



SINISTER WISDOM

ABOUT THIS ISSUE:

At this moment, the real—the true—thing to say about this issue of Sinister Wisdom is that it is very sinister. The other thing to say is that, at this moment, it is wise. We keep reminding ourselves of the need to speak—to speak up, to speak out, to speak to each other. We keep stressing immediacy, the urgency to speak now: not someplace else but here! Here in these pages of words and pictures twenty-two women shatter the silence: they sing, they shout, they clarify and reveal; they do not mutter and murmur, obfuscate and con-seal. Can you hear me? each woman asks. Do you choose to hear me? Do you choose to listen?

Herein Michelle Cliff writes eloquently about speechlessness. What is lacking in this issue is Notes on Deafness (which I am now writing for the next issue. Probably a lot of you are, will be, too. Send them to us.) Lesbians rightly develop deafness as self-defense: the exhortations of the patriarchy are deadly. To be deaf is to control ingress and hence access to one's self. But deafness can be killing, too. It can, like speechlessness, be cultivated to preclude growth. We impose deafness on one ear to protect us from the threats and blandishments of the father, but—out of fear—we can also stop up the other ear to muffle the new words of our sisters. If, as Julia Stanley says, every honest speech act involves personal risk on the part of the speaker, then every act of honest listening involves personal risk, too—the risk of a changed consciousness which can make the listener as naked and vulnerable as the speaker. She who hears, as well as she who speaks, is a witch—a knower of changes.

We have 22 witch writers. Now, we want 22,000 witch readers.

-Catherine

SINISTER WISDOM

*A Journal of Words and Pictures for the Lesbian Imagination
in All Women*

5

Winter, 1978



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Sinister Wisdom

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NOT SOMEWHERE ELSE, BUT HERE

Courage Her face in the leaves the polygons
of the paving Her out of touch
Courage to breathe The death of October
Spilt wine The unbuilt house The unmade life
Graffiti without memory grown conventional
scrawling the least wall *god loves you* *voice of the ghetto*
Death of the city Her face
sleeping Her quick stride Her
running Search for a private space The city
caving-in from within The lessons badly
learned Or not at all The unbuilt world
This one love flowing Touching other
lives Spilt love The least wall caving

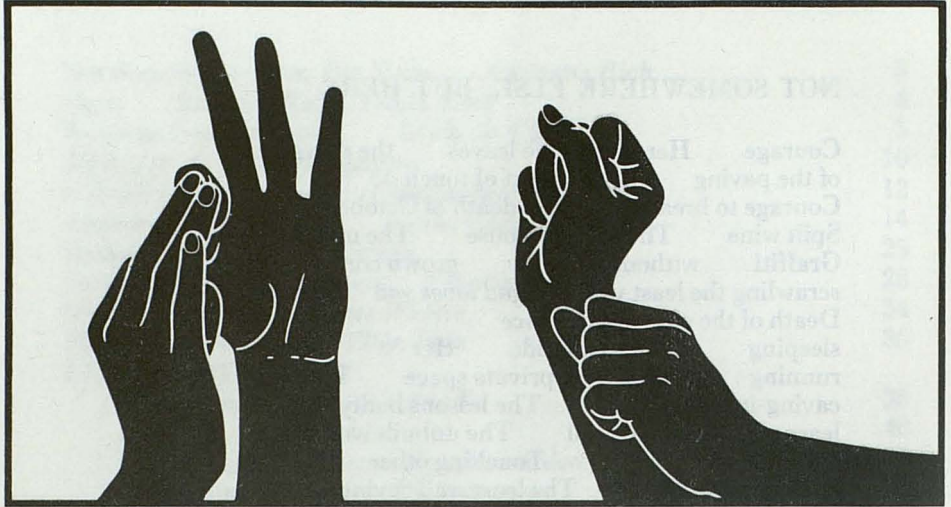
To have enough courage The life that must be lived
in terrible October
Sudden immersion in yellows streaked blood The fast rain
Faces Inscriptions Trying to teach
unlearnable lessons October This one love
Repetitions from other lives The deaths
that must be lived Denials Blank walls
Our quick stride side by side Her fugue

Bad air in the tunnels *voice of the ghetto* *god loves you*
My face pale in the window anger is pale
the blood shrinks to the heart
the head severed it does not pay to feel

Her face The fast rain tearing Courage
to feel this To tell of this to be alive
Trying to learn unteachable lessons

The fugue Blood in my eyes The careful sutures
ripped-open The hands that touch me Shall it be said
I am not alone
Spilt love seeking its level flooding other
lives that must be lived not somewhere else
but here seeing through blood nothing is lost

- Adrienne Rich



SIGN

“Two deaf-mute women used sign language to escape a pair of kidnapers and would-be rapists Saturday morning near Kenton Park, according to police reports. . . .

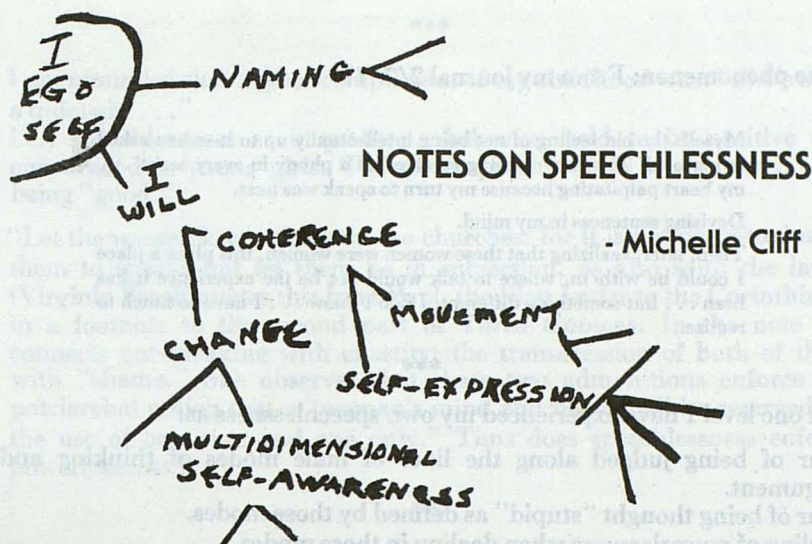
While one woman led the two kidnapers into the woods, the other locked the car’s doors. The woman who had gone with the two men ran back to the automobile and both victims escaped unharmed.”

Oregonian 1/77

My fingers
 move sly against your palm
 Like women everywhere, we speak
 in code Hear me If
 you run, if
 they follow, if
 twigs crack under their shoes
 our bones will hear them
 stumble, unnerved
 by our sudden wisdom: fear
 is not useful;
 doing nothing
 is also dangerous
 Show me your hands

NOW I run
 you lock the car
 I run
 you start the car
 I run
 you wait the car
 ready you wait
 the car ready I
 run I see
 you the car the door
 opens
 my breath, your hands

Poem/Melanie Kaye Graphic/Paula King



The condition of affliction--as described by Simone Weil--is the primary condition of the powerless. This condition is characterized above all by speechlessness.

It is important to realize the alliance of speechlessness and powerlessness; that the former maintains the latter; that the powerful are dedicated to the investiture of speechlessness on the powerless.

Speechlessness--as I have known/know it--is implosive, not explosive. That is, it is most effective--most devastating--against the speechless person. It may seem explosive: it may seem to affect those around and those in opposition to the speechless person, but its real effect is against she who will not/cannot speak.

Speechlessness begins with the inability to speak; this soon develops into the inability to act. The inability to act is part of the implosion.

Speechlessness is always directed against the self, never directed outward, except indirectly.

Speechlessness involves self-denial:

- the denial of rights
- the right to express, to choose
- to choose to express
- to choose to express anger
- to choose to assert a separate self
in the expression of ideas.

If the choice for expression--the separation which will come from real, rather than speechless expression--is not made, the person is speechless.

The non-expression implodes into depression.

This denial of the self is the origin/outcome of speechlessness.

It is self-annihilation.

The phenomenon: From my journal 2/7/77

Myself: the old feeling of not being intellectually up to it--when asked to perform. The idea of being revealed as a phony in every sense . . . my heart palpitating because my turn to speak was next.

Devising sentences in my mind.

Then, later, realizing that these women were women, this place a place I could be with/in, where to talk would not be the experience it has been . . . but something different. I don't know . . . I have so much to realize.

On one level I have experienced my own speechlessness as:

fear of being judged along the lines of male modes of thinking and argument.

fear of being thought "stupid" as defined by those modes.

feeling of powerlessness when dealing in those modes.

fear of revealing I have never understood properly all along; that I am a liar and a fraud.

belief that everyone speaks from clarity where I do not.

These attitudes lead to a genuine difficulty in understanding, since in any situation--a seminar, a meeting--these fears take precedence. The fears settle like a mist; then turn to concrete--encasing. Disallowing communication.

In those situations where absolute silence is impossible, the option for the speechless person can be a trivializing mode of speech--e.g., humor: this can be a mechanism for deflection.

Speechlessness as self-punishment: as something self-induced to preoccupy in order to preclude growth.

The importance for women to realize and understand the causes of our speechlessness. How it is our collaboration with our oppression. How it has been applied by us to protect ourselves from our oppression--but the cost has been ourselves.

Persona:

a film about a woman who has stopped talking and a woman who is a chatterer; about the non-communication of women--within/between themselves.

During the film the faces of the two women split and merge; they become one person: which they are. They share the identity of speechlessness.

We have been quiet. Or we have chattered.

Speechlessness is not simply being quiet--more about this later.

I am reminded that a great compliment of my childhood was: "She's such a quiet girl . . ."

i.e., speechlessness as a quality--a behavior--held to be positive and encouraged in young girls. Therefore speechlessness is connected with being "good."

"Let the women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but let them be in subjection, as also saith the law." (Virginia Woolf quotes this from Paul, the First Letter to the Corinthians, in a footnote to the second part of *Three Guineas*. In the note she connects not-speaking with chastity: the transgression of both of these with "shame." She observes that these two admonitions enforce the patriarchal notion that a "woman's mind and body shall be reserved for the use of one man and one only." Thus does speechlessness enforce powerlessness.)

The necessity to relinquish male parlor games:

My choice of dissertation could be a trivialization of male history and also the trivialization of myself as a scholar. But "The Intellectual Game in Italian Renaissance Culture: 1400-1600" is also an investigation of those modes which seem to terrify me. In the dissertation I reduce the modes to game-playing, which in a sense they are. By choosing male intellectualism but treating it as it was played--usually for the benefit of women--I reduced the principles to a size I did not find intimidating.

I see my own speechlessness as an outcome of various factors:

1. Being female forced into male modes of thinking and argument.
Excelling but never belonging.

She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, the Absolute--she is the Other.

The Second Sex

Being the Other conversing in the language of the Subject is a condition of my speechlessness.

2. Being a lesbian in the same circumstance. Concealing lesbianism and thereby entering a dual masquerade--passing straight/passing lesbian. The effort of retaining the masks enervates and contributes to speechlessness--to speak might be to reveal.

A dream:

I am in a small town in Europe. I enter an old-fashioned butcher shop. The men wear straw hats; there is sawdust on the floor; marble counters. The place is brightly lit, filled with townspeople doing their marketing. I am an outsider, I am having trouble speaking their language. There is a paper container of sausage meat on the marble

counter. The butcher tells me it is for tasting. I taste--it is sweet. I realize suddenly that the meat in the shop is the dead flesh of lesbians. I escape.

I feel when I wake up that I have engaged in an act of auto-cannibalism. The sausage meat is unrecognizable, mixed up. I couldn't have said what it was originally. I can speak the language in shop but haltingly. Whatever else this dream stands for, it is a clear illustration of what I am doing to myself when I take part in a double masquerade. I can't pass myself off as straight because I can't speak their language. But by remaining silent and denying myself any real knowledge, I am forced (forced meat) to devour myself. I am as identifiable as the sausage meat when I engage in this double masquerade. Unknown even to myself. Speechless about myself.

3. Being my parents' child--which perhaps should be #1. For me, the symbolic origin of my speechlessness lies in an event of my childhood: the diary-reading. When I was thirteen, the place where I wrote things was broken into. In one afternoon my words and thoughts--my attempt to recount my own reality; to assert my separateness--were trivialized, shamed, ridiculed, ultimately denied. I was called a liar.

For me, part of my speechlessness originates in my fear of the lies in my childhood/life. It was a childhood in which lies were punished/encouraged, encouraged/punished. In which lies concerned the definition of my identity. Lies (or silences) about my ethnicity/race/name/sex. (I was my father's son...for a time.)

The analogy of Victor, the wild boy of Aveyron, with whom I have identified.

Victor never learned to speak--
a scar on his throat.

He was "rescued from the forest (parents, mother, family) and taken to a "civilized" place (learning, separation, growth). But the damage has already been done--his throat has already been cut--he has been rendered speechless.

Victor returns to the forest.

Then chooses to return to the civilized place.

The fear is that the throat has already been cut; that speechlessness will be lifelong.

In my journal I find that I have written about Virginia Woolf: As a survivor, but also as someone who used withdrawal and humor to deal/not to deal. As I have done.

Both withdrawal and humor are types of speechlessness.

The obscuring and trivialization of what is real is also speechlessness.

Speechlessness is not simple muteness--it is the inability to speak but also the inability to reveal.

Speechlessness--whether muteness, withdrawal, humor--seeks to "avoid" lies; to avoid real expression or revelation. Muteness and withdrawal avoid the possibility of being caught in a lie by their outright silence; humor allows the use of a lie--essentially--and if the lie proves too much, then with a laugh or a disclaimer the lie is defused/negated. Escape is possible. Truth has once again been deflected.

Survival:

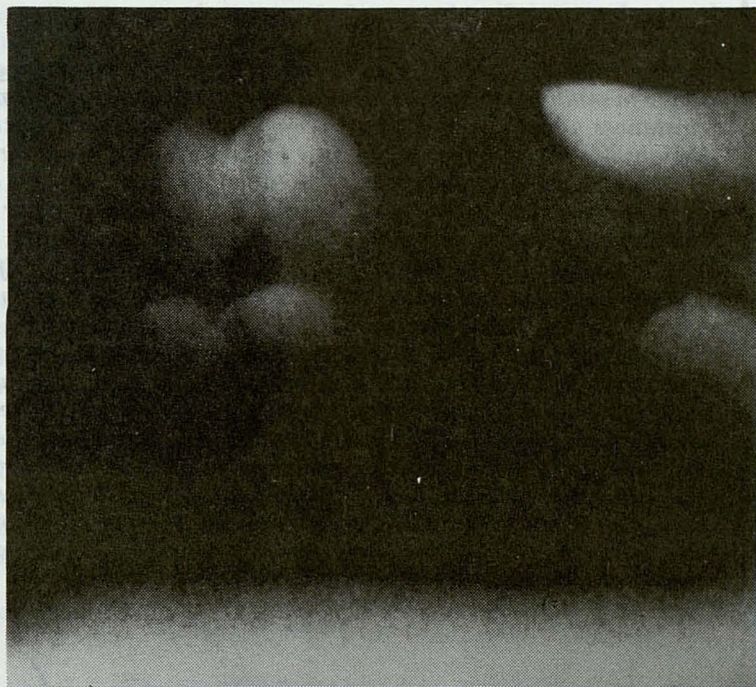
To not be speechless: to seek those modes of thought and articulation which will assure the unity rather than the division of myself.

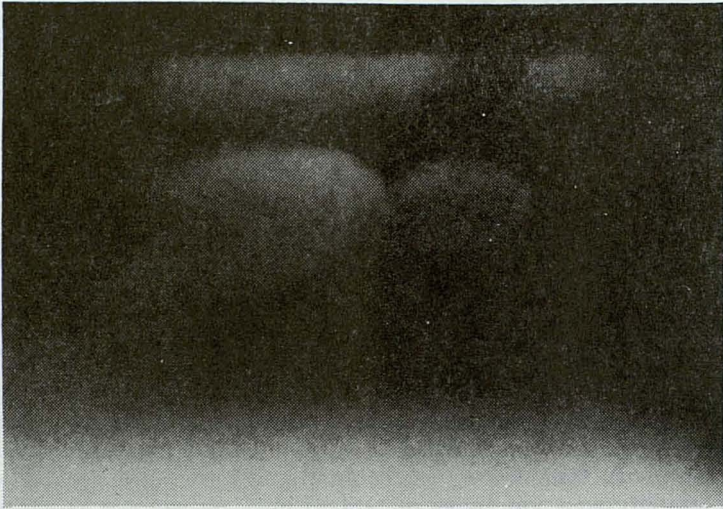
To separate out and eliminate those elements which split me.

Those elements which have divided me into mind/body, straight/lesbian, child/adult.

This means nothing more or less than seeking my own language.

