle the phallogratic sadosociety" were spray painted outside a campus dining hall. [*Suspects were apprehended in this case. After they agreed to remove the messages, charges were not filed.*—JS]

Info from *Valley Women's Voice*, May 88.

## Masked women disrupt arraignment

On Sept. 12, 88, 9 women dressed in black, wearing black stocking masks with the holes outlined in red, interrupted the arraignment of Alan Reyes, accused of stabbing Virginia Ferrer to death. Virginia was stabbed several times in the heart in the alley outside her home, while her eldest daughter watched. The women pointed at Reyes "with clawlike fingers" and chanted in unison "Every act will have consequences. Your action



will come back to you. He should have known his action will have consequences." [Here the chanters were paraphrasing Susan Griffin, *Women and Nature*, p. 186.—JS] "This is not this man's first day in court. That was not Virginia's first pain. We say Virginia is not the only woman." "We will avenge Virginia's death. Virginia is here. You should have known Virginia is here."

The judge called a recess and had the courtroom cleared. Outside the 9 laughed raucously. When asked who they were and where they were from, they said "We're all Virginia from Turner Falls. We're women. Virginia is not the only woman."

Three days later a candlelight vigil for Virginia was interrupted by verbal assaults from males, including Virginia's estranged husband, another of her batterers.

Info from *Daily Collegian*, Univ. Mass., Sept. 15, 88,  
*Greenfield Recorder*, Greenfield, MA, Sept. 12, 88,  
and *Springfield Morning Union*, Springfield, MA, Sept. 13, 88.

## **Vandals leave notes protesting pornography**

After the porno magazines at The Newstand were destroyed with ink, a letter warning the store to stop selling pornography was sent in April to the store manager. In July and August the messages "Death to Pornographers" and "Women Want Vengeance" were spraypainted on the side of the building. The messages reappeared twice after being painted over. In early August a large rock was thrown through the store window with the same messages. A similar rock and message were also thrown through the window of a card store.

Info from *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, Aug. 4, 88.

## **OCCUPIED TERRITORY**

for the revolutionary imagination in all feminists

\* "VIRGINIA: ♀♀ WILL AVENGE YOUR DEATH" was spray painted on the courthouses in N'ton and Greenfield.

\* "DEATH TO RAPISTS, KKKOPS AND KKKOURTS: ♀♀ WILL AVENGE TAWANA" was spray painted on the N'ton court house in October.

\* . . . a rock bearing the names "Vivian, Tawana, Mildred, Virginia, Sharon" was thrown through the window of The Newsstand. Their window was smashed in August by a rock bearing the message, "Death to pornographers. Women want vengeance."

\* The locks of several porn and video stores in N'ton and Greenfield were filled with glue.

\* Several gallons of red paint was poured over the steps and front of Expo Video in Greenfield, a place Mark Branch frequently rented horror films. [Mark Branch, inspired by slasher movies, slashed two women to death in the Greenfield/Turner Falls area. He was found two months later hanging from a tree in the woods, an apparent suicide.—JS] "Women's Blood, Your Profit" was spray painted on the side of the building.

\* Surely you know some territory that needs occupying.

Excerpted from *Valley Women's Vengeance*, December 88.

## Rampage on adult bookstores follows Father's Day protest

A group of militant feminists allegedly went on a rampage in the Combat Zone yesterday, vandalizing adult bookstores after a Father's Day rally protesting "patriarchal violence against women and children."

The rally—held at Boston Common by a group of self-proclaimed "man haters"—drew about 75 women who heard organizers step up to a microphone and viciously lash out at men and fathers. . . . Many women in attendance held placards with slogans such as "Mad at Dad" or "Father Doesn't Know Best."

"It's not a war between the sexes, but a war being waged by one sex against the other. Rape, battering and incest are the holy trinity of patriarchy," [Gail] Dines said angrily.

At 2:30 p.m., shortly after the noon rally broke up, 50 to 100 women, hoisting signs and chanting, "Save our Sisters," stormed three adult bookstores along lower Washington Street, overturning video cases and book racks, throwing magazines onto the ground and smashing windows, shop owners said. . . .

Police called to the scene . . . arrived too late to apprehend any members of the group . . . .

Bobby, an employee at Love Toy Book Shop at 646 Washington St. who didn't want his last name printed, said he was sitting at the back of the store listening to the Red Sox game, when "this group of women came in screaming."

"I told them they couldn't come in here because they had minors with them," Bobby said as he stood amid the broken glass . . . .

"They just pushed their way in, turned over the video case, ripped magazines off the shelves and picked up the postcard rack and threw it

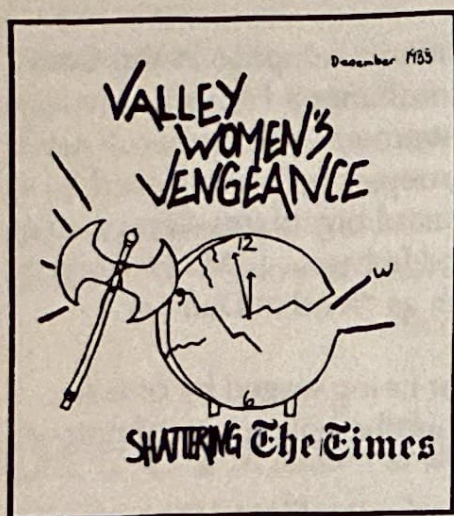
right through the door," he said, pointing to the metal stand and shattered door. . . .

Workers at the nearby Fantasy Land bookstore stood in front of a shattered window as they picked books off the floor and re-stacked them yesterday afternoon. . . .

"They kicked in the glass and came and turned over the bookshelves. We grabbed them . . . and pushed them out and started yelling at them. We didn't know what hit us."

Excerpted from *Boston Herald*, June 19, 89.

The remainder of this article is excerpted from *Valley Women's Vengeance*, an entirely anonymous newspaper, December 88.



## First Notes on Strategy: Guerilla Feminism (Excerpted)

The feminist undercurrent is building strength in these final hours of the 1980's. The next wave of the Women's Liberation Movement gathers force, collects itself, prepares to win this time. This new feminism is that old feminism with more than twenty years of political bat-

tles and hard thinking behind it, and with an increasingly acute sense of just what it will take to get the Movement moving again.

Those of us who are part of this undercurrent recognize that the climate of the 1980's has forestalled the re-emergence of feminism as a central, powerful, political force in this country. The "climate" has the character of a heavy, suffocating atmosphere in which all our attempts seem to dissipate or disintegrate from within before they even get off the ground. The educational efforts that have kept the movement alive have not had the explosive effects they should have had, and will have if the climate itself can be changed.

In order to do this we must re-examine our ideas about political action. In addition to the educational efforts already going on, a new concept of action as something other than directly educational must be

developed. Through our discussions and reflections upon our own participation in protests designed to "raise awareness" about some particular crime against women, we have begun to realize that this definition of political action, when taken as the sum of its possibilities, not only limits our creativity (in terms of the kinds of actions we attempt), but also proves ineffective even in the limited arena of "raising awareness" that it sets for itself.

The reason for this is that individual consciousness is inextricably entangled with the social fabric in which we live, work and learn. These structures themselves limit the possibilities for all of us, no matter how aware we are. The social fabric of 1980's patriarchy is so tightly woven that our efforts tend to become part of it rather than threaten it. The political "space" in which we act, in which women continue to be brutalized, must be forced open, must be made to effervesce, which means "to bubble, hiss, and froth," so that feminists will be able to think, to work, and to move. In an effervescent political climate feminist teaching and writing will have explosive effects, much as they did in the late 60's and early 70's.

In order to create this effervescence, feminist action must target the social fabric itself. It is through actual attacks on the institutions and structures of patriarchy that this tightly woven fabric that is choking all of us can be worn thin, torn perhaps. This loosening will create the political space in which the movement can move again.

The recognition of the conditions under which we are working has led to the inception of a sort of feminist practice that will decisively characterize the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1990's. This type of feminist practice has its roots in the radical feminism of the late 60's and early 70's. It involves small bands of women, some of them operating as covens, some of them simply as action groups, targeting certain institutions, and/or men that are their agents, for harassment and attack.

These actions are designed to shake things up, to shock and frighten the men who run the institutions of patriarchy, including the institutions of rape and battering. These actions are not designed to "educate" in any direct way, but to alter the political climate as a whole.

So, sisters, what next? Guerilla feminism is a big part of the answer to that question. It is left to us to continue to elaborate a practice and a

theory of strategy, to continue to identify what blocks movement, to continue learning the lessons of this last deadly decade. It is left to us to enter the 1990's prepared to take up the historic project of Women's Liberation, prepared to win. Let this newspaper be a first forum for the thinking that is so necessary for an effective revolutionary movement. ❖

### **When you go spray painting, remember. . . .**

1. Shake the can thoroughly before you're at the site. The sound is loud and distinctive.
2. Pop the top off before you leave. It can be tricky. In a pinch, use a key to pry it off.
3. Wipe all finger prints off the can. Wear gloves or paint your finger tips with clear polish. You may have to ditch the can in a pinch. The inside of plastic/latex gloves is a prime spot for fingerprints, so never leave gloves at the site.
4. It is best to go out while there are still a few people around so you don't stand out; but avoid places/times when cops are out cruising (weekends, near rowdy bars, etc.).
5. Use a message that is short, timely, and as threatening as possible.
6. Whoever is doing **STOP RAPE** signs, please consider that "rapists" would be more direct and actually name an agent.
7. When you're done spraying, leave immediately. Never stick around.
8. Avoid going out in large groups. You don't want to look suspicious. Always have at least one woman as a lookout. Agree on warning signals ahead of time.
9. Confidentiality is crucial! And never admit to anything, no matter what you're caught with or what they (cops, etc.) say to you. **They lie.**
10. It's not as scary as it seems.

*We end with the text of a flyer distributed at several Take Back the Night Marches and similar occasions.*

---

Peel back the veneer of everyday life. What is underneath?

Think about their eyes, always on you, prying you open, on display. Remember the hands you couldn't stop, crawling like insects. That somehow he felt pleasure in this.

There is a war going on. We are living in a terrorist state.

The Suffragettes left graffiti everywhere they could. They used paint, chalk, blood, and courage. They threw bricks thru shop windows. They blew up mailboxes. They disrupted public functions from weddings to Parliament. They committed arson. They were force-fed (tortured) in prison. They did this for 70 years. Every day. Whose feet have bloodied the path by which you have come here?

Women's liberation does not mean "providing services" for women who have been on the front lines.

The targets are everywhere. The targets are everything. The courts. Police. Fraternities. Churches. Porn shops. Vogue magazine, make-up counters, mini skirts. The man who molested you as a child. The date who made you suck him off.

Have you ever looked at pornography? Have you seen "Tit Torture Magazine?" "Pigtails and Pussy?" Have you read "Black Bitch in Heat"? This is what men jerk off to. They spend \$9 billion a year on it.

Spray paint is cheap. Bricks are cheaper. Ink, coffee, chewing gum, rumors, spells and curses, guerilla theater: use the weapons at hand.

Two women destroyed \$1000 of pornography at The Newstand on King St. by squirting ink on it. They have not been caught. Rumor has it that The Newstand makes most of their profits selling pornography. 50 women could do \$50,000 of damage.

There are thousands of women serving 20-year-to-life sentences for killing the man who was beating, raping and torturing them. These women are political prisoners.

What would justice look like? Who will see it done?

In Iowa, a huge group of women kidnapped a man who had raped dozens of women. They castrated him in a cornfield. Closer by, a man who had raped at least 10 women was captured by a band of women. They stamped "rapist" all over his body. They super-glued his hands to his penis to his balls to his legs. This is happening everywhere.

What is your freedom worth? What are you willing to risk? A night in jail? A \$50 fine? Your life?

The boys are betting on our compliance, our ignorance, our fear. We have always refused to face the worst that men have done to us. The boys count on it. The boys are betting we cannot face the horror of their sexual system and survive. The boys are betting that their depictions of us as whores will beat us down and stop our hearts. The boys are betting that their penises and fists and knives and fucks and rapes will turn us into what they say we are—the compliant women of sex, the voracious cunts of pornography, the masochistic sluts who resist because we really want more. The boys are betting. The boys are wrong.