This may be what women will do.





dear Sinister Wisdom sisters,

Besides being prompted by the need to articulate my feelings, I think I'm sending this to you because the Soliloquy springs from circumstances among women that I see abounding - lots of mistrust, divisions, purist absolutism. Not to be confused with our urgent need/right to be strong and clear about ourselves and how we each see things as to the extremely desperate circumstances of our sex. Women are trying to search out a new world in one that is on a death march. But (and here's where the Soliloquy emerges) if our strength and clear definition and political passion doesn't surpass perpetuating the patriarchal pattern of women divided against each other (attacking each other, distrusting each other), the larger meaning is nothing new. All this is a problem I pose to myself continually, as superficial accept-everyone-where-she's-at pseudo-sisterhood doesn't work either. I want to see women wondering about this and hope we can call forth our wisdom to consider and create some other alternatives. The Soliloquy puts forth my musings about this where they strike the raw nerve of the personal bottom line, as one basic, fundamental place to start. The personal is political also means that the political is personal.

in sisterstruggle,

Emily

A Soliloquy on the Thousand Mysteries of Women
to be read in a wry, shy voice

It's true, I think sometimes I'm beautiful and strong and kind, and I don't know why a thousand women aren't indicating any passion towards me. That's when I figure there must be some defect invisible to my own eyes that gleams blindingly to all others and scares them from me. But then I think, there are at least a thousand women whom I find wondrous and why is my own passion not urging me toward them? So perhaps, I muse, it's a secret mass stand off - leaving us all hungry and longing. There are, I realize, at least a thousand different preconditions to ardent acceptance considered essential by each woman alive. Often I can then surmise that the next logical step is that I clearly must have my own thousand preconditions too and so what the hell are they anyway? Maybe everyone has a thousand known and unknown ones and is secretly (even to herself) somehow looking for a matching thousand. As I continue musing in this vein, the assorted aforementioned thousands already make a pile so steep that I start searching for a witch broom to sweep psychic house. Of course I know I write brave home alone after making love to myself, but in the bar

your house,
those meetings,
that dance
this dinner,

I smell all the Reasons It Won't Work, which is I know I know the odor really from the passive gas that permeates our female mental atmosphere. Ah - but when the microsecond wedge of hesitation looms between us, it carries fear and awkwardness and detachment, not only from each other, but from the feelings within one's womanself that grease the skids, oil the joints, lubricate the impulses, propel the pulse, move the questions, engage the encounter. Anyhow, that's how I experience it these days. It's certainly not defensible and I'd abandon it in a minute if I could feel it go. But somehow it's still just there - a mystery in a plain brown wrapper. It's not even that I don't see bridges between us, you understand. There are in fact easily a thousand bridges. It's just that we're all standing in the middle of different ones.

by: emily oddwoman

It Begins with Names

quite suddenly
this story ceases to seem strange:
there was that moment,
there was that one moment
registering, the beginning

it begins with names
repeatedly in wildly different conversations
hearing friends' and their friends'
known and unknown names

with recognizing, picking up on
the same dozen names of friends
acquiring histories, your friends, who
so the story goes, once
and their friends, "whom you have to meet
or should have you'd have gotten on
she was a character
went off to England a few years ago, and
anyway, we haven't seen her since
though any time, I wouldn't be surprised"
with wondering
with listening
for the links, the legends
it begins with names

there was no apparent reason
as it happened
my life happened within
certain expectations and
I was accepted

there is an informal code
we do have certain expectations
that don't have to be defined
a context in which our behavior
is, if not predictable, at least
consistent, on consideration
reasonable, not out of line
a core of mutual familiarity
experience and allusion
the whole point is that our lives
should not be alien and strange

a place, a presence
reckoned on, space figured
into conversation for my words

for stories that begin not to need
endings, that include your name
that hesitate into the question
“you were here then, weren’t you” were you
it’s become hard to remember
just when it began
the relativity of this chronology has been accepted
what must and what does not
have to be true to be true

there was a beginning
a point in this roll of names
when my name joined
but it no longer matters
I have been accepted
I belong from the beginning
to the end my name will
have its own existence

“you’d have liked her
but she moved, east somewhere
she puts in an appearance
once a year or so”

and still no completely
comprehensively apparent reason
certain expectations
that can’t be defined
a group of friends, a web
of legends, a network of names

hearing names
this moment slides and
I have suddenly remembered
different, and the same, the same
we move on, we move each other on
quite reasonably
to new old names
the whole point is
and our lives are not strange
you know this story
it begins with names

- Claudia Scott

Another Place to Begin

a story by FLYING CLOUDS

This is the beginning of my story. I plan to get up at six every morning and come here to write, alone, at the typewriter, while the day is fresh. It will be hard to manage this. For one thing Regina isn't very encouraging. When I told her my plan she assumed I wouldn't be able to do it and therefore would just blame myself. I feel I will do it and I know, even if I don't, I would blame myself more for not trying. Gina doesn't realize that writing must be *done*, that it doesn't just happen. I shouldn't expect her to understand right away, after all it's taken me this long to figure it out myself. For just a few minutes this morning when I could see that I would not be here as early as I wanted, I began to feel the frustrated anger. Starting tomorrow I will be working full-time. I need time to read, to be with Gina, to keep the house together. When am I going to write? What makes me think I can do so much? And even if I did crowd in my writing, wouldn't that cramp always be there? I want my writing to be free. I felt that frustration only a minute, then I said, simply: No, absolutely, no. I have had enough of that anger. That was my experience most of last year, all of last summer, and now I don't care how difficult my situation is, I will write, I will enjoy it, no frustration anymore. I will be hopeful. Wide open. It is really very simple. Get up at six, get ready and come here, work on my story until nine o'clock when the work day begins. The only thing that bothers me is being afraid to be here at work alone. I will lock the doors and go into all the rooms to make sure no one else is here. No discontent now. Mustn't feel that, must just go ahead. In fact, as I write I am very happy. I like to think that morning after morning stretching into the future, I will be writing.

There was a dream Regina and now there's a real, day by day Regina. I feel that I hold out on the everyday Gina. I'm not as brave as I might think and much too afraid of losing things for myself. Sometimes it bothers me that I can't tell how Gina looks. It's like listening to a language you know and not being able to hear how it sounds -- her face has too much meaning. We've been friends for thirteen years.

Gina was very happy last night when she came home. Peacefully happy. And very tired and wanting to go to sleep but I was in her bed and hadn't gotten out yet, so we talked. She'd been talking to the man who fucked her the night before. He was supposed to withdraw and didn't.

She was upset yesterday, couldn't decide to take the morning-after pill because they require her to sign a paper saying if it doesn't work and she is pregnant that she will get an abortion. Yesterday she decided she *would* get an abortion if she were pregnant. It was a big decision for her to make. I talked to her about getting a diaphragm. She was thrilled to imagine not being a victim anymore. How sordid it all looks to me now. It's because I have this other experience, this other knowledge of how nice things can be, how we don't have to have anything at all to do with men. Of course, the whole thing makes me hate that man and hate Gina too in a way. Damn it.

This anger in everything I do, everything I think. Ironically enough Gina particularly understands the source of that anger, Gina knows *why* I hate men, white, rich so much. But now I'm hating brown, poor, incompetence, pain. I want nothing to do with it. I want money, ease, *space*. I want to cry. I can't. I feel the struggles of my whole life pushing out through my eyes. And here at work I'm expected to be the secretary. To be pleasant! Pleasant! Fuck that shit! Here to keep my job, the only thing going for me right now, I'm to be polite, calm and certainly not angry! Not even sad! I'm to be efficient. I'm to smooth the way so that these fucking *men* can get a good day's work done -- and *my* work, what of that, what about *my* work! I want to write too and to read and to think and to be involved with other women who are writing and thinking and reading. No room for that in this scheme of things. Lucky to get this job. Great! A job copying down notices for the professors of what their salaries will be next year -- most of them around \$20,000. Twenty thousand dollars. If I made that much money I would have gotten to my writing class at the Women's Building last night. I wouldn't have been anxious the whole long bus trip, anxious first of all about having to change, having to wait around as it got darker and darker, afraid of men, men who tease at violence and rape, not that they intend to do anything, too much energy required for that and a bit too much risk most of the time, but still it isn't too much energy to make me afraid, so they'll do that. Walk right up to me, feel the fear rise, walk on by! I do know if I were making 20,000 a year I wouldn't have been that sort of anxious last night, the eagerness, the anxiousness making my stomach upset, being hungry too but no time to eat, didn't know what to eat in any case. Then getting off the last bus, seeing from the numbers I was still blocks away, already late by now, getting darker and darker. Deserted places, parking lots, warehouses, few people, walk, walk, my legs being pushed, their tension, my whole body tension. Trying not to sense I'm defeated, that I'll never make it. My \$1.29 paint-scraping razor tied around my wrist, held in my fist, opened, determined I'd use it, wish it weren't so nothing; if only it were a gun. Ahead of me rows and rows of train tracks, trains standing still, fenced-in roadway, and I'm not sure how far I have to go, how safe I can be, I can't face it, I resist acknowledging defeat -- I cross over to the next street (out of my way), the relief of seeing people going into restaurants, getting out of their cars, going into restaurants.

Last night I dreamed of Jay. She'd bought a house in the country. It was a new house, hadn't set yet, didn't have living in it yet. I went there when she wasn't expecting me, I cooked, I was happy. I loved looking at the animals and smelling the country smells. I was about to leave and she came in. I knew she was happy to see me but she kept saying other things, pretending I should leave and I pretended I would. Then she kissed me, said she wanted to give me a baby. I yelled, "*What do you think I am, a test tube?*" I was happy to leave that house with the yellow walls, and walk in the evening down the country road going to my own home.

Also dreamed of Regina, her having something to tell me, being afraid to tell me. Finally she told me -- how ugly it was to her that I don't shave under my arms. Oh, how angry I was, how disgusted with her for not being a lesbian. In fact, the dream was like being with her this morning. I hated when she came and got in bed with me, explaining it was because of the cold. I really don't want to touch her. That getting in bed with me sort of thing more than anything I know makes me angry with her for all her interest in pricks. Oh, I'm working my way back to last night, to just before we went to sleep. I'd changed the sheets on the bed (we traded, now she's sleeping on the floor and I have the bed, I was quite happy about it until I realized this morning what a bad soft bed it is, aches and pains, and Gina laughing saying now you know why I wanted to switch). I'd changed the sheets, used white sheets. I couldn't sleep. I started reading about witchcraft. Mostly my mind was working on my essay, the political/spiritual realities. I kept thinking the contradictions to everything I was reading while I was agreeing too. I began to feel that everything was possible, that I would be able to travel. I lit candles and started making a tiny dream pillow out of muslin, stuffing it with mugwort, sewing it with pink thread. Gina wanted to make one too. How she laughed and laughed when she saw how tiny my pillow was! She calls it a checker. With black thread she embroidered a life sign and a flower with stars shooting out. To stuff hers she dumped the herbs right onto my bed and started stuffing in her messy way. We commented on how each one's pillow looked like who made it -- mine orderly and neat, plain, hers disorderly, crooked, inspired, and dirty. We traded dream pillows. She made us saffron tea. She forgot we had a teapot. How can she forget we have a teapot! We use it everyday and talk everytime about what a nice teapot it is. I think it was because last time we made saffron tea there were roses in the teapot, nine lovely salmon roses.

I was shocked to find myself writing that I didn't want to touch Gina. And yesterday when she wanted to hold my hand it was alright with me and we held hands for awhile. I could easily remember then the very early days of our being together and how we always held hands, held each other in bed, gave each other baths. How without tension it all was for me, how I knew Gina'd balk at love-making or rather more of it so I never expected it. But neither did I expect that when she'd heard Rose and I'd been lovers in the Navy she'd quit coming home, quit snuggling, quit holding hands so naturally. That was years ago and that rejection cut so

deep into both of us we could never tell exactly how to be with each other after that and now there's yesterday and the rose garden and holding hands. I loved smelling the invitation roses.

I have what's almost one single image of my life at Miss Annie's where I lived for a year and a half and where I was living when Jay and I became lovers. And that single image is of the big room, its row of wide windows above the wooden box, the sheer white curtains and how alone I was, how happy. I'd read, I'd write, I'd get ready for work in the early morning and walk there noticing every tree and every flower; in the evening I'd walk home again, wonderful to feel the strength to walk the two miles home though I was tired from cleaning and recleaning Ms. Halden's already sterilely clean house, coming home and being alone, how deep that solitude became, it became my joy, my pleasure and my pain. The roses bloomed and bloomed and I'd get cranky with Miss Annie for watering them before I got a chance to, she'd always beat me to it and that wonderful morning when she called me outside at 5:30 to show me a long row of plants all violently blooming in wonderful purple, all those old cans of flowers strung across a wire and how ever after I called them the Paris flowers because how I felt right then, that morning, was in love, loving Miss Annie, sharing the love of the flowers with her, and how that in love was all of me, the inside out of me, the air I breathed and why am I remembering Springtime now when it wasn't Spring, not at all, when Jay came into my life, how she'd come over, I'd listen for her motorcycle and then she'd be there thin and smiling, smelling like squashes and cauliflower, her lankiness would be there, that flopping down on the bed, her black sweater, new jeans, leather motorcycle gloves, how she'd swish around her blond strands of baby hair, how she wouldn't talk and I'd want her to, how she'd smile and I'd feel that happiness coming out of her like the being in love was coming out of me, and those Paris flowers and the morning Miss Annie called me into the green house to see the blooming begonia the "just a talking doll" it was to her; she hardly knew how to be that happy, her energetic seventy-four year old dyke self, us together loving that begonia, and Jay with me, Jay coming on the blue motorcycle and my solitude disappearing, beautifully disappearing, I'd buy more groceries, I'd think of her when I bought food, I'd try to have things for us to eat, but she wasn't satisfied, said she'd bring things from home, it'd be no trouble, and how sad that felt, I'd pushed back into being alone but so cruelly this time because she was right there, in the kitchen, looking into the refrigerator, laughing, making jokes at how little there was -- and I thought of Ida how she never did anything *but* joke and play tricks but never would Ida have joked or even let on she'd noticed if someone's refrigerator wasn't as full as hers, she never made fun of panties that were old the elastic stretched completely out -- and Jay who hardly ever let me laugh, who'd threaten with her asthma the minute I started to laugh, Jay throwing me so cruelly back into a solitude that she'd shattered for me, throwing me back there with her jokes about how empty the refrigerator was and I knew there were three meals there, I knew exactly what was in the refrigerator, and I knew

those three meals were meals for sharing. Her laughing and then coming back into the room and offering me three dollars worth of food stamps. It was my turn to be silent, for her to want me to talk, didn't I want the food stamps, why shouldn't I take things from her? *Fuck you*, I was feeling good, food in the refrigerator, food to share and you because you have more money, more food saying you'll bring your own from home, giving me three dollars worth of food stamps, there now, we'll be equal. *Fuck you* -- keep your damn food stamps and leave me my pleasure my sharing why can't you fucking learn about me, why can't you fucking learn how I know every piece of fruit every vegetable I buy like I know every rose I pick, why can't you learn about me how I hardly eat at home how I eat in the houses where I work because it's free because they only pay me \$15.00 a day and they spend twice that each day on groceries alone and when they offer me lunch I take it and if they leave the house during the day I go to the refrigerator and I eat and I put oranges into my knap-sack and when they say "These vegetables aren't fresh, would you like them?" -- I take them. Why don't you learn about me damn you how Miss Annie brings me eggs back from the country and I share them with my sister and with Ida and then I have six wonderful country eggs and I love the shape of them, I leave them out in the sun so I can feel their warmth, how I loved them, growing up, hunting for them in the lots among the straw in the sheds, how sometimes I'd find them in the bright sunshine hardly hidden at all, I'd gather all the warm eggs into that rusty coffee can that we used to measure the cottonseed meal and I'd take them in to Mother with such absolute pleasure and how she'd make her little speech, the little speech of appreciation she always made -- "Oh, am I glad to see those eggs, put them right here, we can certainly use those fresh eggs, my girl's got bright eyes." Learn about me *damn you* don't go laughing because your refrigerator has more in it than mine's got and stuffing your damn three dollars worth of food stamps down my throat when *I'm* the one working, *I'm* the one with four days of work a week. It never seemed to Jay that I had a job, and later on when our tensions couldn't bear themselves any longer she'd yell how I should have gotten a job, all along I should have had a job! And I'd yell "All along I *did* have a job, I *worked*, I *know* I worked, I feel every clean floor, every clean dish, every made bed in my *blood*, I *worked dammit!*"