Andrea Dworkin

*Pornography: Men Possessing Women (1981), p. 224.*

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# Defusing the Bomb: Lesbian Ethics and Horizontal Violence\*

Claudia Card

On Friday the 13th of this January, Catherine Rouse, former manager of Madison's former feminist restaurant Lysistrata, took a gun purchased a few days before, drove to the house of her ex-lover, Joan, who had recently ended their relationship, and shot her three times, dead. She did not find Joan's new lover. She then drove home and shot herself, dead. She warned Joan days before of her intentions, practiced shooting in the country. Her sister, a university dean of students, worried that Catherine was suicidal, set up emergency counselling for her and reached her by phone. Catherine said, "Thank you very much," did not mention having shot Joan, hung up the phone, and shot herself.<sup>1</sup>

Catherine's murder-suicide ended a life begun as an abused child and marked by both violent relationships with women and lesbianfeminist activism. It also took the life of her artist friend, Joan. Thinking of Catherine and Joan, I turned again to Sarah Hoagland's *Lesbian Ethics*.<sup>2</sup>

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\*Thanks to Vicky Davion and to Sarah Hoagland for comments and conversations that helped me clear my head in thinking my way through this thicket and to Jeanette Silveira for very helpful editorial suggestions. Earlier drafts of this essay were presented to the Midwest Society of Women in Philosophy at Indianapolis in March 1989 and at the Society of Women in Philosophy session at the Central Division of the American Philosophical Association in Chicago, April 1989.

As used in this essay "*Lesbian Ethics*" (in italics) refers to the book by Sarah Hoagland, and "Lesbian Ethics" (not in italics) refers more generally to the ethics we are building in our communities. In no instance do the words refer to the journal you have in your hand.

*Lesbian Ethics* invites us to think how to build community, avoid disabling survival strategies, end horizontal hostilities, do *more* than just survive, avoid demoralization, choose creatively, develop agency and integrity in oppressive contexts, create bonds that don't bind, become resistant to oppression because dishabituated to domination and subordination. The invitation moves me deeply. Two of its fundamental objectives are (1) to identify interactions that foster growth rather than deterioration of lesbian community, and (2) to address *internal* ("horizontal") hostilities that jeopardize lesbian community. My concern here—although not a focus of the book—is with a part of the second objective, specifically, with *passionate lesbian violence* in intimate relationships.

Speculating that ethics based on control foster domination and subordination, *Lesbian Ethics* proposes to substitute an ethic of agency and integrity, in which *attending*, rather than control, plays a central role.\* On whether the new ethic is only for lesbian contexts, Sarah Hoagland hesitates:

What I am calling Lesbian Ethics are meant to be used in lesbian community, among ourselves. . . . Whether these values can be developed from a different angle as part of a political strategy to confront patriarchy is an open question. . . . I once felt these values were Meaningless in patriarchy. I am no longer sure. (*LE*, 22).

The doubt interests me. Lesbian ethics, even for lesbian community, must be prepared for serious hostility. As targets of oppression we have experienced hostile control from those with power over us. In response, we have developed our own forms of hostile control. We have learned

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\**Lesbian Ethics* reveals the obsession of modern western male ethics with control. Rights are controls. Theory of justice has become the theory of rights. The academy treats justice as the whole of ethics, and this is probably the main truth of Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1982). Blame, often a concern of retributive justice, is a control. Utilitarians, who decide right and wrong solely by consequences, want to determine outcomes, regardless of credit or blame. Sarah Hoagland notes, in a different context, that approval and disapproval are controls. (They are often ways of granting or withholding permissions.) And so I would add to the ethical theories she identifies as preoccupied with control the *emotive theory* of ethics, according to which "This is right" and "This is wrong" really assert nothing with any truth value but simply evince the speaker's approval or disapproval.

to listen and to watch. If we can be prepared for hostility among ourselves, perhaps we can meet the oppressor with our own ethics.

What does it *mean* to attend another? *Attend* comes from a word meaning "stretch." It can mean to turn the mind to, serve, wait upon, escort, accompany, be present to. *Paying attention* suggests noticing, perceiving, discriminating, exercising care. *Attendance* is often thought of as just being there. "Attention!" is a command in the army, producing a rigid posture. We have just traveled from stretching to rigidity, an interesting set of potentialities. (I love the image of a woman shouting, "Attention!" and everyone stretching in response.)

I have thought lesbians relatively good at attending lesbians—not always good at exercising judgment in attending but good at seeing the lesbians, where the lesbians are, what is of value in individual lesbians, what lesbians like, want, do well, enjoy.<sup>3</sup> Though not equally good at seeing all lesbians, lesbians seem often the best appreciators of lesbians—no mean achievement in a world rendering us invisible.

Attending is central to friendship. Being attended can affirm even those whose prospects are hopeless, as we learn in attending the dying. The excuse for not being there—"nothing we can do"—means things are beyond our control. Being there can, of course, be the best thing to do when things are beyond our control. The message of *Lesbian Ethics* is also that being there can be the best thing to do even when things are *not* beyond our control. Yet there is more to be said about attending: attending is not always friendly, and even when friendly can be very controlling.

I am wary of sliding from rejecting *an ethic based on control* to rejecting controls we need and should value, and also of overlooking hostile attending. Drawing on the feminist spirituality movement, *Lesbian Ethics* defines "power over" as the power of dominance and subordination, by contrast with "power from within," described as "not a controlling power" (LE, 118). The activity of *attending* is presented as a manifestation of power from within and as capable of empowering those who are its focus. Unstated assumptions seem to be that attending is *friendly* engagement and control either hostile or dangerous. Attending, however, is potentially lethal. Control is not always conflict-oriented, and it can repel rather than invite domination or subordination even when so oriented. I believe control lies at the heart of lesbian violence. Yet attending is there also.<sup>4</sup> I therefore want to extend the inquiries of *Lesbian Ethics* by taking up hostile attending, the controlling potentialities of

attending, control that is not conflict-oriented, and other potentialities of conflict-oriented control than its potentialities to foster domination and subordination.

Sarah Hoagland reminds us that in discussing a work we make a statement as much about ourselves as about the work (*LE*, 149). What follows reflects my interests, defenses, focus, and limits, those of a lesbian who has been on the receiving end of violence in intimate relationships, rather than on the battering end. I leave it to those with the latter experience to take up the responsibility of writing from their own perspectives. *Lesbian Ethics* gives me a new vocabulary to think about violence among us and helps me clarify why I am more sanguine about control and less sanguine about attending than *Lesbian Ethics* is.

Many lesbians live with lesbians they love passionately who batter them.<sup>5</sup> The battery can begin with Mother and continue with lesbian lovers. Mother may be, in a way, the first lesbian relationship. It can be highly charged and dangerous for the daughter, thanks to her relative powerlessness and her mother's resentments, envies, and jealousies. While it can be true, as Sarah Hoagland argues, that control, by anticipating conflict and hostility, can actually foster conflict and hostility, nonetheless, such daughters do not need to learn that their attempts to defend themselves fostered their mothers' assaultive behavior. Rather, they need to learn that they did not create their mothers' hostilities.

Daughters of hostile mothers often must learn to attend their mothers from early childhood—to appreciate Mother's moods and needs, comfort her, keep her company, be there for her, fully present. These lessons may be taught by battery, perhaps reenacting the mother's own earlier relationship with a parent. Such childhoods set us up for adult relationships in which we either become hostile attention demanders ourselves or else especially vulnerable to others who are.

Battered children may be a little peculiar by the time they start school. They may cover with entertainment skills, clowning. I think about that in reading about how we need more clowns (*LE*, 245). Clowning can be a mask for pain we dare not feel, much less show, and a strategy of the insecure for winning friends.

*Lesbian Ethics* insists upon the option of withdrawal. I agree. However, although *Lesbian Ethics* never admits this, withdrawal is significant control over others, closing options that would otherwise give them access to us. There are other ways I feel control *positively* connected to my

sense of agency. I take pride in it, cannot imagine *creativity*, for example, without it. Control brings order out of chaos, guides development with intelligence. Controls I value are *shape-giving*—not particularly conflict-oriented (e.g., effortless tone control in playing a musical instrument), and effectively *repelling* unwanted intervention—definitely conflict-oriented. I have learned slowly to shape my life and protect it against assaults, repelling as well as withdrawing. I like pushing and pulling, steering energy. I like the T'ai Chi concept of deflecting and redirecting hostile power. I aspire to being effectively repulsive, a pusher, a shaper.

"Controls" are, basically, checks. Checking is a matter of degree. To dominate is to check from all directions, leaving no leeway, nothing unmonitored—etymologically, to "lord" it over someone. (*Dominus* is "lord.") Controlling activities include monitoring, restraining, intimidating, preventing, policing, which have degrees, and also directing, commanding, seducing, manipulating, which sound more like Sarah Hoagland's idea of control as "bending others to our will" (*LE*, 117). Yet such bendings need not invite domination or subordination. Shaping suggests directing. Commanding suggests hierarchies but also gives us imperatives to repel aggression, deny it a certain uptake: ¡*basta!* stop! go away! (Some withdrawals—lowered eyes—actually can give the kind of uptake that escalates aggression.) Manipulation, such as intimidation and seduction, is devious. Yet I will have qualified praise even for manipulation, not as sabotage, but as connecting and disconnecting.

It is hard to evaluate attention or control abstracted from objects and attitudes. Some have paid me lots of attention but neglected my needs. Engrossed in me, they failed to see who I was. Yet I have benefitted as well as suffered as in some sense the focus of their attention.

Control, like money, is valuable for what it gets us. One thing it gets us is attention. When attention is valuable, that is often *not* for what it gets us but *for itself*. We bask in it; it warms like the sun, makes us feel valued, important, affects how we value ourselves. Attention is to the soul what air, water, and food are to the body—they keep it vital. Loss of attention may be more demoralizing than loss of control. If invisibility produces attention starvation, we might begin to think ethically about how we deal with our need for it. One means is abuse of attention itself. Attention, like control generally, is subject to abuse.

Among strangers a common abuse of attention is impertinence. Impertinent attending manipulates. Men routinely do it to us, pointedly

noticing that (usually anatomical) which is irrelevant to purposes for which we may have consented to interact (say, job interview). When we do it to each other, the pointed noticing is as apt to be of some irrelevant idiosyncrasy of manner or style as of anatomy or apparel. By pointed noticing we get another to attend to the fact that we are noticing, engineer an attention shift from the ostensible matter at hand to produce interaction on a different level. We learn this maneuver as a way to make ourselves visible to each other in a society where overt lesbian approaches are unsafe. If we sense danger, we can pretend, by adjusting our attention, that nothing happened. Such admittedly manipulative behavior can thus be constructive, as well as imaginative and fun. Playful interaction may be often deliberately impertinent, although not necessarily abusive. Flirting may be impertinence *par excellence*, disregarding another's agenda though not the other whose agenda it was. It becomes disrespectful of her if she chooses to interact *only* for certain purposes. For then it disregards her conditions for others' access to her, for engaging her attention.

If isolated impertinence is not a major concern, constant impertinence is crazy-making. Impertinent attending reveals attending as potentially harmful, depending on how it's done. More dangerous is concentrated hostile attending. Have you ever been the sustained target of focussed, hostile attention? Attenders can be *monitors*. Recall the last time you conducted a session that was attended by a monitor. Mary Daly's classes have been monitored by her department. Monitoring is warning activity. It *can* be friendly. Even when friendly it can be controlling, intimidating. Disengaging can be dangerous and requires skills. Refusal to engage can be dangerous if the attender is hostile. Those who batter focus inordinately, in ludicrous detail, on those they batter. Monitoring, more than acute battering incidents, is their great source of control. *Hostile attending is a form of control available even to those otherwise relatively impotent.* With histories of oppression, we should be alert to the danger of becoming monitors and being monitored by each other. Mothers raised in patriarchy are liable to excessive child-monitoring; we, mothers or not, may also be liable to lesbian-monitoring.

*Lesbian Ethics*, Chapter 3, does acknowledge certain limits to the ethical value of attending: others may need privacy; we may need to shield ourselves in attending others; we cannot always be a party to another's choices; we may unwittingly distort another's experience if there are

major differences between us. The points of view omitted, however, in acknowledging these limits are sometimes surprising. Ch. 3 argues, for example, that attending attackers is not helpful, apparently because doing so reinforces the attacker's low opinion of herself (LE, 131). I am concerned with what attending can do to or for *those targeted for attack*.

The model or paradigm circumstance considered by *Lesbian Ethics* is one in which we lack control as individuals over a situation *that we can neither abandon nor significantly alter* but within which we can still *respond* and "make a difference." This is a major paradigm of life under oppression. By reference to it Sarah Hoagland explores responses that develop agency and integrity. She sees danger from other lesbians as their trying to take over for us, benevolently, and alerts us that control, by anticipating conflict and hostility, can actually *foster* conflict and hostility.

By contrast, in my paradigm circumstance—also a major paradigm of oppression—we have learned helplessness instead of skills within situations we could learn to avoid, or within which we could *learn to make* significant alterations, if we weren't already so engaged. Dangers concerning me are passionate hostilities of lesbians toward lesbians and our lack of skill in disengaging and in repelling attacks. I worry about patriarchally inspired horizontal hostilities *not* fostered by our anticipating them and about habits of withdrawal that can escalate aggression.

We face situations of both kinds. A hypothesis to add to Sarah Hoagland's hypotheses about obstacles to lesbian community is that patriarchy gives us good reason to fear each other's hatreds because we have more *access* to each other than to those with power over us and because the *price* of harming us is not high. Black men in the U.S. who kill are more likely to kill black than white women and men, when it costs so much less and is so much easier.<sup>6</sup> For the same kinds of reasons, lesbians who kill are more likely to kill lesbians than to kill anyone else.