And now it's the smell of Jay, always the smell of her and that unexpected closeness, just that having her there, the ever miracle to me that was, the sound of her motorcycle and she'd be there, take up space in the room, lie in the bath-tub, tub full of water, me on the toilet seat listening to her talk, finally Jay begins to talk and I try to piece things together, grope around, know I'm not doing a good job, keep thinking well that isn't all -- she's left something out. Jay there, relaxed, unselfconscious, strong arms, her smiling silence and blue eyes, small breasts, vulva exposed, nothing buried, no churning muddy rivers. Jay there. Jay in the kitchen, Jay eating the food she'd brought from home, Jay allergic to tomatoes but liking the eggplant with cheese, my joy of actually sharing food with her, loving the dark purple of the eggplant, the

funny greenish yellow of the inside, eggplant always making me think of long ago Julie, Julie telling me it wasn't even a food, it was a *poison*, Aunt Zell telling how her aunt pulled up her uncle's eggplants never having seen them before, thought they were weeds, threw them over the fence to dry up in the sun, eggplant and scraping the skin off with the potato peeler and remembering Mother crying, Mother's heart breaking while she scraped the carrots at home, making our supper, Mother's caring and caring and caring and always feeling that tenuousness about it, never taking it for granted, never letting us, always reminding us she was taking care of us because she could now she might not always be able to, Mother growing up in those Federal schools, making her own way, on her own, from age three and before that when Grandma'd leave her in the upstairs room to care for her brothers, little Mother worried one day, worried when Grandma didn't come home, knew she'd have to get food, taking down the flat tin pan, tiny Mother deciding she'd wash her hair before she left her brothers alone, before she left to find Grandma or find food whatever she could manage, Grandma hadn't come home when she usually did and they'd watched for her from the window, watching for Grandmother coming home, and then the Indian schools, those earnest years, those silent years, then crying scraping carrots and crying and scraping and crying, the slivers falling onto the old newspaper where she'd collect scraps for the pigs' slop, Mother crying, Mother's heart breaking and my not understanding, not knowing what to do, not knowing, wasn't I there with her, why was she crying, wouldn't I take care of her always, didn't I love her, hadn't we walked together in the evening like we did every night, hadn't she told me then the things she always told me, hadn't I run ahead eager to make sure the nest and little birds were where I'd found them, were still where I was taking Mother to see them, running ahead, too eager, leaving her to walk more slowly, should I have walked slowly too, should I never never never have left her side, Mother crying, Mother's heart breaking and Mother fixing our supper, the carrots she'd scrape and cut in half and then each half in long quarters and place in the shallow glass dish with radishes, Mother who never cooked the carrots, never served us cooked carrots, that was much later, years later, coming home to see her, both of us women together then, both of us able to share the secrets of that, those unspoken secrets, those unspoken secrets of woman loving woman, woman happiness with a new recipe, a recipe for cooked carrots, a recipe called copper pennies, how beautiful the orange carrot circles the green pepper circles were to her, much later that, years later. And Jay *there*, Jay in the big doorway between the bedroom and the hall, that joy in me, that almost disbelief at the *company*, and then I knew she'd move, she wouldn't be framed there, not for long, just a few seconds and then she'd move, she'd say something, she'd want something, she'd suggest something, my life buoyed up, lifted beyond itself, Jay there and us together, rainy evening, tired of being in the house, tired of love-making - what pleasure - and walking in the misty evening, her under bright orange poncho, me getting wet, wishing it were wetter, taking our books, going to the ice cream shop, going to sit and read, going to find the tiniest distance for the shortest time, going to read different books, going to step into different worlds and every now and

then return to say the smallest something to the other -- "Do you want another Dr. Pepper?" "Do you want some more coffee?" "Are you liking your book?" "Are you happy?" and then reading again, raining outside, at first hard to read, hard to want to leave her, hard to want to separate and then my mind catching hold, my mind jumping with its freedom, wanting to be away, wanting to read, not wanting her to interrupt, hoping she doesn't tire first, hoping I get to read for hours and hours and for her to still be there, wouldn't want to adjust to her absence, just let her stay there, across the table, Jay's red and white face reading, quiet, there, Jay across the table, Jay looking out the window, Jay watching the rain, Jay there, there, there, with me, not alone, for awhile not alone, how strange, how I'm not nervous, how I'm sure, how I'm happy, Jay there, and then later in the dark, walking back to my house, she'll spend another night, walking beside her in the rain, rain puddles, street lights in the puddles, loving her for being there, how long since I've been out at night, not since I was raped, so long since I've felt the silence, the nighttime, unafraid, glad she's there, glad I'm there. Jay -- there.

I need to start all over, to find another place to begin. I'm so sleepy. I didn't get to sleep till after three, I was excited. So was Regina. She cooked us green beans, told me I'd been creative last time I'd gone shopping, and laughed when I told her I was tired of hommos. She'd been to her calligraphy class, had a bottle of black ink and pen, showed me what they'd done, the lines and circles. She'd left behind the sample of writing her teacher'd passed out. "See, there I was taking care of everyone else and forgot my own things!" I laughed and she called out, "Your ink! Here's your ink! You're forgetting your ink!" like she'd done in class and then it was clear to me that *she* had been in that class. Strange how I forget how real Gina is, if she's not right under my nose.

I'm ashamed now of how I told how we quit living together years ago. Gina was pregnant. On the train to the house after she'd met me at Greyhound she told me. She told it like a happy surprise. She wanted to get an abortion. I said, "Oh, no, don't do that, we'll take care of the baby." She laughed, said she knew I'd say that but no she wasn't going to have the baby. All nineteen-year-old me knew was that it was wrong to kill and I certainly didn't know how to go about getting an abortion. We didn't have money and we didn't know anyone. Finally she made friends with Rachel, another Puerto Rican woman, who knew someone. All this time passing though, four months, and Gina'd say look and show me her breasts how full they were, how happy she was to be pregnant. And then Rachel went with her. I heard about it later. A woman had done it for \$75.00. Gina said she was "like a man" and there had been pictures of women covering the walls and the ceiling. Rachel took her to her own house where Gina'd been living most of the last two months anyway. They went home by cab. Gina lost alot of blood and was in a great deal of pain. After two days Rachel took her to a city hospital. When I went to see her I took a chocolate bar which Gina had me eat; she said she could tell I hadn't eaten lately, my hands were shaking the way they did when I was hungry. I ate the candy. She was pale and far away from me. There

were bottles of liquid, tubes going into her hand. The ward was green and dirty, noisy, the beds close together. I sat for awhile in the hall on a splintery bench and talked to another woman. She asked me what was wrong with my friend. I said she'd lost a baby. How clearly I remember that woman's face, so wrinkled, so New York, so poor and her smirky knowing nod, "Oh, lost a baby." It was illegal then to get abortions I suppose. Gina stayed in the hospital a long time but she got better, little by little. Her hand where they'd fed her through the tubes was the last to get well -- for months it would swell up and hurt. She lived with Rachel after that. Rachel had a baby girl and sometimes I'd go over there and babysit while they went out, just because I wanted to, they were quite used to leaving her alone in her crib. I remember Rachel carrying the girl on her hip to the beach. How tan Gina got during that time, how beautiful. She and Rachel busy hustling and shop-lifting, going dancing, living that fast-pace. I'd gone to live with another woman then and Gina hardly ever came over.

How could I write about the time we quit living together in that upstairs apartment without mentioning the chickens -- Gina brought home four chicks and kept them in the bathtub with wire fixed over the top. Whenever we wanted to take a bath we had to manage to get the chickens into a cardboard box, set the box out the window onto the roof, and clean out all the smelly chicken shit. They grew so fast and soon the whole apartment smelled bad and when I'd call Gina and ask why didn't she ever come home anymore, she'd say how bad it smelled there and laugh and laugh! How much time we spend making each other laugh. I suppose that's the most characteristic thing about the two of us together -- we make each other laugh, on purpose and as often as possible.

I dreamed there isn't much food to go around. The maid has a little food. She keeps it for herself. She doesn't hand it over to the rich people. I pat her on the back. I want her to know I agree. Why should she give up those few cucumbers? But our hearts know different. We know she is in the right to keep the small portion of food. And yet. She is able to give it up. She knows its value. And she knows she can give it up. And she does. But sometimes she'll be hungry. Sometimes she'll wish there were someone to know that those few cucumbers had been rightfully hers -- after all, they did belong to her. And at those times she'll not want to be with Jay anymore. She'd rather walk alone where the hill slips down to the water and in the river she'll see floating trees, whole trees sometimes, and she'll find minnows near the edge. Sometimes she'll want to be interested in how big the water can be and at the edge how small -- why, not even big enough to cover her fingernail, sometimes she'll choose not to be interested in Jay, or in anyone. For the maid it's a matter of being stumped, not wanting to have so much in her own hands. Here, take some of me, look into my face, see what it's like to give up those two cucumbers, here, take all of this. I'll talk and talk and talk, I'll tell Jay

everything, she'll see how angry I can be, she'll see how far under I can go, she'll see how being locked out after the long bus ride when I was ready to clean your house, you rich people's house, and you didn't leave the door open and I went home again without the money for the day's work and you didn't call until you wanted me to clean again, you didn't get your house cleaned but you did save yourself \$15.00, Jay'll see how one of those days and I don't know how to go on, when we go to the store I really have no idea *what* I want her to buy for our supper, I think about it and feel well whatever Jay wants I guess I'll want that too, and I get worried thinking I won't know when I'm hungry but it's bound to be more often than Jay, and then what will I do -- go hungry? Yes, I guess that's the best way, I don't have my \$15.00 to put in and I've lost myself somehow, too many similar circumstances I suppose, slipped back in one day to those times with men, those hungry times, when I'd eat what they wanted to eat when they wanted to eat because I didn't have my own money and I couldn't hold out against the flood of them. Sure I worked I had money too but even all of it was so little and we always lived within *their* means. Oh, yes, I lived better, learned about proper ways to eat, but I didn't eat what I wanted when I wanted it and now I'm desperate and there's this awful cloud like I'll never even *know* what I want to eat again. I left to go talk to my sister. Not about what was happening, I was too fogged up in that to think I could talk about it, but just to go see my sister. Oh and then I got things right. Then I could see again and talk again and feel hungry again. Damn it, I hate you rich people. You're the ones with the cars, the houses, all the furniture to clean, kitchens dirty from all the damn food you've eaten -- I go over there, long bus ride, up hours before I even start working, then hours of cleaning. I hate you. And always I start loving the work about the time I'm too tired to want to finish. Just about the time when I start to think I just can't finish, I want to sit down, damn it, just about that time that understanding that isn't in my mind, that knowing, that stretched out place will come to me and I'll finish my work, and your house will be clean, I'll want to look and look and look like when I write I want to read and read and read but I'll pull myself away and I'll go home. I'll have spent all day *caring*, perhaps in spite of myself, but caring even so, wanting the bathtub spotless, wanting all the shelves and books dusted just so, and I'll go around seeing the house through your eyes, the beds changed, your funny water bed that if I were still riding the maid van we'd all laugh about together. The newspapers scattered all over the floor, someone knocked a trash can over this morning and didn't pick it up, I guess you thought, "Oh, the maid comes today." That's what hurts, not honest work for honest pay, but that thinking I'm *supposed* to do for you what you're too lazy to do for yourselves. Some of you won't even throw your underwear in the hamper, won't even pick it up off the floor, and that's what *hurts*, what makes me angry if I have energy enough, just kind of knocks off a part of my heart if I don't. I'll clean your house, I'll care about it all day long, I'll really try to get the kitchen floor clean, and I'll want the stove and counter tops shining, I'll feel bad if I can't get everything done before you come home, and what is your part? Well, leave the door unlocked so I can get in and pay me \$15.00. I'd like Dr. Pepper but that's really something extra and

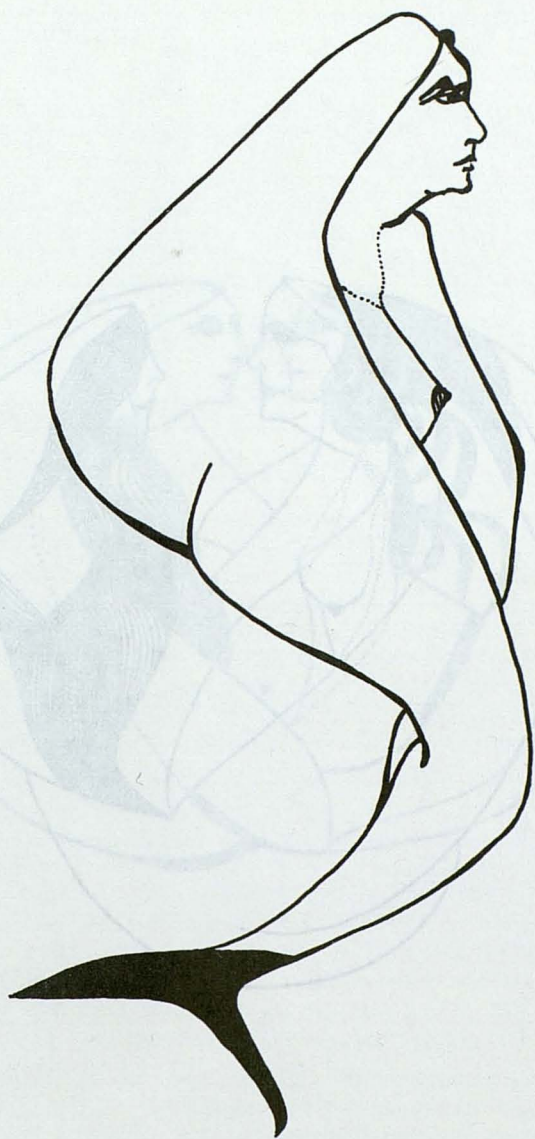
if I have the money I'll buy my own and bring it in my knap-sack. No, just leave the door open and leave \$15.00 on the table. You won't have to learn about me, it'll never have to occur to you to wonder what *my* house looks like, how I have things to do just like you, how my days mean something to *me*, not just to you in how clean your house is when I leave, none of that, and those of you who spend the day at home with me you'll talk all day long about yourselves, my heart will love you, feel bad at your imprisonment, feel bad to know you pay me half to listen to you since no one else will (of course you expect the house to be cleaned too), you'll talk everyday I come for weeks and weeks and it'll never occur to you to wonder what's on my heart, whether when you're talking to me I might not have my own head full of things to say. No, none of that required. All that is required is that you leave the door open and the money on the table. (You went away once for three weeks and expected me to clean without getting paid. You paid me when you got back, as though I didn't have to buy food and pay bus fare while you were away.) I keep harping. I just mean to say -- leave the door open, the money on the table. I'll do the rest of it, I'll take into myself whatever needs to be taken in, I'll do the work. And then you lock me out! You don't call later to say you're sorry, that you'll bring the money over anyway. Alright, not bring the money over, but just to call and say you're sorry, that you'd intended to leave the door open! Sometimes on those days the pain covers me over and I get lost and for days I can't even be with Jay, can only just float along there beside her, feeling that I'll manage if I just eat when she's eating. But we'd planned to go to the ocean. She'd even borrowed her friend's car. We'd *planned*. I can't go. I can't decide to go. I can't decide to stay. ***I WANT MY TWO CUCUMBERS BACK.*** I need them now. I can't ride on the top of this wave. If only I could yell my anger! If only I could march over to your house and start screaming --

I'd gone to the Friday night coffeehouse. The newsletter had just come out with some awful slander against the separatists and since most of us were at the coffeehouse there was lots of talk, alot of excitement. I was very tired. I'd cleaned Ms. Keese's house and then waited an hour on the bus. I don't even know why I went to the coffeehouse except that it had something to do with not being defeated, taking a bath, putting on clean clothes and making the world mine again, no matter how tired, the tiredness would leave, it'd just give me an easiness, a special cloud to see the others through. I sat on the big stuffed pillow, Darlene sat beside me and Linda on the other side, separatists all around me on the floor. I felt like I was the center to the whole discussion, something was making me the center, I couldn't tell what. The articles in the newsletter hadn't affected me much, I saw them for what they were, that was all. The tall weedy wildflowers in the vacant lot had affected me more, my tiredness affected me more, being there with the other women, the triumph for me in that, no more going to strange houses with strange men doing strange things, no more being used, absent -- my taking the world, my going to the coffeehouse, sitting on the stuffed pillow sitting between Darlene and

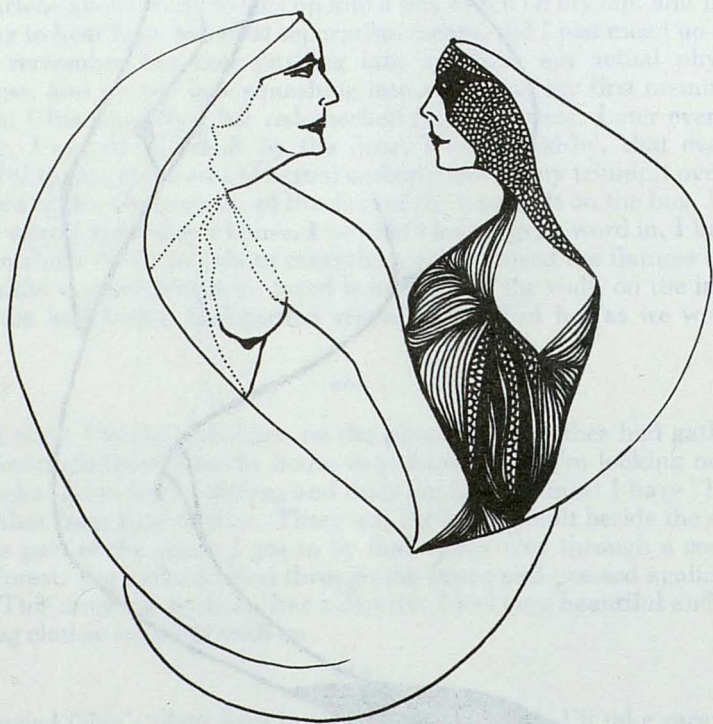
Linda, somehow being the center of the circle though I wasn't even talking. Joan was the most upset, it mattered to her so much that she be liked, that she not be misunderstood. I told her *we* loved her, to just consider herself part of the Lesbian Separatist Organization and forget the Lesbian Organization. I told her "water off a duck's back" and thought of buffle-heads on the Hudson near the falls, thought of upturned tails that could make me laugh, thought of those walks by myself through the snow to see the buffle-heads. All of it water off a duck's back, the body tiredness I'd defeated, I'd come on my bicycle in the twilight. I could hear women's voices, I loved to look at us, to see how we looked, felt Darlene about ready to curl up into a tiny kitten on my lap, and Linda wanting to hear from me what separatism meant, did I just mean no men, and I remember her face pushing into my face, not actual physical closeness, and yet her face squashing into mine, like my first memory of Regina, Gina squashing her red-cheeked face into mine. Later everyone leaving, I sat on the desk by the door, I said good-by, that evening beautiful to me, some sort of actual embodiment of my triumph over the tiredness of the whole week, of the day, of the long wait on the bus. I said plenty when I got to Jay's house. I wouldn't let her get a word in, I had an opinion about everyone, about everything said. I loved the flatness of her bed on the wooden platform, loved being next to the wall, on the inside, loved the half-Vicks, half-garden vegetable smell of her as we went to sleep.