Let us see how an ethic of attention might respond effectively and well to horizontal violence among lesbians. Lesbian battery is unfortunate proof of agency under oppression. Counselling withdrawal of the battered is unhelpful when batterers pursue or when battering disables lesbians from withdrawing. Withdrawal of *outsiders* from batterers can facilitate battering. For, battery of intimates is often a highly private affair; some who would not dream of violence in the presence of outsiders will do incredible things to intimates in private. Attendance of *outsiders* can disempower batterers, an exploitable strategy. We may

need emergency outside attendance in relationship crises to interrupt scripts, disengage, intimidate without ulterior threats, thereby controlling—i.e., checking—without punishments and without domination.

Given the earlier recognition of the importance of withdrawal, the following, from Chapter 4, was surprising:

... not only is safety an illusion under patriarchy, it is not a useful goal among ourselves—for attempts to guarantee safety involve attempts to control (*LE*, 194).

Two paragraphs later, the following explanatory claim sounded alien to me:

The issue of safety among lesbians in community mostly involves not being laughed at, put down, ignored, outshouted, or in general taken for granted (*LE*, 194-5).

That is not what safety means to battered lesbians. It means safety from continual hostile monitoring, the ever-present threat of bodily battery, and from constant intentional assaults on one's self-esteem—deliberate, severe harms, not the unfortunate effects of benevolent intervention or ignorance but expressions of ongoing passionate hostilities: jealousies, resentments, envies. A lesbian who has to fear for her personal safety from the lesbian closest to her is not a good friend, even to herself. Such lesbian connections are terrifying. Safety from such deliberate harm is not only possible but necessary for agency and integrity.

If the key phrase in the quote just above is "in community," then my response is that we need a Lesbian Ethic that acknowledges we're not "there" yet, helps us get "there," and provides us with means of dealing with battering on our way. Or, if the key phrase is "among lesbians" and one were to claim—as Sarah Hoagland does not—that those who hate us cannot be truly "lesbian" (and thus cannot present an issue of safety among lesbians), my response is that many still fall "in love" with us, we are their erotic focus, they draw their life sustenance from interactions with us. Lesbians capable of hating us are also capable of gentleness, tenderness, and joyful excitement. We wouldn't get hooked if battering lesbians were nothing but hostile, only time tells when hostility is superficial and when it runs deep. The truth is that hatred presents serious issues of safety among us, threatening our integrity, our capacity for agency, and our very lives.

Calling someone a batterer is cited in Ch. 5 (*LE*, 216) as blaming and rejected as unproductive. If "calling" means "addressing as," that may be so. If "calling" means "pointing out," blaming need not be the issue but, rather, deciding whether a relationship is honorable or worth preserving, assessing our responses, maintaining self-respect, setting priorities when time and energies are limited. To deny access to batterers, shelters need to know who they are.

Yet batterers commonly interpret the battered's self-shielding as abusive and her attempts to escape as revenge; they manipulate by charging abuse and, consequently, make it very confusing for shelters to determine who is battering whom. Lesbians battered by lesbians lack credibility. Just as patriarchy supports men who batter, many lesbians identify with lesbian batterers as strong, assertive, not afraid to show their anger. Yet willingness to batter reveals neither assertiveness nor strength. It reveals a lack of scruples, and instead a reliance on others' scruples, loyalty, sense of responsibility.

Violence might not be an issue among us if we were raised in a society not obsessed with control. But that is where we were raised, and we bear the scars. A community of lesbians raised in patriarchy is a time-bomb of Catherines and Joans. We need strategies to defuse the bomb. To move out of *obsession* with control, we may need to be sure we all have basic forms of it. "Power from within" untranslatable into abilities to shape our lives and check unwanted intrusions may fuel hatred, destroying those to whom we have greatest access, those easiest to attack: other lesbians, our lovers, ourselves.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> I have used newspaper accounts as my sources for the facts reported herein, *The Capitol Times* and *The Wisconsin State Journal*, both of Madison, Wisconsin.


<sup>2</sup> *Lesbian Ethics, Toward a New Value* (Palo Alto: Institute for Lesbian Studies, 1988). I read and commented on two earlier full drafts of *Lesbian Ethics* but had not yet begun writing on lesbian violence at the time, was not thinking about it, and so, regrettably, did not make those applications then.

<sup>3</sup> For delightful elaboration, see Marilyn Frye, "To See and Be Seen: The Politics of Reality," in *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing, 1983), 152-174.

<sup>4</sup>Sarah Hoagland notes that attending and control are not opposites. I need to pause over this more than she does, however. For me, they do not even suggest different emphases, at least within certain areas.


<sup>5</sup>The literature on battery among lesbians is only beginning to come out. For example, *Naming the Violence: Speaking Out About Lesbian Battering*, ed. Kerry Lobel (Seattle: Seal, 1986), which gives perspectives of battered lesbians and rejects the idea of "mutual battering." I have reviewed that book in the American Philosophical Association's Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy 88: 1 (Nov. 1988), 3-7. The Seal Press has also published two other books with chapters on lesbian battering: *Getting Free: A Handbook for Women in Abusive Relationships* (1986) and *The Ones Who Got Away: Women Who Left Abusive Partners* (1987), both from Ginny NiCarthy [sic], who disagrees with the perspective of the Lobel book on the idea of "mutual battering."

<sup>6</sup>Alvin Poussaint develops these ideas in his essay, "Why Blacks Kill Blacks" in his book of the same title (New York: Emerson Hall, 1972).



## LESBIAN ETHICS

Sarah Lucia Hoagland



INSTITUTE OF LESBIAN STUDIES

*LESBIAN ETHICS uses lesbian experience as a starting point for redefining ethics. The overall thesis is that the values from anglo-european ethical philosophy undermine rather than promote lesbian connection. Challenging control in lesbian relationships, the book develops an ethics relevant to lesbians under oppression — one which avoids both blaming the victim and victimism, which embraces the spirit of lesbian resistance, and which encourages plurality.*

This is what we've been waiting for: original, illuminating, comprehensive and inspiring. Sarah Hoagland covers all the bases in the Ethics Game. I want everyone to read it!  
*Allix Dobkin*

Part reminder and part call to new value, there are no easy answers here, no once-and-for-all, but a fearless intelligibility which can help us avoid themistakes of the past as we embrace the dynamism of the present and future community.  
*Kate Clinton*

This book encourages compassion for lesbians among lesbians and I say "It's about time!" Above all it is brimming with vision and is so full of heart.  
*Naomi Littlebear Morena*

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## Nexus

*Nexus is an information exchange. A place to ask questions, make suggestions, to report on things that have worked (or haven't). Each new connection increases our power geometrically.*

### Lesbian Economy—A First Step

The following idea was sparked by a talk given at the Mountain Moving Coffeehouse for Womyn and Children in Chicago by Sarah Hoagland, about two years ago. In a group discussion following her talk, she challenged us to come up with some concrete ways to create a Lesbian economy. Right now, Lesbians are not in a position to be able to totally leave the patriarchal economy. What follows is a realistic, small first step, not the end solution.