Last night I spoke to Regina on the phone. Her mother had gathered nine dozen gladiolas into the house to welcome her! I'm looking now at the bricks laid to form patterns and thinking how the most I have "built" is my altar from time to time. There was the altar I built beside the ocean once, a part of the ocean I got to by finding my way through a coconut palm forest. Big rocks carried through the forest and pressed against the sand. This morning my body has a dignity. I feel very beautiful and even wearing clothes is alright with me.

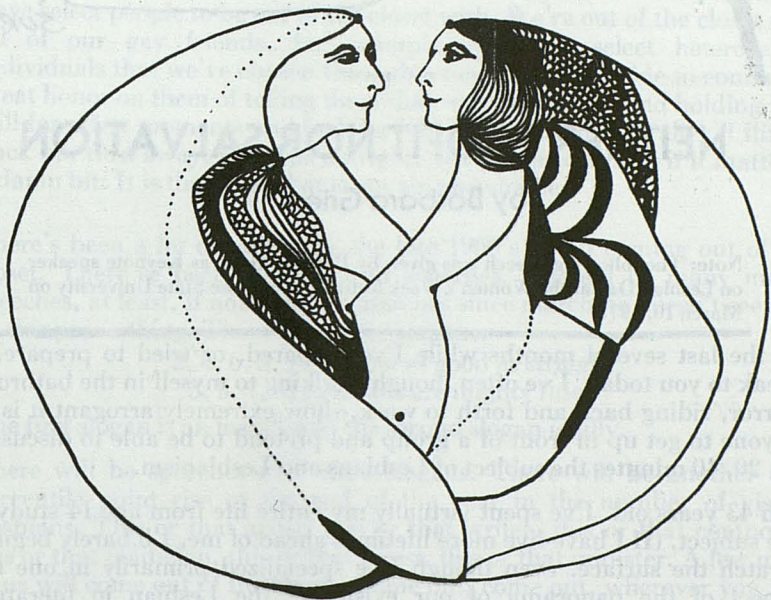
I carried Gina's plant here in its round glass bowl. I'll take care of it. Through loving it, repotting it into something clay, something more porous, I'll return to my love for her, I'll weed that love of our too-close contact of the last few months, our too-great differences. Such a melody in me this morning. The bushy green plant that even so needs care, is glad to be here with me, watching the birds on the round brick roof and feeling the breeze. I stayed home this morning, burned the purple candle, the temple candle of work, of writing. I read Jay's letter, not the reading that makes sense, just the reading of words skipping around, skipping toward some sort of fountain, some sort of happiness in me.



The three drawings beginning with the womyn-siren are to be considered a series. I did them thinking of our amphibian emergence from water. Beginning with one siren/womyn emerging into two, I am trying to combine two elements of wimmin, earthiness and fluidity; oneness with multiplicity, suggesting friendship and strength.

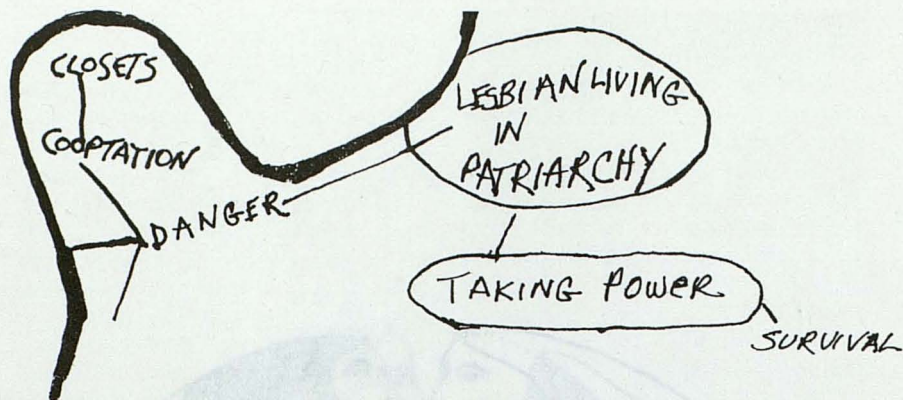


It is hard for me to talk about these pen and inks. It is hard to place interpretations on myths, archetypes, mind images. So take it for what they are to me, what they may be to you, what they become to any womyn looking at them.



I see them as symbolic of our "sinister" wisdom, our intuitive knowledge of our origin, our apparent and hidden strength.

DRAWINGS by Joanna Spilman



NEITHER PROFIT NOR SALVATION

by Barbara Grier

Note: The following speech was given by Barbara Grier as Keynote speaker on Lesbian Day at the Women's Week festival at San Jose State University on March 10, 1977.

In the last several months while I've prepared, or tried to prepare, to speak to you today, I've often thought--talking to myself in the bathroom mirror, riding back and forth to work,--how extremely arrogant it is for anyone to get up in front of a group and pretend to be able to discuss in 15, 20, 40 minutes the subject of Lesbians and Lesbianism.

I'm 43 years old. I've spent virtually my entire life from age 14 studying the subject. (If I have five more lifetimes ahead of me, I'll barely begin to scratch the surface, even though I've specialized primarily in one tiny aspect of the panorama of our existence, the Lesbian in literature, because, after all, there are millions of Lesbians.) There are millions of Lesbians in the United States. Not thousands nor hundreds of thousands, but millions of women who are Lesbians. We have many things in common, but we have many more things not in common with one another. What is true for one of us may not be true for hundreds of thousands of us in different personal circumstances.

Probably the Lesbians sitting in this room have a little higher sense of what we call "consciousness" but maybe not even that, because I'll bet there are some closeted Lesbians in this room too. In fact, there are probably a few secret Lesbians sitting out there listening to me now. And as I'm talking, you're beginning to shake inside or squirm a little. There's bound to be some of you out there. There are always some of you in every room where there are a few women, always. Every time you ride a bus and there are a handful of women on the bus, someone on that bus is probably a closet Lesbian, maybe several someones on that bus. In fact, the closet, that ridiculous place, may be just exactly the only other thing we have in common besides the basic one, that we are Lesbians.

I'm not even sure that I want to try to define the word *Lesbian* in front of a group like this. Those of you out there who know what the word means don't need any explanation, and those of you who do not, why are you here? But the closet, we all know about closets. We hang our coats, shirts, pants, shoes, lives in closets. In fact, not just some of us, not just a few of us, not half of us, or three quarters but more like 95% of us live our lives in closets.

Now, even the closet folk have differing levels of "closetism" ... I guess we'll coin a word. Some of us live in closets part of the time, some of us live in closets, say, 75% of the time and 25% we're out of the closet. We have select people to be out of the closet with. We're out of the closet with all of our gay friends, for example, and five select heterosexual individuals that we've chosen throughout our lives to decide to confer the great honor on them of telling them that we're Lesbians, and holding very still for a few moments and looking into their eyes for fear they'll flinch, back up, turn away, reject us outright, as if it mattered. As if it mattered a damn bit. It is the closet that is our sin and shame.

There's been a lot of talk since the late 1960's about coming out of the closet. There've been marches and speeches. There'll be many more speeches, at least, if not so many marches since marching doesn't seem to be this year's thing. There'll be some slogans:

"2, 4, 6, 8, gay is just as good as straight

"3, 5, 7, 9, Lesbians are mighty fine"

The first slogan is an insult, and the second slogan is silly.

There will be speeches and more slogans. There will be another tiny percentile point rise at the end of the year in the number of visible Lesbians. This or that artist, this or that writer, this or that composer, this or that politician, this or that priest, this or that minister. A few more of us will come out of the closet. Come out, come out, wherever you are. That will be very good for them and that will be very good for the handful of people whose lives they touch and it will probably even be somewhat beneficial for the Lesbians who have access to their public derring-do and take some comfort from their acts.

But coming out of the closet is getting to be less and less of an option and more and more of an obligation. It is not a matter of "you ought to because it's healthier to live like an open free person" or "you ought to because it's easier" because deception is difficult at best ... you have to carry it forward and it keeps you busy looking over your shoulder on both sides. And you ought to because being in the closet is not necessary any longer. It's a moral obligation. It's not a matter of coming out of the closet because it's good for you. It's not a matter of coming out of the closet because it's good for your lover, because you're going to feel better, because it'll eventually loosen up your relationship with your family or loosen up your relationships with your neighbors or help at work. It has nothing to do with that. You need to come out of the closet because *you know* you're a Lesbian and everyone of you who stays in the closet makes it harder for the woman down the street to come out of the closet. We help oppress each other, we are our own oppression. We even have a few

women out there who are ashamed of being Lesbians. That's hard to imagine, I know, but it's true. There are still Lesbians out there who are ashamed of being Lesbians. Incomprehensible, illogical, of course, but it exists. Now, there are a few people who remain in the closet and enjoy being uncomfortable about being Lesbians, and I'm not sure if anything I say here today is going to have any effect on any of them. But there are some weird people everywhere, there are even some weird Lesbians, so if you're weird in this way, fine, stay in the closet, I'm not talking to you. I'm talking to the run-of-the-mill Lesbians out there, the women who do not belong in the closet, are not comfortable in the closet, don't really want to be in the closet, but think for some real or imagined reason ... and imagined reasons are every bit as good as real reasons ... that they must remain there because if they don't stay in the closet, if they come out, they're going to lose their jobs or no one will love them or people will point at them on the street and laugh or their co-workers will have nothing to do with them or well, make up your own reasons. I'm sure there are as many reasons as there are closet cases out there.

But it's not a matter of choice any longer. I'm not really asking you to come out of the closet, I'm telling you. You have to come out of the closet, you have to come out. Not only do you have to, but the time has come where those of us who are out of the closet need to put pressure on those who are in. And I don't mean unkind pressure but real pressure. We need to talk to the women we know who know that they are gay and that we know they're gay and that they know we know they're gay but who for one reason or another still remain in the closet. If there is a crusade in the future, the crusade is to strengthen our numbers publicly. I mean make those women who are Lesbians and know they are Lesbians stand up and be counted. It is time to do so. Once again, I am not advocating that you run around with sandwich boards, I am not saying you need to go out on the street and chalk it in front of your house. I am saying that you need to start acting like you really are. Don't lie, don't pretend. Behave as you are, you're a Lesbian, act like a Lesbian, be glad you're a Lesbian, tell the world you're a Lesbian, subtly, of course. But make sure that every thinking, intelligent person anywhere around you, that has any relationship with you, however casual, is aware or likely to be aware of your orientation. It's the least you can do for the cause, it's the least you can do for your own people. We have a terrible disadvantage ... we aren't marked in some clear cut way. We can't be seen, we aren't visible. As others have suggested, I too wish we'd all wake up lavender some morning and solve that part of the problem. We cannot be seen and because we can't be seen, we can pretend, and in years past, perhaps there were reasons for it. Perhaps it was better, perhaps it was easier to pretend.

But it's not good anymore, it's not healthy, it doesn't feel good, it's not good for you, and it's very bad for the movement. It's very bad for the future. It's extremely bad for the young Lesbians now, the 10-year olds, the 15-year olds, the ones who are 20 and looking to us as examples. Why not make this world a little easier for everyone who comes after us? It's

really not too much to ask. Don't we owe the world that? Shouldn't our passage through it enrich it? Shouldn't our having lived mean something good for those who come after us? And what about our own lives? There are an awful lot of young people in this world. Why should we reinforce in them fear for the safety of any job? Why should you for a minute imagine that you have to fear for your job? One of the reasons that women are having trouble in universities and in businesses on a professional level is the closet. Many women who would be active in the women's movement, women who have the knowledge and the wherewithall to do wonders are cautious in many cases because they fear that if they rock the boat about feminism, someone will come out with the fact that they're closet Lesbians and rock their boat back a little. I've heard that argument offered up so many times, I can't count it. The way to combat it is to come out first.

What it boils down to is this: when you start counting the women who have succeeded on an historical level, you find that virtually all famous women were Lesbians. Not all, but virtually all. Such enormous quantities of them, such a proportion far out of reasonable belief that you're forced to come up with one of two conclusions. Either almost every woman must be a Lesbian given the choice to be, which happens to be my personal opinion, or, if you can't accept that, you must at least accept that those women who step out in the world and do something important in it are Lesbians. It is unrealistic to believe that some social body is going to turn upon all of the successful and creative women in the world and put them out of commission by some kind of mass genocide. I rather doubt that that's going to happen. For one thing, there are far too many women for it to happen. If all the Lesbians come out of the closet, think how many famous women that's going to concern. Think for a minute in your head about every entertainer you can name who is gay, every movie star that you know is a Lesbian. Think about that for a few minutes.

Then let's talk about all the women we learned about in school in literature. Let's take one relatively small group -- American women poets. Let's name the famous American women poets that we now have reasonable proof were Lesbians. There's Amy Lowell, and Emily Dickinson, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Elinor Wylie and Sara Teasdale. Get the point? Did you ever hear of any of those women? Could you get through school without having heard of any of them? We can go on, there's quite a list more. Let's see, who's the latest one to come out publicly? Adrienne Rich was the winner of the National Book Award a couple of years back. She's just come out, and Olga Broumas has established her reputation on her Lesbian poetry. In fact, I have trouble finding heterosexual women poets. Marianne Moore, as far as I know, is the only famous American one, but I'm sure there are some others. There just aren't very many, for some reason, there just aren't very many. So when all these women come out, including all the women who work in factories and work on switchboards and run elevators and work for Macy's Department Store as I do, when all the women come out, how is it going to change the world? Well, for one thing, it's going to make it easier for all of us to live in the world. It's going to make it impossible for people

to be fired for being Lesbians because it is going to be extremely difficult to fire all the Lesbians and still run all the businesses, and all the schools, and all the universities, and all the churches because you cannot get rid of all your talent and keep everything moving forward properly. And an awful lot of talent would have to go. But I'm not really asking or cajoling or convincing, I'm trying to tell you in as kind a way as I can that it's time to come out of the closet and it's time to make sure everyone around you comes out of the closet too.

I'd like to tell you about my sister. My sister is five years younger than I am. Her name is Diane. She lives less than an eighth of a mile away from me in a valley in Missouri, forty miles east of Kansas City, Missouri. She lives with another woman. They consider themselves married. They have a number of closeted gay friends like themselves, both male couples and Lesbian couples. They're very open with them or at least as open as they are able to be open with anybody or anything. They've both worked at the same company for more than ten years and it's a company with a hundred or so employees. They've been together all of those years and in that length of time, owned two pieces of property together. They still think, and will tell you, that none of the people they work with know they're a Lesbian couple. I don't think all the people they work with are that stupid myself, but maybe they are. But when you ask them why they don't let the people they work with know, for sure, they say they don't fear for their jobs at all and they wouldn't mind if their bosses knew, but they'd hate for their co-workers to know they are Lesbians. Have you every thought for a minute what people think of you if they don't think you're Lesbians? Think about that. Do you really want to be thought heterosexual? I personally do not. Think about it, just think about it.