The idea, though a very basic one, requires a conceptual jump from the way we are used to thinking about property.

Lesbians with excess goods would bring them to some central space, preferably one already near Lesbian traffic. Any Lesbian who wanted anything at this space would take it. The goods ordinarily wasted by Lesbians who had no use for them would now be funnelled back to benefit other Lesbians.

As a middle-class Lesbian, I daily have access to goods I don't need, or don't want. Only with the most valuable of these do I actively search for someone in the community who could use them. The time and energy expended to find someone who wants, say a pair of shoes, brand new, bought on sale (and therefore unreturnable), but too small, is not worth it, and I usually just donate such items to patriarchal charities, or eventually throw them away. Many Lesbians have access to excess goods through their jobs: free goods, overruns, discarded products, scrap. A vegetarian gets an "x-mas" turkey from her boss, a Lesbian gets a free bottle of motor oil with her gas fill-up, but it's not the kind she uses). A sweet aunt sends her annual holiday gift, a brand-new laminated plaque, featuring a flower-framed religious tract. A Lesbian's neighbor moves leaving behind usable furniture, another Lesbian changes

weight and doesn't need some of her clothes of the old size . . . the important point to note here is that all of these goods are to be excess, that is goods that normally would not be used by the donor/source. NO Lesbian should "sacrifice," or give up goods to which she has any attachment. This system will be based on the assumption that the source Lesbians of the goods will not be invested in what happens to them.

Any Lesbian would be free to come to the space, and take anything/-everything she liked. This would not be based on need. This is not a "charity," or necessarily a funnelling of goods from one economic class to another (although this would probably happen too). But rather a recycling of wasted goods back to those who can benefit from them. All Lesbians would be encouraged to take everything they could be possibly inclined to want. Taking would not be based on reciprocity; no donations of goods or money, or assumptions of future donations would be necessary to receive goods. The premise is that any movement of the goods that benefits a Lesbian is positive. If a Lesbian gets something at the space she would ordinarily buy, and instead spends the money on the community, Lesbians have benefited. If a Lesbian obtains goods she needs, and usually could not afford to buy, that benefits a Lesbian. If a Lesbian who has always spent money each holiday season to buy her aunt a gift gives her aunt something she has obtained free from this Lesbian space (that another Lesbian brought in when her sweet aunt sent it to her), then she has saved money for herself, and this benefits a Lesbian. If a Lesbian takes something for herself that she doesn't need, but enjoys as a luxury, luxury raises one's standard of living and this has also benefited a Lesbian. If a Lesbian takes something and then sells it, she has received the money, and this has also benefited a Lesbian. The only limit on the goods flowing out would be to assure that the flow benefited Lesbians.

It would take relatively little overhead to try this first step, the main thing being a space, best if near or at the site of other Lesbian activities. The primary logistical problem would be to insure that straight womyn didn't use the space to obtain goods for themselves or their men, and to avoid sabotage of the process by men or their sympathizers, either on an individual or governmental level. Would avoiding publicity, relying only on word-of-mouth be sufficient?

For problem goods, such as food and large items, there can be a *note board* instead, on which these items can be posted. Then these goods can be obtained directly from the source Lesbians. If funding happens to

be available, a phone line could be set up, for Lesbians to call in and see if a particular item is available.

Politically, this space benefits all lesbians, as a *group*, regardless of any other characteristics. It in no way benefits men. It is not vulnerable to men's typical methods of appropriating womyn's goods and money, because it is not based on money or on reciprocity. No "membership" records means nothing on paper for men to use to track down Lesbians who have benefited. It can be done within Lesbians' current economic realities, and is not dependent on any other political or economic progress being made first.

One restriction on this plan is that it is based on an assumption of excess, which will not be accurate in all communities or geographical areas. Another possible problem with the plan, as a friend of mine pointed out,<sup>1</sup> is that different Lesbians, due to differences in class backgrounds and other factors, have differing levels of sense of entitlement. Would all Lesbians freely take from the space? If a Lesbian were to leave behind something she wanted so that it would be there for another Lesbian "who needs it more or deserves it more," that other Lesbian might never materialize, causing the good to be discarded. On the other hand, a Lesbian who needed it less than her (but who had a larger sense of entitlement)<sup>2</sup> might choose to take it. The result would be that Lesbians with large senses of entitlement would benefit disproportionately.

One side effect of the plan is that other Lesbians may learn the value of things that come free, and that when you get something without spending money, it can still have worth.<sup>3</sup>

Thinking about this idea, last year I gathered some jewelry and ritual objects that I had not used and were no longer necessary for me, and took them to the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. I put them in a basket, with a sign reading "Gifts—Feel Free to Take!" and left the full bas-

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<sup>1</sup>Thanks for your input, Mary Hauk!

<sup>2</sup>This is not meant to imply that I believe that larger senses of entitlement are always paired with greater class privilege; "middle-class guilt" can cause a middle-class Lesbian to have a very small sense of entitlement, and some Lesbians who have always been poor can have large senses of entitlement. I have seen examples of both small and large senses of entitlement in Lesbians of various class backgrounds.

<sup>3</sup>Phone conversation with Sarah Hoagland.

ket in the meditation circle space. When I came back the next day, sure enough, womyn had taken all the things I'd left, and others had left some stones, driftwood, and other gifts to pass on. It felt *great!*

I've only made a start here—let's talk about Lesbian economics! Perhaps a give-away area could be set up at festivals, in addition to the occasional "barter" area. It would be great if we could get some dialogue going, and build on and springboard off each others ideas.

*Faun*

**Dear Concerned Feminist:**

On Monday, January 2nd, 1989, a lesbian feminist activist entered a newstand in Amherst, Massachusetts and allegedly poured glue on a rack of pornographic magazines.

On that day, the men who raped, battered, and harassed women went free. But Sandy Goodman was arrested and charged with "Willful and Malicious Destruction of Private Property over \$250," a felony charge that carries a maximum sentence of 5 years and a substantial fine. She is accused of committing a "crime against the people."