I'd like to tell you about Donna, the woman I'm married to. She is head of several departments at the Kansas City, Missouri Public Library. When we started living together over five years ago, I had been a patron of that library for 15 years or so. Needless to say, every librarian in the system had heard about the notorious Barbara Grier who collects thoose books, so there would have been no possible way that Donna could have remained in the closet in any sense. It's been a rich and rewarding experience for her in every way.

I think I can demonstrate using her as an example how seriously it can disadvantage you to be known as a Lesbian. When we began living together, she was an assistant in a department in the library, a professional librarian, simply one of many in a department. She's now head of several departments and she's doubled her salary, and she's very well thought of by everyone she works with, very well liked, and they know that she's a Lesbian. They know that we're a couple. They don't make a big point of it, they don't run around discussing it at great length, at least not with Donna. But if it has caused her any inconvenience, she hasn't noticed it.

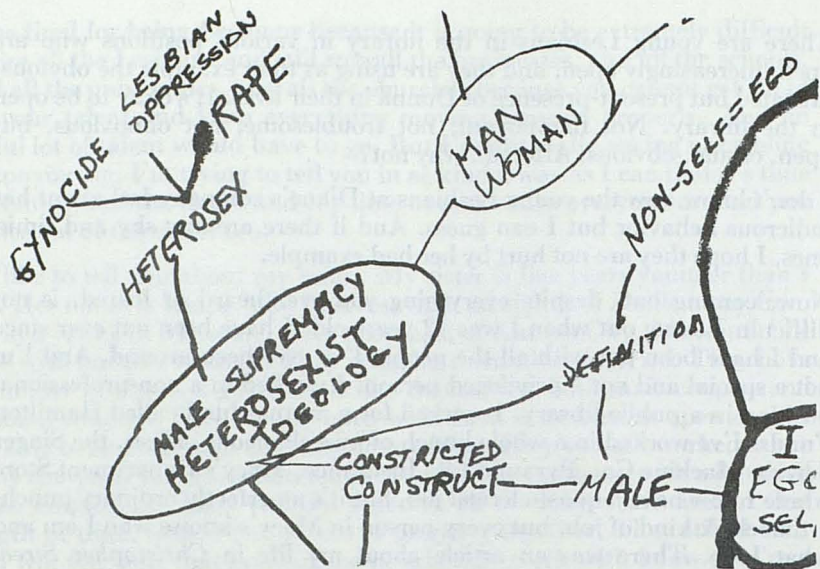
But there's another comparison between my sister Diane and her life and the life Donna and I enjoy, and it's probably the most important one.

There are young Lesbians in the library in various positions who are open, increasingly open, and they are using as their example the obvious, unstated but present-presence of Donna in their lives. It's okay to be open in the library. Not flamboyant, not troublesome, not obnoxious, but open, casual, obvious. After all, why not?

I don't know how the young Lesbians at Diane's company feel about her ludicrous behavior but I can guess. And if there are any shy and timid ones, I hope they are not hurt by her bad example.

Now, coming out, despite everything you ever heard or feared, is not difficult. I came out when I was 12 years old. I have been out ever since and I have been out with all the people I've ever been around. And I'm not a special and not a privileged person. I worked in a non-professional position in a public library. I worked for a mutual fund called Hamilton Funds. I've worked in a whole bunch of miscellaneous offices, the Singer Sewing Machine Co., Pyramid Life Insurance, Macy's Department Store where I now have a quasi-clerical job, but it's a perfectly ordinary punch-a-timeclock kind of job, but every person in Macy's knows who I am and what I do. There was an article about my life in *Christopher Street Magazine* in October, 1976. There's a dog-eared, tattered copy of *Christopher Street* that went all over my department. Everybody in the place read it and everyone came and talked to me. My boss, who is a stereotype male-chauvinist-pig, oppressive person who dislikes everything that he doesn't particularly share an intimate acquaintance with, the kind of person who has a bumper sticker that reads "Take your boy hunting and you won't go hunting your boy," even my boss finds somehow an obscure pride in my openness.

But I'm not asking you, I'm telling you that you have to come out of the closet. We have to, we all have to be out, we have to because there's nowhere else to go. We've done all we can do as a small, isolated, spotlighted public movement. It's not enough that every year a few thousand kids come out of high school and decide, boy, oh boy, I'm going to break with the enemy, my family, I'm going out and I'm going to live my life. That's one kind of coming out. They've got a long way to go. They're going to walk out of society and walk back into it, and walk out of it and back into it and go through a lot of changes, a lot of education processes, a lot of jobs, a lot of things. Right now, I want all of those women who have made their "place" in the world, I want all of those women over 25 or so who have jobs and responsibilities and obligations and functions to perform and a life of their own and don't-bother-me, I'll-call-you, and I-don't-see-why-I-should-do-that-because-I-did-it-all-myself, let-them-drag-themselves-up-by-their-bootstraps. I did it all myself, let them drag themselves up by their bootstraps, I don't owe them anything. But you do. You owe them plenty. You owe them your wit and wisdom. You owe them all the suffering you went through passed by, the right not to have to go through it all just like you did. It's not that it wouldn't make them stronger, perhaps, but it's just not necessary anymore. What is necessary is coming out. Coming out every day in every way. Neither for profit nor salvation, but because *this* is the time to come out.



DISTURBANCE

The mountain dark treacherous
 wild with loneliness the night
 hiding in its own shadow
 Accented by a kerosene lamp
 The smell of smoke from a wood-burning stove
 a rifle cocked & loaded in the corner.

Tonight three burly men outside my cabin door
 Two Chicanos unkempt but smiling
 The third man fat short white
 a mean wide face
 as greasy as a frying pan.

They stand so easy in my space
 thinking nothing of it
 I play my guitar to all the trees
 The wide one grins his teeth as dirty as
 any that I've read about or seen.

"Goodbye Guy," he says
 Curls his lip around the second word
 his way to tell me that he knows
 I am a dyke
 His male ego erect His IQ of minus 20
 His primitive hate the hate of every man
 for a woman
 who sins against his entire sex
 by omission.

My stomach churns at his departure
Remembering a sawed-off Southern truck driver
with a greasy crewcut and short mean teeth
Six years ago he tried to rape me
I was 22
struggling for my life
caught between the shelter of the trees
and his semi on the other side
I had taken the half-mile ride
for which I had to pay
inside his arms
His cock unzipped hard
against my unsuspecting jeans.

"I have to be back by four." I was logical.
He was amused.
He tried to smear his face across my mouth.
I tried to remember how to kill him.
The truth is that he let me go.
His goodwill. His enjoyment.
I ran away thanking him.
My voice high-pitched obsequious
Dramatizing the story later
to hide my powerlessness.

Thank ya Thank ya massah
Let this poor defenseless creature go
She is only a woman.
I am only a woman
remembering that terrified woman's cries
that pulling at survival
that groveling on the ground
The face of his unquestioned power then
His whim to let me go or rape and kill me.

Tonight my rifle makes no sound
But if you come inside that door
Fat Greasy Frying Pan man
Sawed-off Southern Trucker or
Any man who thinks he might
Trample on my space again
I will not hesitate to throw this trigger back
And send your head across the peaceful trees
Then cry only for your violence
That sits aching in my fingers
On the trigger of this gun.

PRACTICE. A DREAM.

The woman tells me to remember Diana, the Goddess
and to scream
when I am in danger.

I stay alert and watch the speaker
but danger does not come where one is looking.

A man appears next to me, close
about to run his hand up me like a piano keyboard.

I find my voice and scream.
I remembered Diana.
I wake shaken, but feeling I did well.

- Ellen Bass

*"for the number of outlaws of women
is a circle wider than history"*



Lesbian Herstory

AN OPTIONAL HISTORY

If in some other life I had been a scop,
a wandering poet
moving from village to village
circle of light in the primitive mind
woman trapped in a male body
earning my living by my readings
free to wander through the silence where the women dwelled,
I could tell you straight in the eye
that while the men burned the manuscripts and
played the thrust and parry games
with monsters of their own invention,
the women recited their strength to themselves
and carried the memory of the race
strapped to their shoulders and tied to their tongues,
keeping alive the truth of the xx chromosomes
knowing their silhouette was survival's future tense.

And later when the women found themselves trading
the vast plains for feudal tenancy
barred from priesthood, knighthood, selfhood
they tended the plagues
while the church burned the women to cure the earth

The survivors hunched over their labor
their rounded shoulders not enough of an apology
keeping watch by the gummy mouth
where the teeth of death had rotted
and they confessed to their daughters
with each drop from their nipples
that they would rather be Maid Marion
riding off with the outlaw Robin Hood
for they knew who she really was
and why celibate Tuck was faithful to her.

And they knew nothing of the continent of incontinent women
draped in buffalo robes
who covered their bodies when the men grew tired of them
who used rocks for birth control when they were not tired
and when the rocks failed

warmed their infants with their lactation and lamentation
and discovered that the secrets of the shamans
contained only instructions for making a rattle
and so, painted their visions on cambric shirts
waiting out the ghost dance.

If in this life I would be the self-same wandering poet
moving from enclave to enclave
free woman in my own body

I would tell you straight in the eye
that women have been too long half in shadow
half in light
more half than whole
each of us looking at each other
as if from around some corner
yet sensing all out there in the breasts catching the light
and though the men continue minting the earth
we can do more than gossip the legends to ourselves,
for the number of outlaws of women is a circle wider than history.

for the numbers of outlaws of women
is a circle wider than history

- Sandia

HONORARY SUBSCRIPTIONS
TO SINISTER WISDOM FOR:

EMILY DICKINSON
VIRGINIA WOOLF
AMY LOWELL
WILLA CATHER
MARGARET ANDERSON
SUSAN B. ANTHONY
SARA TEASDALE
CARBY THOMAS
EDITH HAMILTON
VITA JACKVILLE-WEST
RENÉE VIVIEN

FROM JOAN CORBIN

Dear Catherine and Harriet,

It was when I tried to think of people who would appreciate a subscription to *Sinister Wisdom* that I realized more than ever how shockingly isolated I am and have been for too long--yes, in this great metropolis! Though I am taking steps to remedy that, as of now I come up with a total blank. Continuing to search my mind for candidates, I devised a better-than-nothing solution: a list I submit for honorary gift subscriptions: Emily Dickinson, Virginia Woolf, Amy Lowell, Willa Cather, Margaret Anderson, Susan B. Anthony, Sara Teasdale, Carey Thomas, Edith Hamilton, Vita Sackville-West, and Renee Vivien. Regretfully, I wasn't able to include everyone because I'm far from wealthy. But there's no one I want to encourage more than you.

I have the first three issues of *SW* and a sub for the next three. I'm continually re-reading them. I think I should stop by Page One, Pasadena, as I do at least once a week, and stock up on spares! I read Adrienne Rich's important statement again and again because I love hearing her say it--almost as though it were a poem.

And Tee Corinne's cover! Can you imagine how much I desire a print or poster of that? Loveliest thing I've ever seen! (I'm sure multitudes are telling you the same thing.)

Now--having taken care of business, there is a further communication--mainly an extension of your discussion of *The Ladder*--that I want to share with you. In the midst of many details I'll be as concise as possible.

I happened to be living in Los Angeles when *The Ladder* first appeared and I knew some of the women who worked on it, who started it. I knew the ones who lived in L.A. very well. I have most of the early issues including the first one, the latest being January, 1961. It is ironic that I find these much more interesting now than I did then--for in those days I regarded it as a rather pitiful sheet. The art work was atrocious and the fiction! Sophomoric, wildly hysterical, gauche--and embarrassing. "Homeward," the first story they printed, was typical and seemed to set the tone for much that followed. Gene Damon's stories were somewhat better and "Masquerade" rather amusingly romantic. I even have a few copies of *Vice Versa* somewhere--and knew the young woman who "published" it--1947-48. Her list was limited--she typed each entire issue. (See *The Ladder*, Book Review, Vol. 1, No. 3). Today I acknowledge *The Ladder* as a very valuable document, a towering monument in our history. Everything they printed contained a view of the way things were. Many women in those days were the way they appeared in the fiction. It was actually often sadistically frustrating. And there was much energy spent on the subject of was it a sickness? even a "Study of Personality Variables of Homosexual Women" (*The Ladder*, Vol. 3, No. 8) in which I participated. (It was entertaining--I got to draw pictures.)

I was never a member of the DOB [Daughters of Bilitis]--although the Feds thought I was and I underwent some devastating harassment in the 60's. They even got inside my house one time. (My friend admitted them, and when I reached home later, they seemed disconcerted that we weren't cringing.) Five years later, after lots of money, energy and hours with a (woman) attorney, I had a hearing and was granted my security clearance. People I worked with were supportive--none of them gay. Anyway, those agents had taken telephoto pictures of DOB's everywhere, at the beach, even in their own backyards--they were shown to me, but I couldn't "identify" any of them. But that's a whole other story. The effects were longer lasting than I like to think of.

At the time The Ladder appeared, an organization called One, Inc., founded by male homosexuals, had been established for four years in Los Angeles. Beginning in January, 1953, they published a monthly called One Magazine: The Homosexual Viewpoint. I became involved with that in April, '53, first doing the mailing which I enjoyed, until the editor raided my wastebasket, rescuing discards and discovering my artistic potential. I was on the editorial staff for a while--several women worked on the mag from time to time--and by July of 1954 I had graduated to Art Director as Eve Elloree, doing the production work--layout, paste-up, type selection and most of the drawings and covers. Many of us, though not all, thought we should use pseudonyms in those days. I picked Elloree out of the atlas--I liked the sound of it--a little town about 120 miles south of you.

One, Inc., as well as DOB and The Ladder, did a lot of the groundwork, part of a foundation we are building on today. There was even an obscenity ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court in our favor. (See One Magazine, February, 1958.)

If it hadn't been for One, I would most likely have devoted more of myself to The Ladder. If it were today, I know I would. But I didn't have the ability to focus then that I have now. As it was, I worked with One until around 1964 when the magazine ceased publication.

I assure you, it is astonishing to see the changes since those beginnings! What an abundance of superb writers, artists and thinkers we have now! What love, sharing, determination, self-respect, courage, energy and spirit!

Yes, a network exists--and I'm passionately a part of it, and yes my Lesbian imagination is constantly developing and yes, it's truly an exhilarating time to be living!

My deepest thanks to you--

*Joan Corbin
La Crescenta, California*



Photograph and detail by **CLEMENTINA HAWARDEN**



Photograph and detail by **CLEMENTINA HAWARDEN**

CLEMENTINA HAWARDEN, PHOTOGRAPHER

by Tee Corinne

Clementina, Lady Hawarden, was an enigmatic woman photographer born in Scotland in 1822. She married at 23, gave birth to a son and died at the age of 42. Graham Ovenden, editor of the only major publication dealing with her work, refers to her as being "like Vita Sackville-West, a mixture of the aristocratic north and the Mediterranean south." After looking at her photographs one wonders if there were other similarities between Lady Hawarden and the prominent bisexual author, Sackville-West.

In Hawarden's photographs of two women together, the women almost always touch each other, often they embrace. Some couples seem about to kiss, others look as if a shared intimacy had just been interrupted. If these women were posed in the same positions without clothing on it would be impossible not to read the lesbian connotations clearly. If one individual were a man and the other a woman the overt sexuality again would be taken for granted. The photographic ambiguity is a result of our lack of specific biographical information combined with the Victorian exaltation of emotionally charged friendships between individuals of the same sex. Most of us have been taught to read sentimentality rather than sexuality into this type of image. (The danger of desexualizing work done in the last century can most clearly be seen in Alice Austen's "The Darned Club" which shows two pairs of women holding each other's waist. Austen (1866-1952) was a lesbian photographer who lived and worked near New York City.)

In Hawarden's work Ovenden refers to the "oppressed sexuality" and the "languid, almost Sapphic sensuality" of her groupings of two women together or of one "matched, Narcissus-like, with a mirror." Consistently Hawarden produced solidly constructed images which imply that more is going on in them than what is actually shown. Her work seems to encompass a personal mythology (women together, women with large mirrors, women leaning their heads against walls as if trying to break through them) rather than the greco-roman allusions of her contemporary Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879).

I like spending time with this woman's work, finding it both exciting and disturbing. Mostly I want to know more about the women in the pictures, more about Clementina herself. The majority of her photographs are in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Perhaps she also left written documents and more images than those in the Academy Editions publication referred to above.

Note: Since photography books are often expensive, you may want to request that your local library purchase copies. Written requests seem to get the best results. Optionally, you can secure copies through inter-library loan.

Clementina, Lady Hawarden edited by Graham Ovenden, Academy Editions, London/St. Martin's Press, N.Y., 1974.

Alice's World: The Life and Photography of an American Original, Alice Austen (1866-1952) Ann Novotny, Chatham Press, Old Greenwich, Conn., 1976. Available from Research Reprints, 315 W. 78th St., N.Y. 10024.