Sandy Goodman will face the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the owners of the Amherst Newsroom in court this August.

This is not the only feminist action that has taken place in the Amherst-Northampton area over the past year. Women have protested the murders of local women both in the courts and in the streets, held educational slideshows about pornography and harm it causes to women, and organized leafletting and pickets at several local porn stores.

**The pornographers aren't fundraising to defend their position. They are profiting from it.**

- \$10 Average price of a homemade porn film.
- \$20 Average cost of one Dial-a-Porn telephone call.
- \$35 Average cost of a subscription to penthouse or hustler.
- \$50 Average cost to buy a pornographic video.
- \$\_\_ Send more if you can.

**Make checks payable to: H. Horak/Goodman Anti-Porn Defense and send to P.O. Box 953, Northampton, MA 01061. For more information on the legal case call: (413) 584-4969.**

*Ad-Hoc Anti-Porn Group*

## Separatist Magic

A workshop on "Revolutionary Magic," quickly changed to "Separatist Magic," was held at the Separatist Conference this June. Thirteen dykes attended. We exchanged fine stories of spells and rituals that had worked. What follows is a summary of issues discussed and points made.

Magic works. It is simple. Anydyke can do it.

Belief is probably helpful, but suspension of disbelief may be more crucial. Say thank you when the ritual is done, because you know your request will be granted. Then do not worry or redo the ritual.

Magic is not a substitute for action, it is part of action. Magic guides our actions in the right paths, and it protects our actions and ourselves. We should never go out unprotected.

Do not be too specific in your requests about what you want or when. In this way you allow the forces you are appealing to to help you, they have access to information you don't. Magic does not do the impossible, it functions *within* the world. Think carefully about what you *really* want as an outcome in general terms. (For example: two of the dykes had found a house they wanted to buy, but it had already been sold. They did a ritual asking for the right house for them, as soon as possible. A week later the original deal fell through and they bought the house. The purchase took 3 days.)

Leave room for an alternative, something like: "If there is an alternative for the higher good of myself and all dykes, I accept this." Again, this is leaving room for knowledge other than your own.

These basic principles owe much to Luisah Teish, *Jambalaya* (1985, now in paperback), which is recommended.

We talked about why some radical dykes refuse to use magic. Sometimes dykes associate magic with humanism, "creating your own reality," blissing out and no longer acting politically. Sometimes dykes reject magic because they've heard some lesbian talk about karma and how we shouldn't send out "negative energy" against men because it would just come back to us. Those of us in the group, however, all do anti-male magic.

Several of us also knew dykes who had stopped doing magic *because* they experienced it working. We speculated that this withdrawal was due to a perhaps unconscious expectation of punishment from men if dykes regain our powers.

We also talked about women's access to magic as compared to men's. We believed that women are more magical than men. One dyke mentioned the Bohemia Club, the club for ruling males in northern California, where men do do rituals to harden their hearts so that they can rule and oppress more effectively. Another dyke said that she had encountered male spirits and suspected their purpose was to keep her from contacting female spirits. (Of course, we appeal only to female forces, particularly Amazon ancestors, in our rituals.)

One of us asked why, if women are more magical than men, men had succeeded in oppressing us. Someone pointed out how many thousands of years it had taken, and someone else suggested that perhaps our ancestors, not being evil themselves, had not realized how evil men were until it was too late.

At the end of the 'workshop' we formed a planetary dykemagic network committed to the destruction of male power. The network has grown since the conference, and has members in four countries. The network cannot be contacted through *LE*, but only through one of its members personally. However you can begin your own network. Our first ritual was after the conference, on June 21, wherein we all, at our separate locations, asked that men be divested of all their power and that all their acts and intentions harmful to women be turned back on them. We asked that the network prosper and grow and that all her members be protected from any harm.

Some of us thought that our magic would be more effective if we all did it at the same time, others did not think timing was critical. In any case, we invite all dykes on the planet to participate in the destruction of male power, locally and globally. As to times, the Dark of the Moon and the Full of the Moon suggest themselves. Some of us will be doing a ritual on September 22. And Halloween of course.

## The Meaning of Radical Gyn-Affection: A Project

This project will explore the meanings and the power of the full range of intimacy between lesbians. Input from other lesbians, in a variety of forms (written, spoken, taped, group, individual, questions, answers) is essential and is sought. To receive a description of the project and a set of inciteful and envisioning questions, or to contribute input, contact:

Mev Miller  
P.O. Box 120703  
East Haven, CT 06512

## Whoops!

*The following corrections should be made in Dicey Yates "Dear Dyke Separatist Strangers," LE 3:2, pp. 26-47.*

- *The following two lines should be inserted at the bottom of page 27: their mood of token liberalism, and in the next years they will escalate misogyny and derivative injustices in the christian-fascist way.*
- *The following two lines should be inserted at the bottom of page 29: would want to know how you handle the problem of first-degree kin males if you have them. If you don't have them (or if you avoided the*
- *The following two lines should be inserted at the bottom of page 31: brute strength and they use it for the same purpose: getting access to womons' physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual energies.*
- *The following line should be inserted at the bottom of page 33: meta-Being including meta-Mind—finds it strategically necessary these*
- *The first two lines on pages 29, 31, and 33 should be deleted.*

*If you would like replacement pages for your copy of LE, send a stamped (25¢) envelope to LE. Best is 6" x 9", so pages won't be folded.*

## Letters to the Editor

dear LE:

i'm afraid the editing of my article "a toe in the water" (LE 3:2) left an ageist impression i did not intend. i said that my friend, who is better than i am at initiating discussions of feelings, is 16 years younger. in the original article, i had mentioned another younger friend who was also easy with such discussions. i questioned whether our age difference was really a factor, and hoped it was, as an indication that real-talk is becoming more acceptable in the world. i did *not* mean to imply that ageing means become less open. i was comparing how these two *particular generations* may have learned to communicate.

amanda hayman's "wishful thinking" was the most delightful thing i've read in some time. rather than wait for any engraved invitations, i'm starting my wishing right now, and hope other dykes do the same!

in lesbian spirit,

zana

Dear Diana,

I read to page four of your article, "The Lesson of the Lotus Flower" (LE 3:2) and pulled up short: "My mother sexually abused me as a child," and "I repeated my mother's behavior towards me by having a sexual relationship with a wommon 17 years younger than I."

I found this phrase so offensive I didn't bother reading any further. I am in a relationship with a woman 17 years older than me; Marilyn Hacker describes a relationship between two women 17 years apart in the acclaimed *Love, Death and the Changing of the Seasons*; Sarah Ponsonby was 17 years younger than Eleanor Butler (the Ladies of Llongollen). What grounds do you have for calling our relationships "incestuous"? You have, by implication, insulted us with that term. . . . The harmful, heterosexual stereotype of the predatory older woman remains unchallenged; all relationships between women of at least 15 years difference in age are considered, a priori, abusive. I am sick of hearing other lesbians refer to my lover as 'your Aunty,' 'your mother,' and even 'your Granny'—they are not making a mistake, they are deliberately expressing their opinion that age is disgusting and young women should keep away from it. How often have you heard lesbians laughing at (mocking) dykes who 'often' pick younger women as lovers. 'Often' is probably twice, but that's twice too 'often.'

I would suggest that when you criticise yourself for unpleasant behaviour you endeavour not to chuck your criticism around onto other women who have not earned it and are, indeed, harmed by it.

In sisterhood,

*Anna Livia*

A partner in a relationship-between-two-women-more-than-15-years-apart. For those who prefer their politics in slogans: Yeah, we're the new thing you have to be politically correct about. [Do I detect yet another anthology on the horizon?]

## Notes on Contributors

**Eileen Anderson** lives in San Francisco and welcomes correspondence through *Lesbian Ethics*.

**Anna Livia** is 33, white, Anglo-Irish, and lives in London. If you want to read more about Minnie and Beryl you could buy a copy of *Relatively Norma*, or wait for *Minimax*, the sequel. So often humour is dismissed as a soft option, it deserves the painstaking attention of a pirouette.

**Dacey Yates** is a pseudonym. My lover and I share homelife with several animals. Also some rocks live here; two, a pair of quartz crystals, are my constant

companions. Add some trees and herbs. The aforementioned beings are personal friends and allies. I wish to acknowledge their importance in my life.

**Claudia Card**, a graying, vegetarian, cat-loving, mid-western Sapphist (and clown) of Celtic origins professes lesbian culture, ethics, feminist theory, social philosophy, philosophy and literature, and environmental ethics at Univ. Wisconsin-Madison. She's writing a book, *Character and Moral Luck*, on character evolutions under oppressive institutions.

## Announcements & Ads

*Lesbian Ethics* ad rates are as follows:

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

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**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**, P.O. Box 3177, Burlington, VT 05401.

**Women's Review of Books**, monthly review of feminist writing. In-depth reviews of the most current and controversial in writing by and/or about women. Subscriptions: \$15, two years \$26. Institutions \$25/\$47. Canada add US\$3, elsewhere add US\$5 surface, US\$18 air. Dept. EX, Women's Review, Wellesley Women's Research Center, Wellesley, MA 02181.

## Conferences

**2nd West Coast Conference and Celebration for Old Lesbians (60+)**. August 4-6, Conference Center, San Francisco State Univ. On-site registration. WCC II, P.O. Box 31787, San Francisco, CA 94131.

**4th Annual Womyn and Witchcraft: Developing Dianic Wicca**. Labor Day weekend in central Wisconsin. \$165. DDW4, Box 6022, Madison, WI 53716.

## Call for Papers

Texts theorizing lesbian existence or addressing the writing of lesbian feminist theory sought for an anthology of new and reprinted articles for use in Lesbian Studies, Women's Studies and for the feminist reader. All genres welcome. By December 31, 89. Send with SASE to: Marlene Wildeman, c/o Les Éditions du Remue-ménage, 4428 boul. St. Laurent, #202, Montreal, Quebec H2W 1Z5, CANADA.

## 110 Announcements

**Italian-American Women**, special *Sinister Wisdom* Issue #41. Etnicità, la spiritualità, stereotipi culturali, lesbiche italo-americane, la famiglia, la storia. Submit work in duplicate, enclose SASE. Deadline Feb. 15, 90. *Sinister Wisdom*, c/o Denise Leto & Janet Capone, P.O. Box 3252, Berkeley, CA 94703.

**LESBIAN BEDTIME STORIES** are now sought for Volume III We want quality and rich diversity: unpublished short stories offering humor, problem-solving, warmth or hope. Consensual editing. Payment. Lesbians of Color are especially encouraged. Send stories with SASE before April 90. SASE for guidelines. Tough Dove Books, Box 528, Little River, CA 95456.

**GRANDMA'S GAY!**, a book on lesbian grandparenting, seeks contributions such as essays, poems, letters. For info: Mayflower Assoc., Box 534, Hicksville, NY 11801.

### Resources

**NO GOING BACK**, video on abortion by Federation of Feminist Women's Health Centers. Not a how-to video but contains information on self-help group technique of menstrual extraction. \$25 to NO GOING BACK, 1043 University Ave, No. 169, San Diego, CA 92103.

**THROWING OUR WEIGHT AROUND**, a video about fat women's lives, produced by volunteers. \$6000 needed to complete the project. 20 minute "rough" version available for fund-raising. **BOSTON AREA FAT LIBERATION**, P.O. Box 1836, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130.

*The Battered Women's Directory* (9th edition) of shelters, services and educational resources is available with an updated 1989 Supplement for \$12 + \$1 postage. Supplement alone is \$8 + \$1. Terry Mehlman, 5173 Turner Rd., Richmond, IN 47374.

*Women of Color and Southern Women: A Bibliography of Social Science Research 1975 to 1988*. \$17, \$5 outside U.S. Center for Research on Women, 337 Clement Hall, Memphis State Univ., Memphis, TN 38152.

*Directory of Women's Media*, 1989, now includes a 30 page section on "Women Working Toward a Radical Restructuring of the Communications System." 120 pp directory \$15 (low income \$11). WIFP, 3306 Ross Pl. N.W., Washington, DC 20008.

## Guidelines for Authors

*Lesbian Ethics* is a forum for radical 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. *LE* does not publish material being published elsewhere, but we don't mind simultaneous submissions as long as you advise us of the fact when you send in your article. Depending on where we are in the publishing cycle, we may take up to 9 months to respond to your article.

Contributions should be based on lesbian experience, should cite lesbians—with an adequate reference to the source of the material cited, 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* 4:1 is Betrayals: When We're Not as Ethical with Each Other as We Oughta Be. Deadline is October 31, 89. The Readers' Forum for *LE* 4:2 is Class: How It Affects Our Lesbian Interactions. Deadline is April 30, 90. See the Editor's Introduction for more details on both Forums. Forum contributions will be edited to save space and avoid repetition.

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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Only a few copies of LE 2:1 and 2:2 are left. LE Vol. 1 is out of print.

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