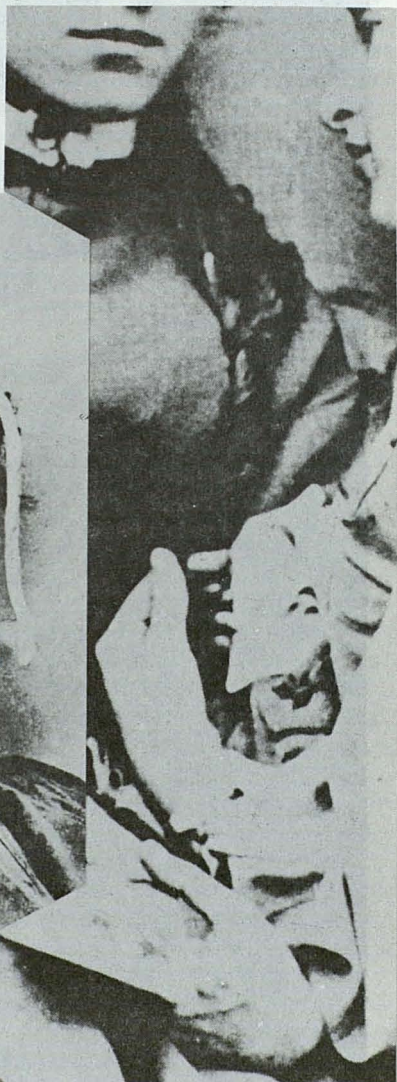
Women of Photography: A Historical Survey. A catalogue, Margery Mann and Anne Noggle, The San Francisco Museum of Art, 1975.

"Alice Austen - Photographs" by Penny House and Liza Cowan, an article appearing in "DYKE, A Quarterly" #3, 1976.

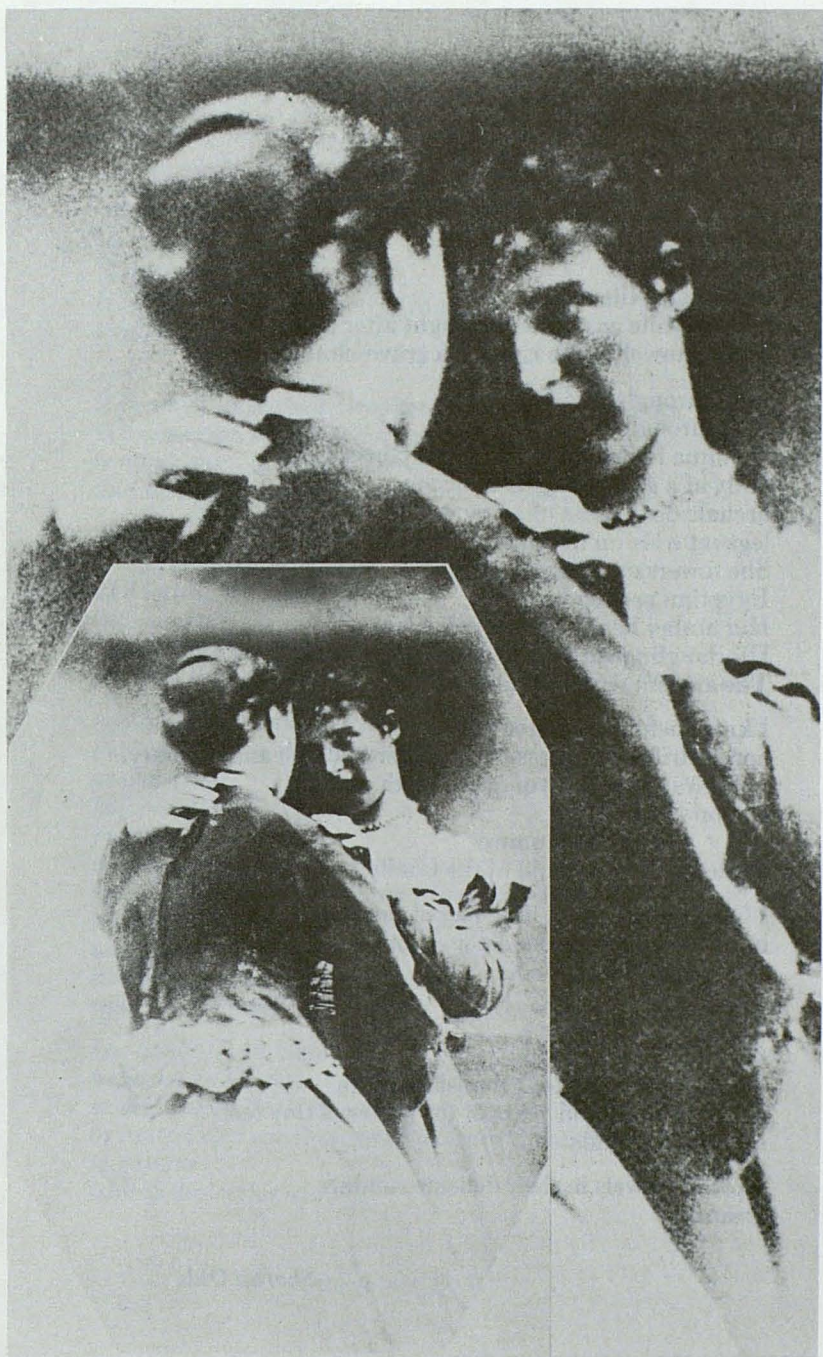
"Alice Austen's World" by Ann Novotny, an article appearing in "HERESIES: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics" #3, 1977.

Note: All photographs by Clementina Hawarden are taken from *Clementina, Lady Hawarden*, edited by Graham Ovenden. Permission to reprint requested.





Photograph and detail by CLEMENTINA HAWARDEN



Photograph and detail by CLEMENTINA HAWARDEN

The Hieroglyphics on the Bathroom Wall

The tub fills
like a pale Nile
its bed white as cartilage. Night after night,
folding towells, like Egyptian grave-cloths.

Seen through blue-green,
seen through blue,
the aqua limbs of the children. Rinsed
body of a girl oblong as a cocoon;
archaic deep waist of a boy,
legs set wide on the wide pelvis.
She towers over him in regal
Egyptian proportion.
Her amber head sports a red raven.
His dangling curls clasp caterpillars.
The ancient water parts for them.

I kneel before these gods,
hands drifting aimless in the water of death and memory,
wrinkles like stripes of grave-cloth across
a bound brow.

I am the mummy
hidden in the pyramid of the family.

I followed the slick, bare feet of the gods
into the monstrous sandstone, slipped
through the secret door.
There is no way out.
There are little dishes.
Oil of gold to bathe in.
Corn seeds to last four thousand years
and four thousand years of the patter of tiny feet
across my eyelids.

How the jewels in their delicate sandals
gleam!

- Sharon Olds

EGO

ego
is she who names herself
is i who identifies myself with me
and so creates my cosmos

ego
is focus of self in will to coherence in self-expressing
is connection of feel and dream and know
is non-denial of simultaneous
and discontinuous affirmed

ego
is aggression not violence
and letting-be as letting-me-be
(do you hear?)
one of a multidimensional self who accepts me:
discrete integer in a timeloss non-spatial correlative system

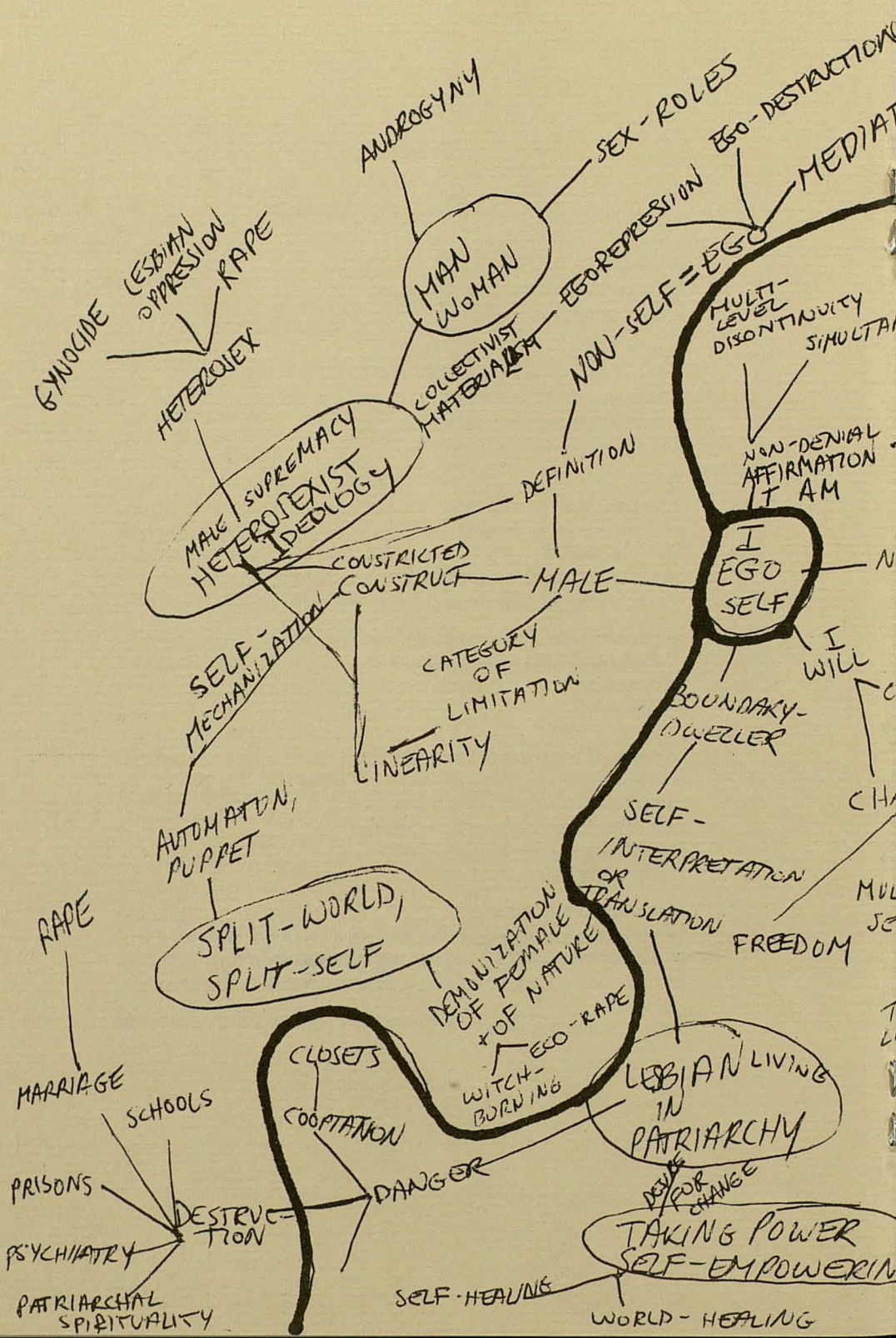
ego is also part of a system defined by men,
denied by them except as theirs

as construct
kewpie-doll

puppet
to keep all separate from each-
(even the witches they burned were separate,
puppets demonic to their mindless)-
and ever hanging from their strings
(we hang but very loosely sisters
ready to fly free)

ego mediates in male
between an alienated fiction and an alien environment
or else denies itself in endless mystic cartwheels
or materialist encomiums to collective linear dichotomized
negations
(this is dialectics, dear!)

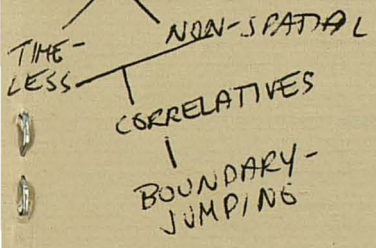
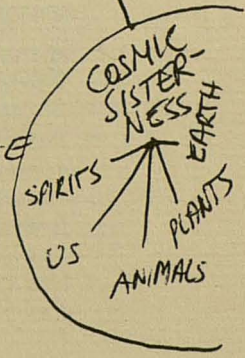
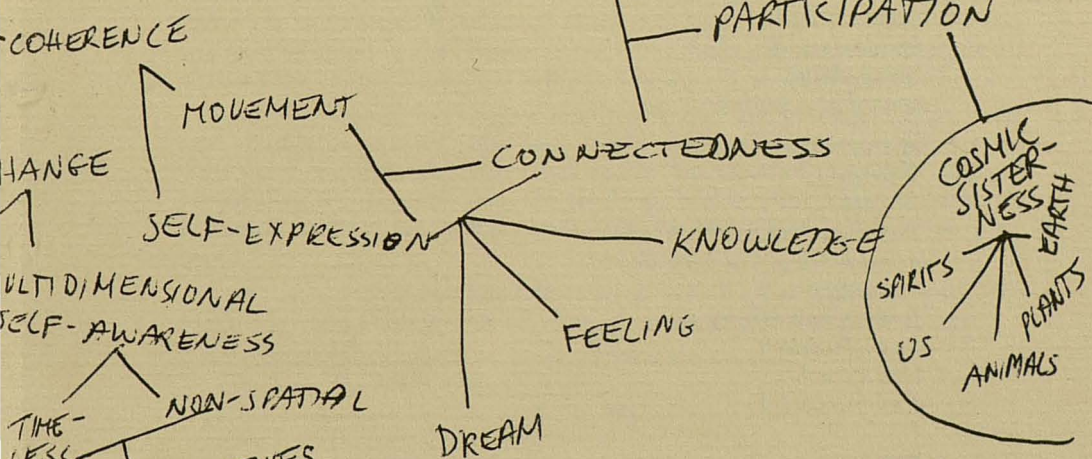
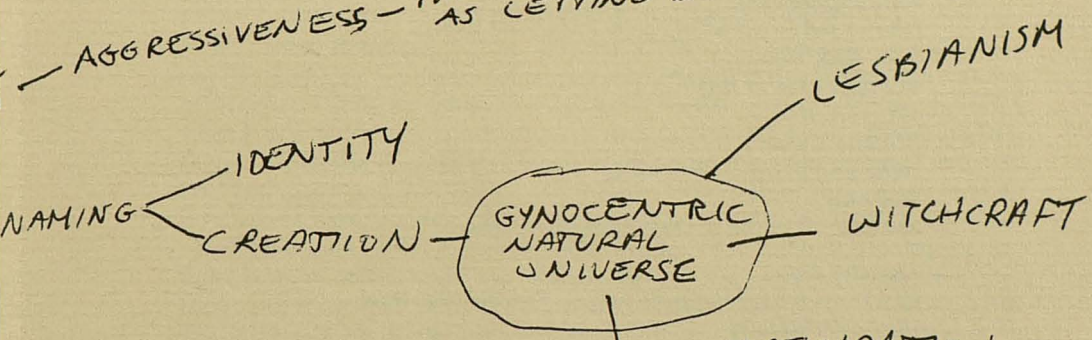
(continued on page 54)



W - MYSTICISM
 AND R. BETWEEN — WORLD DESTROYED BY MEN
 SELF-FICTION

ANXIETY

AGGRESSIVENESS — MAKING SPACE AS LETTING-BE



NG — SURVIVAL

"EGO"
 Myra Lore
 Copyright 1977

*ego translates,
interprets self in a selfless mechanized male-construction,
malconstruct
ego is she the boundary-dwelling I
who will not say no to us or yes to it, to them at any price
the force behind desire
self-empowering
(they tried to rid us of these childhood habits,
bad, bad, habits,
but we chose to stay alive:
fifty mantra,
fifteen shocks,
stelazine, prisons, schooling
and rape,
but still we chose to stay alive, we choose)*

*ego says I will
and tries to heal the split-self, split-world heritage
they wrecked us:
self and world
inside-outside
being-doing
sacred and profane*

*ego says I am
You are
We are
Lesbian, Sister, Witch
non-identical but very strong
connected
forging us a language
and a freedom
and a truth
I am powerful,
I:
Ego*

-Myra Love, a poem to be read with the centerfold map



Door Swing

RESEARCHING LESBIAN HISTORY

by Judith Schwarz

The basic problem in doing Lesbian history research (once you learn the elementary skills) is this: can you *ever* be positive the woman you are researching was a bona fide lesbian? What constitutes a definition of lesbianism? Is it stretching the historical facts to consider a woman a lesbian if you cannot prove in any real iron-clad way that she ever had a physical, sexually intimate relationship with another woman?

My own definition of a lesbian does not contain the absolute requirement that a woman who loves and cherishes another woman as her primary romantic attachment must have sexual contact with her before I would call her a woman-loving-woman--a lesbian sister. Nevertheless, there are infinite degrees and levels of affection and commitment between any two people. I am personally more interested in how these women lived their lives outside of the standard protection and more accepted social position of a male-female relationship, than I am in pinning an air-tight label to any woman's sexuality. Before you even begin researching, then, you *must* take time to define not only the basic term "lesbian," but also why you are doing the research in the first place. What questions do you want to answer? What is it you hope to find? Without questions, you will find yourself in the hopeless position of facing mountains of material without the vaguest idea how to begin making sense out of the chaos.

Assuming you do have questions--if only how the average lesbian lived and loved in generations past--but you have only the barest notion how to start your research, this essay will guide you through the early stages.* Hopefully, by the time you are ready to tackle your local archives or historical society, you will be knowledgeable enough to continue on your own.

You begin with a few basic books and articles that will arm you with knowledge and skills you will find enormously helpful later. They are:

American Historical Association. *Guide to Historical Literature*.
New York: Macmillan, 1961.

Barzun, Jacques, and Graff, Henry F. *The Modern Researcher*.
New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977.

Handlin, Oscar, ed. *Harvard Guide to American History*.
Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1966.

James, Edward T., et al. *Notable American Women: 1607-1950*.
Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1971.

Katz, Jonathan, ed. *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.*
New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1976.

Safer, R.J. *A Guide to Historical Method*. Revised ed.
Homewood, Illinois: The Dorsey Press, 1974.

*The specific information given assumes that you will be researching lesbians in the United States.

Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America." *Signs* 1 (Fall 1975): 1-29.

The above books and article should all be available at your nearest library. The only ones you may really wish to buy at this point are Katz's *Gay American History* (\$9.95) and *The Modern Researcher* (\$6.95). The indispensable *GAH* is worth every penny (and more), not only for its detailed chapter by chapter bibliographies and fascinating contents, but also for you to see the multitude of questions already being asked and the wealth of material you can examine for your own research. This book can also give you a framework and a starting point for your own research, or it may be exciting to discover that the particular question, era, or person you are most interested in has not even been considered yet. Nothing can replace that thrill when you realize that you are about to explore completely new territory where no mind asking your particular questions has ever been before. It is addictive.

The rest of the books are self-explanatory and will be extremely useful at different stages of your work. There are also excellent bibliographies on women's history you should consult, the most helpful of which are the ones compiled by Gerda Lerner, The Common Woman collective of Cambridge, Mass., or Gene Damon's excellent bibliography of *Lesbian Literature*. You may already be familiar with the vast possibilities for research in public libraries--if not, you will be surprised to know how much primary work can be accomplished there once you learn how to make use of their multitude of resources.

To be a truly effective researcher, you will need all of the following ingredients, more or less:

- 1) an enjoyment of reading.
- 2) the previously mentioned background knowledge--and hopefully your own reading over the years in gay and lesbian books and periodicals to know what has already been done over and over to the point of boredom. The world does *not* need another biography of Virginia Woolf or Gertrude Stein (unless, of course, it is exceptionally brilliant).
- 3) a love of women. (How can you know what to look for if you haven't a first-hand knowledge of even that? If you are especially new to the many aspects and varieties of lesbian life, you may wish to consult a few of the many biographies and non-fiction lesbian books available in any feminist bookstore.)
- 4) an historical imagination--which simply means that you realize how very, very different and difficult life was for lesbians in the past. If you plan to research pre-20th century women, you will find it helpful to begin by reading not only Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's article, but also Sarah Aldridge's *Cytherea's Breath* (1976), and Isabel Miller's *Patience and Sarah* (1971): two excellent novels which will help give you an historical perspective on what it may have been like to be a lesbian in the 19th century.
- 5) the soul of a detective--eager to track down elusive clues and minute details until you have found the last possible piece in the puzzle that is every person's life.

6) patience for the long, dreary days when you seek and do not find a damn thing.

7) common sense--both in the search itself (where to go, how to get into a library or archive that only allows in PhD candidates, etc.) and in the use of the material you find. Are you going to get it to other eager history buffs in written form, as a slide show, on a television program, or as a play--or were you planning to share your knowledge in even more creative new ways? Remember how many of us are out here avidly awaiting *your* discoveries--not only because of what your material may have to say that is original and unique in itself, but also because it may be the very last piece in our own puzzle that will help everything fit and make sense. You do *not* need to be the world's greatest writer, only a persistent and truthful one.

8) *honesty*. Never plagiarize another writer's material, always give credit where it is due: another book, the library where you found the original material (don't forget to ask their permission to use it for publication or you will never see the inside of a rare book room or archive again. Be subtle about *how* you will use it if you have to, but never lie--you lose in the end.) Be extremely careful not to over-read or misread your material. Sloppy research makes lousy history.

9) clean hands. I'm serious about this--if you are working in the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe (a treasure-trove of enormously valuable letters, diaries, and other rare material on American women) and/or other archives that contain rare and irreplaceable documents, please remember that smudges, dirt, tears, or careless handling only make it harder for the next researcher. They also may mean the eventual destruction of a document's usefulness forever. I will never forgive whoever it was that had eaten a jam sandwich before she handled a letter by Margaret Fuller that I needed to use. By the time I read the letter, the most essential part was unreadable. Rage, despair, and curses most foul did not make up for the heart-sick feeling that the document--and part of Margaret Fuller--was forever lost. *Be Careful!*

Let's say that you have found a woman you want to know more about, but so far she is only a name to you. For instance, you have read the article in *Notable American Women* on the economic historian and social reformer, Katharine Coman (1857-1915), and become intrigued with the last line: "After her death Katharine Lee Bates, with whom she had lived for many years, wrote a series of sonnets in her memory, later published in *Yellow Clover* (1922)." You dash to the library and read (or order through interlibrary loan) *Yellow Clover*, and cannot believe you've never heard of this book, nor that it was published in 1922 and is so explicitly written about the love between two women. Bates' grief over the loss of her "Beloved," her "Joy-of-Life," Katharine Coman is somewhat maudlin at times, but always intensely felt and openly admitted. (The romantic in me burst into tears the first time I read the title poem.)

"Hurrah! you say! "I've hit gold the first try!" And it looks easy from here on -- after all, Katharine Lee Bates wrote the second national anthem, "America the Beautiful," so there's bound to be a lot written about her. Also, both Bates and Coman are in *Notable American Women*, which gives you not only a brief but complete biography of the

women, but also a detailed bibliography of all known sources on them. But there is one problem--no one else has ever hinted that they were anything other than "just good friends." In fact, the only major published biography ever written about Bates was done by a niece of hers, and gives only the barest mention of Katharine Coman--an amazing bit of pussy-footing around the truth when you realize that the women were an acknowledged couple for over thirty-five years! After reading everything you can get your hands on, you still *know* this couple represents a strong lesbian relationship of the type that flourished in the many women's colleges at the turn of the century--but you have not one shred of proof. Yes, you could write a convincing article just using the poems in *Yellow Clover* and a few details found in other accounts of their lives. But you want as complete and accurate a history of their lives as you can possibly put together. Now that you have read all the secondary sources, you are ready to begin searching for original letters, diaries and other material of Bates and Coman which may have survived and been placed in archives or collections where researchers may use them. (There are also other ways to find original material and letters that have not been collected, such as interviews with surviving relatives, letters to them asking what material they may have in their possession and if you may have permission to examine, xerox or publish it. By the time you get that far into your research, though, you will undoubtedly know enough to complete it on your own.)

The National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections, compiled by the Library of Congress on a yearly basis since 1959, lists over 35,000 manuscript and archival collections in the United States. By looking up Bates in the indexes to all the volumes, you discover the not remarkable fact that Wellesley College (where both women taught all their academic lives) has a large collection of papers and documents in the Katharine Lee Bates collection: 2200 items, to be exact. Other letters of hers are at Boston Public Library in the rare book room, and at Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe College. Correspondence, poems and booklets by Bates are also in the Earl Bowman Marlett Papers at DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana. This information is all very fine if you happen to live in either Greencastle, Indiana, or the Boston area. If not, your only recourse is to write to the respective libraries, ask for a list of what is in their collections, and start praying to the Great Goddess for a little luck.

From here on, your knowledge of these women from your earlier reading will let you know who they might have written to in a frank and open manner about their life together, who their closest friends were, and what period of their lives they were separated and might have written to each other. You will know, for instance, that their colleague, Vida Scudder, also had a life-long relationship with the writer, Florence Converse. Letters to Scudder or Converse, or others in their intimate circle with strong women friendships, should be examined with special care. It goes without saying that any letters between Bates and Coman should definitely be analyzed with a fine eye for details that will help you understand the relationship as it really was (not as you would like it to have been). You will be relieved as much as you are saddened by the information that the majority of the 2200 items at Wellesley are

correspondence and material relating only to Bates' poem "America the Beautiful." There is a diary of hers from 1866, but since she was only seven years old at that time, it will not be much help except as background. But there are letters to Coman available, and many photographs, and many other letters to close friends. You are on your way. Don't expect positive proof, ever (how open are *you* even in this day and age in your diary or letters? Would you be as open and frank if the year were 1890? --Some were, of course); the chances of finding a diary that is not only revealing but that also survived the ravages of time and later relatives are minimal. Nevertheless, you may be lucky. The most interesting work is yet to be done on the local level in historical societies that receive mounds of moldy material, file them with only a cursory glance at the contents, and let them gather dust until you come along and find lesbian history just waiting for your experienced mind to perceive it.

I cannot emphasize this too strongly: don't just flounder around in the library or archives. Go there with some sense of what it is you are looking for, and a method of note-taking and research that will help save you valuable time easily wasted in backtracking. What are you most interested in knowing? What questions are you eager to discover the answers to--the honest and *complete* answers. If all you are curious about is whether a particular woman went to bed with another woman, you will be doomed from the very beginning. It is not that the question is not a valid one; it is simply a question that will rarely be answered to the complete satisfaction of either you or your audience. Also, that kind of blunt question leaves so little room for historical imagination or discovery that you are better off sticking with books already researched by others more eager to explore the subtleties of women's relationships. Remember that not all women with lesbian emotions and sexuality either recognize or feel comfortable acting out their lesbianism, even today. Also, the mere fact that a woman wore trousers or ties in an era of extreme feminine fashion does not make her a bona fide lesbian--she may simply have been doing the sensible thing any right-thinking independent woman would have done. "Passing women" who lived as men were fighting other grievances of women--they may or may not have also been lesbians. Be joyful when you find real evidence of our foresters that will help us understand our lesbian past, but also be careful about misreading one of those typically affectionate letters between women in the nineteenth-century as more of a relationship than it really was. The last thing we need is more naive, not to say shamefully ignorant, lesbian history.

Once you begin doing lesbian research in original letters and diaries, I guarantee you that you will never go back to secondary sources in libraries again (except to do preliminary background work). Nothing will ever match the excitement you will feel as a researcher when you hold in your hands a battered, yellowing leather-bound diary over a hundred years old, and read of a woman's experiences and thoughts on her relationship with her woman "friend" that are so similar to your own feelings you could have written them yourself. I have laughed and cried and made an absolute public ass of myself over more than one such document. I can only wish for you that thrill of discovery, too.

Remembering Our Past

Remembering our past
starts simply. We go back
to our childhood. We write
about the hallway window
that looked into Zoffer's.
Florence Zoffer, she asked my brother
to teach her tennis. She wanted him
for a boyfriend, mother said.
She was too old, had orange hair. I watched her
take off her blouse, hang it in
the closet, her slip.

We go back to our mothers and our fathers.
She was in nurse's training.
Eleven hour shifts.
When he took her to the movies, it was warm, quiet,
she fell asleep. He said
let's go sometime when you're not so tired.
There is no time, she said.

We tell the stories, our
grandmothers, his mother. She was
a pretty woman. When the coal
train went by she
ran outside. They waved
to her and kicked coal off the car.

Our grandmothers, her mother.
I screamed when the train went by.
The noise. The rumble in the floor.
She told me, my boyfriend
is on the train. Come with me, see,
we will wave to him. My boyfriend.
See. We waved. We waved.

We go back, her mother was
Sarah, her mother Nochoma.
We start with what we know.
Then we continue--her mother and hers.
Her mother and hers.
We are in lithuania, Russia.
We are in Poland, Yugoslavia.
We are in Sweden. We are in Ireland.
We are in Puerto Rico. We are in Mexico.
We are in Rome, Greece. We are in
Mesopotamia, Crete. The names
go through their transformations

Sally, Sarah, Sappho, Selene, Ceres
Cybele, Sophia, Athene, Diana
Artemis, Anat, Isis, Ishtar, Astarte, Minerva, Dana
Tiamat, Potnia. Say the words.
Lycia, Athens, Lemnos, Lesbos
Cantatiria, Atlantis, Catal Huyuk
Mycenaeans, Anatolians, Lydia, Caria
Lavinia, Latium, Julia, Claudia, Rhea Silvia
Alalakh, Altamira, Anna Nin.
Say the words.
This is the beginning.

- Ellen Bass

READING & WRITING & PUBLISHING

RETRIEVED FROM SILENCE: My Life and Times with Daughters, Inc. by Harriet Desmoines

December, 1977: Flat on my back, felled by a peculiar disease the only symptoms of which are a slight fever and an overwhelming reluctance to get out of bed. Sounds like mono, say experienced friends. Sounds like battle fatigue, I say to myself. Review copies of *Applesauce*, *I Must Not Rock*, and *Angel Dance* arrive in the mail. With an eerie sense that history is repeating itself, I promise I'll review one of them for *Sinister Wisdom*. Catherine leaves for Chicago to meet friends, find manuscripts, make connections, and I proceed to the business of completely falling apart in privacy while reading Daughters' latest.

Applesauce brings the past flooding back.

...there's no such thing as anything. That's where the lesbian writer starts.

(June Arnold, "Lesbian Fiction," *Sinister Wisdom* 2, p. 51)

Checkpoint #1: November, 1973.

This story begins at home. "Home" is occupied by one handsomely graying professor husband, three teenaged sons (his), two collie dogs (theirs), and me ... 26, and possessed of the telltale protruding eyes that generally advertise lunatic-on-the-loose. I am chopping onions and considering whether to drink the Drano as a before-dinner or after-dinner treat when the phone rings. The voice on the line belongs to another Harriet, a gentler, older, more sophisticated but still fragile Harriet, who allows as how it would be a great favor to her if I would review feminist books for the Sunday paper. Unaware that her call is one more husband-

instigated therapy, I embrace the intoxicating theory that Harriets read each other's minds and, pausing only to dump the Drano down the drain, rush to her workplace where I discover her carefully filing the first five Daughters paperbacks at the very back of the bottom drawer of the most obscure file cabinet in the rear annex of the newsroom. She turns, saying over her shoulder, "You don't suppose they're worth reviewing?" and I lunge at the books, then pull back dumbfounded with the realization that I've grabbed her hands in the process. I mumble several mortified somethings and, clutching the five novels to my chest, flee down the escalator, home.

*Now nan body felt extraordinary, the sense of feeling focussed
on nan palms as if one first experienced the metaphor literally
...as if...aliveness existed independently and merely needed to
be called up.*

(June Arnold, *The Cook and the Carpenter*, p. 26)

In three nights and three days (inbetween making money, cooking, breaking up urchin battles, typing women's center stencils, vying for "heterosexual acrobat of the year," and various other Renaissance Girl activities), I read *Rubyfruit Jungle*, *Nerves*, *Early Losses*, *The Treasure*, and *The Cook and the Carpenter*. I read them again. I read them backwards, I read them middle to outside, I go through and pick out the juicy parts. I fall in love with the Carpenter, I fall in love with the Cook, I fall in love with Three, I end up falling in love with every single female character but one in June Arnold's novel, and I ecstatically congratulate myself on having made no false guesses about the shared gender of her lovers, despite the tricky pronoun *na*.

Then I review the only cryptic novel of the lot, *The Treasure*, adding short paragraphs on the other four: a review which successfully avoids any hint of Lesbian activity. I even contrive to review these two feminist and three Lesbian feminist novels without once using the word *sex*, or the word *oppression*.

Time passes, amid nightmares of strangling on the backed-up saliva in my throat. It is Christmas, and I grow more melodramatic by the hour. I buy a typewriter, for salvation; but I keep two cans of Drano under the sink, for insurance. Finally, when the new year hits, I sit down to write myself out of a suicide.

*I live in the boathouse now, writing my memoirs and getting
strange. Everyone who happened to me was extraordinary--
but I didn't realize they were until I had left them and was
gone. Je ne regrette rien, as the song goes. Actually, I'm afraid
of being arrested for murder if I show my face.*

(Bertha Harris, *Lover*, p. 26)

Nine months and 213 single-spaced journal pages later, I sit alone, in a room of my own that rides like a fugitive ship above the women's center. The professor-husband is on the eighth floor psych ward, his sons are

pouring paint on the women's center roof, my lover has left me because I pay more attention to my typewriter than I do to her, and I have been failing for three weeks to write a review of Angela Davis' autobiography.

Rolled under the typewriter platen is the draft of a letter to the other Harriet, explaining why I am no longer able to write distanced, objective reviews. In the very back of the bottom drawer of a battered file cabinet I bought to organize my ambitions lies a note on stationery printed, "Daughters, Inc.: Publishers of Books by Women." I retrieve it and stare at the compressed, formal, backslanting hand. "Dear Harriet. Thanks so much for writing & sending us your terrific review. Your support is deeply appreciated & we hope that you send us your novel when you write one...."

We have a lot of paper. Here is the typewriter. Why don't you become a novelist? I urge you to become a novelist.

(Lover, p. 94)

The center is quiet, my ex-lover and her new lover long in bed, before I tear the page from my typewriter and begin again. "Dear Harriet....I'm in the middle of something that's a lot like *Flying*, only more defined, since it's a journal selected toward the specific story of leaving a marriage and becoming a lesbian. It frightens me because it's my life and because I've never written like this before. I can only manage to sit at the typewriter if I imagine I'm composing a love present to women in the same struggle I am...."

Checkpoint #2: January, 1975.

I have been a secretary, folded lingerie in department stores, been a short order cook, dope peddler and thief, but I have never written a novel before: start where the tap is running and proceed. Invent, imagine, saw apart the lady in the big pine box! You have the power, yours the keys, do away with dead wood, bring back your dreams, come on kid, we know you can.

(Elana Nachman, *Riverfinger Women*, p. 70)

Servant to an ideology concocted of equal parts feminism and desperation, I write blindly on. *Daughters in High School*, *Riverfinger Women*, and *A True Story of a Drunken Mother* have simultaneously burst into sound, forming an insistent rhythm section in the back of my head. *Riverfinger Women* shuttles around the dyke contingent of the women's center, passed from hand to hand with squeals, shouts, moans of recognition. Buzzing, popping, crackling, singing, the center is a live wire, receiving information, tapping out information: *these are our lives* (beep), *these are our lives* (beep), *these are our lives*. The journal that began as a delicate matter of personal survival becomes a communal record. Sometimes it feels foggy, sometimes it feels cruel, but once in a great while it feels like loving, like holding a mirror to the wymyn around me, murmuring, you didn't know you were a miracle? *look*. Gazelles appear in the mirror, a doe, panthers; when I turn it to my own face it

reflects a monkey. But everyone is reflecting now, everyone is writing now, and the journals pass from hand to hand with squeals, shouts, moans of recognition. The women's center newsletter becomes a babble of gushing, furious voices--rhetoric and love poems to wymyn, all run off on mimeo paper colored to match the newly painted center that (with its mango walls and burnt red trim) looks like a hash smoker's dream: a giant marigold that glows softly in the dark.

In the midst of the whirlwind, seven of us converge. We talk together, breathe together on the subjects of how to untangle patriarchal language, how to exorcise patriarchal values, how to cut away patriarchal attachments. We are Lesbians; together we become separatists, and we name ourselves, with much hilarity, "drastik dykes." Conspiring, we peel away layers of lies, layers of constructed selves, stripping down, down, down to touch the essential womyn surging up, released, from below.

NEWS RELEASE TO *OFF OUR BACKS* (which they didn't print)

International Telephone and Telegraph held its annual shareholders' meeting Wednesday, May 7th, 1975, in Charlotte, North Carolina. By midmorning, a picket line of approximately thirty demonstrators from the People's Coalition Against ITT had formed outside the downtown Sheraton. Their number was increased when a van suddenly pulled up and deposited seven women, armed with leaflets and a six-foot papier mache penis labeled "ITT." An American flag flew from the head of the phallus, which was painted an appropriate mango and adorned with such slogans as, *Knock ITT down before it knocks you up....*

Drastik dykes is an unlikely assortment of spirit sisters, given to the expression of need, the expression of rage, and the taking of metaphors literally. After our public and private dramatics, we leave the women's center -- in part, because the women's center has already left us. Its environment vanished, my journal is at an end. Together, we pick over the bones of our experience, gnaw them, spit them out; and I search for the bones of a book, a skeleton to hang my journal on. Three hundred pages, four hundred pages, the flesh will not shape. I try to make it a spiral; a collection of documents; an album; a collage; I wrestle with passage after long passage of introspective murk, maundering self-pities, dribbling mundanities, here and there flashes of what seems now -- in the utter collapse of my courage -- to have been more delusion than dream. Nothing works. Nothing.

Checkpoint #3: November, 1975.

Seven drastik dykes, having sucked the last juices each from her own past, each from our collective past, are reduced to tearing each other's most present, most vulnerable skins. Three of us head north on the

strength (in my mind, at least) of one last-ditch fantasy: that some (any) speeding tough-talking boot-stomping naugahyde New York City dyke will inform us what to do with ourselves next. We listen and take notes of this Lesbian feminist speaker and that Lesbian feminist speaker; we embroil ourselves in workshops, in strategy sessions; finally, we land exhausted, bedraggled, and half-stunned at a party to celebrate the coming-out of Daughters' third group of books: *The Pumpkin Eater*, *Happenthing in Travel On*, *Born to Struggle*, and *Sister Gin*. Someone introduces us as the troops from North Carolina, and June Arnold asks us if we know the woman who reviewed Daughters' books for *The Charlotte Observer*. With the unmistakably helpless feeling that I'm being witched, I manage squeakily to reply, "I did." She laughs.

"You're Daisy, in *Sister Gin*."

Catherine, Penny, and I ride the long way home in a lurching, bumping surreality, devouring our copies of *Sister Gin* in the back of the bus.

Sister Gin breaks silence, lifts taboos, renames -- transforming menopause from death-of-the-woman to rebirth-of-the-girl, old wymyn from patriarchy's waste product to feminism's front line fighters. It uncovers the "revolutionary" potential of white Southern wymyn, of closeted "professional" dykes, of Lesbian alcoholics, even -- controversially enough -- of gin: "our sharp, clear inheritance of courage, as the witches knew: her brew." It does all these things, and more -- including a sensitive because tentative exploration of the betrayals of Southern Black wymyn by Southern white wymyn and the continuing links, twisted but still holding, between them. But in the back of that Trailways bus, I noticed none of these -- only the forgotten feeling of release: release of courage, release of anger, release of laughter, release of female self. One long ecstatic whoosh.

When I was a Marxist, I would write over and over in the corners of notebooks, *I want theory that is consciousness of transformation*. And in the journal I tried to make myself a parable of transformation, a parable of wymyn awaking, as though by working through my own destiny I would discover what might save wymyn as a class. Or: by reading about, writing about, talking about, listening to what might save wymyn as a class, I might copy the general in individual terms and thereby save myself. Theory was failing me, journaling had driven me blathery, when miraculously it all appeared *there*, in a novel: the transformation of suppressed impulse into authentic female speech; the transformation of passivity into authentic female action (a gang of old wymyn stripping rapists, tying them to boards and leaving them in the streets is authentic, it must be, it gives me such profound satisfaction). It was all there: the transformations of consciousness, the peeling away of inhibitions -- with the pullings back, the defections to cowardice, the spiralling progress, the ironies of Lesbian lives tumbling one on top of the other, oddly shaped crystals refracting light.

Sister Gin was not properly a "novel" at all to me; it was an apparition.

But one is very much like the other, anyway. And if you can't discern difference between the original and the reproduction, then difference does not exist: they are the same, although they take up separate blocks of time and space and may change one's ideas about the course of history.

(*Lover*, p. 60)

Later I would think about Daisy, who is a slight youthful figure caught in little more than two brush strokes: telltale eyes, and ambition. She wasn't me, she was me, she was more real than the phantom "I" of 400 journal pages. I thought about the plot (contrived? romantic? fantastic?) and the setting (Wilmington, North Carolina -- characterized by a politics most nearly kin to that of the night riders, the gestapo, and the *ton ton macoutes*). That plot? in that place? None of it was real, none of it was even possible. And yet.... Seven unlikely members of the Shirley Temples Emeritae captured more of the essential rebellion fermenting in seven drastik dykes than I could record, living that rebellion. Somehow, I had left out the most important parts.

Checkpoint #4: December, 1977.

Review of *Applesauce* by June Arnold, for *Sinister Wisdom* #5.
A First Draft.

She said that for a dozen years of her life she'd been left alone, to spread unnoticed over the land, as she put it. And then she became female and had to wear dresses. She said that dresses with shapes of their own surrounded her body and forbade it to wander off into indistinct outlines; dresses closeted her and confined her into the standard girl-mold and wouldn't let her go, held her there until she thought she would burst or rip them away. She said she sometimes did slip out and shift free, but that she was caught and reprimanded and poured back into her mold with such fierceness and loss of love that she often couldn't muster the energy to escape with.

(*Applesauce*, p. 78)

Applesauce, while seeming to grow by putting out flowering shoots in all directions, as fantastically wild a novel as one could wish for, assumes finally the shape of a perfectly pruned parable. (*parable: a casting side by side...any saying that expresses something in terms of something else...enigmatical, dark saying...*) In it, "the primary struggle of a woman to be a woman" emerges as a succession of violent self-transformations. Liza -- who until she is twelve is herself -- becomes Eloise, the inorgasmic heterosexual kitten who drives her car off the bridge into the San Jacinto river and becomes Rebecca, the male-identified intellectual who is torn apart by sharks when she begins menstruating in the ocean and becomes Lila, the earth mother who dies falling out of an apple tree and becomes Gus, the emotionally paralyzed male alter ego who carefully builds a room in which to explode and, so

doing, becomes again Liza, female self without outline, without walls, "a 'bursting' vitality."

An instructive thought: compare *Applesauce* to the novel whose title baldly announces a similar intention, *How to Save Your Own Life*, in which -- by understanding the problem shallowly and attacking it head-on -- Erica Jong fails even to save her own intelligence

...my only criterion for choosing to include something, imagined or real, was whether or not it touched the floor of me.

(author's foreward, *Applesauce*)

The threads are all slipping from my hands. Get hold of your self, I tell my self, but which one? First, I was the voice of a journal, then I was a character in a novel, now I'm one leg of a magazine.

This time like the first time I'm reviewing somebody else's novel. I cast them side by side: then and now. Now and then: they make a dark saying, a paradox, like but unlike. I'm writing "reviews" I swore I'd never write again, but this time the context is not *The Charlotte Observer*. This time the environment is womyn-space. An environment in which networks of wymyn touching, two at a time, three, seven at a time, happen naturally, without expectation, without planning, without predetermination -- touchings almost accidental, almost by design.

In writing my journal I tried to connect my life, some other wymyn's lives, all other wymyn's lives -- I failed because I forced the connections. All I knew to do next was to help make another environment for another "journal" to grow in, and then lie in wait, watching for the touchings to begin, the synapses to spark, the messages to relay....

Writing this "review," I begin to feel a bit the happiness of clarity. But the most important part is still missing -- what it is that I so want, the tormenting, elusive object of my desire, desire and object conjured up whole by wymyn's words, cast down by wymyn's words, called up again and again by new words. The source. That which connects a voice in a journal, a character in a novel, a leg of a magazine.

We're peeling off layers -- of inhibition and of what we've learned -- and trying to recapture that which is the source of literature, which is intuition totally engaged with intellectuality, with a sense of arrogance about it.

(Bertha Harris, "Lesbian Fiction," *Sinister Wisdom* 2, p. 44)

WHICH ASPECT
OF THE CRAFT
OF WITCHES
DO YOU PRACTICE

(Alice Molloy, *In Other Words*, p. 16)

Typesetting Leigh Star's "Lesbian Feminism as an Altered State of Consciousness," I'm suddenly struck by her section on Witchcraft/Psychic Tools/History. A witch was/is a knower of changes, a changer, she who transforms energy, she whose knowledge is a knowledge of the earth, she whose will emanates from the core, from the five-pointed energy focus: sex, self-awareness, passion, pride and power.

What is it I so want? Only this: the witch's doing. The power to transform energy. The power to juggle spheres of sound, the power to keep them in the air, the power to transmute the tumbling words into mirrors, crystal spheres glinting in the sun, reflecting doe wymyn, panther wymyn, gazelle wymyn....

....you didn't know you were a miracle? Look.

One thing leads to another...and the nature of all kinds of rapture, including this, is that it must clothe itself in disguise. ...There is no ending that is, eventually, not happy.

(*Lover*, p. 208)

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WRITING and POLITICKING as PRIVILEGE

by Gloria Gyn

Once there was a bright, strong woman who lived in an ordinary town. She had always had a natural curiosity and loved learning, but because of her poor background, she tried to prepare herself for a life of working, instead of taking courses to prepare herself for college. Her knowledge of the world was that if you didn't work, you didn't eat, and to attend college was out of the question. Like many women of her class, however, marriage seemed a way out; having babies kept her out of work for a short period, but added to her responsibilities, along with housework and a regular paid job. Her job was necessary because there was never enough money for living expenses, not to mention luxuries.

She always wanted to write, but never felt educated enough, and when her marriage ended after three years and the total responsibility for her own support and her two children fell completely on her, there was little time to think, let alone try to write.

When the women's movement began attracting her attention in the late 1960's, she felt it was something she could relate to--after all, she worked for a living, was as independent as she could possibly be, and didn't depend on men for anything. What she found in the women's movement was a lot of talking and writing, study groups, and intimidation. Those women were educated and they wanted people to know it! If men would not listen to them, women would have to. It was so difficult to understand a lot of what was being written, because of all the big words used, and the language was so different. She also discovered that what all the theory boiled down to was simply rhetoric--none of it dealt with the reality of the lives of most women she knew, including her own. She felt she had to try to be like the educated women in the women's movement to be accepted. It was almost the same as when she was growing up; the sense of not being as good, not being middle class, not having the privilege of making choices for herself. Ironically, it was those women who made her become class conscious as she had never been before. When she was younger, she had pretty much accepted who she was, although she hated her class position and was often made to feel ashamed of being poor.

What angered her a lot was that she tried to *live* her life according to her principles; she tried to change her life, working with women, trying to learn, and trying to educate as well. She saw many of her ideas go down the drain because she was neither speaker nor writer enough to express her ideas "properly." It was made clear to her that she lacked "credentials," and she remained a patronized "token."

So she decided to go back to college, which turned into a disaster. Because she was an outspoken feminist, she had trouble. She was always having to compromise, just to be allowed to swallow all that male propaganda (which she had discovered "higher learning" was all about). She was the only student in the local junior college women's association and had the same feelings of intimidation she experienced in the women's movement; even though she had more experience working with women, she lacked those goddamn "credentials."

She quit school and had a nervous breakdown and it was in the psychiatric ward that she came out as a Lesbian to herself. She became part of the Lesbian community and began reading Lesbian writings.

More frustration.

This intrepid would-be writer finds herself trying to make sense of the theoretical works of women like Daly, Rich and others and falling on her face. She still feels without credentials, unknowledgeable, ignorant.

And she is sad and angry.

Sad that Lesbians must use the elitist, bullshit language and style of the university. Angry that men are able to read Lesbian works when Lesbians are not able to.

Sad and angry that there seems to be a Lesbian "star" system. Sad and angry that there is plenty of educated theory and not enough everyday practice. The competition among Lesbian writers for being the loudest (if not clearest) voice seems apparent. Does all that male education really work for women, or does it trap them squarely in male values? Does it really take prestige and credentials for even Lesbians to be heard?

In the words of one young working-class Lesbian friend, commenting on Lesbian writing, "Sometimes I feel like becoming a separatist--separating myself from the whole Lesbian trip, including separatists!"

What happens to women like these who have something to say, important ideas to express? Where is their vehicle, if not in Lesbian publications? These women use the oral tradition that women have used through the ages, having no other way. They pass their culture along to each other through love and trust, denying the patriarchal value system. They defy the twin oppressions of "scholarship" and "authority" without loss of any intelligence, living out their beliefs without benefit of male approval. Their language is not of the university, but of love of each other--and no amount of theory will change that.

Perhaps more women would or could write (in their own way) about what they are thinking and doing if it were their "vocation." But most women who are fighting for economic survival don't have that privilege, and writing is a *privilege*. Lesbian and feminist presses need to take a hard look at who they are reaching, writers at who they are writing for, publishers who they are publishing, and at the privilege they have as a result. The dominance of degreed, "star" writers in Lesbian and feminist publications smacks of elitism and tells of their politics. The seduction of the university is complete. Their "products" control Lesbian and feminist publishing and writing, and they in turn continue to oppress working-class women.

It's an easy way out to write for the academic crowd; it's a far more difficult task to write for the common woman.

THE RAPE OF DIANA

Catherine interviews Casey Czarnik and Coletta Reid

On October 25, 1977, between five and seven a.m., DIANA PRESS, a publisher of Lesbian feminist books, was invaded by professional vandals who successfully eluded the alarm system, and using the chemicals at hand in the shop proceeded to damage negatives, plates, paste-up copy, unbound books, printing equipment, telephones, adding machines and typewriters; and to ransack files, storage cabinets, desks. At this time (January, 1978) no person has been arrested for this crime.

Coletta Reid--editor, writer, publisher--and Casey Czarnik--graphic artist, designer, printer--founded DIANA PRESS in Baltimore in 1972. In the spring of 1977 the press moved to Oakland, Ca. It is now a much larger organization, employing several women. Its structural principles, its political philosophy, and its economic policies have been the subject of serious, bitter controversy in feminist publishing. I have agonized a great deal over the issues raised by the controversy and am not yet ready to write about it. But in December I knew that I wanted to talk to Coletta and Casey, knew that it was vitally important to me to learn how they felt about the terrible attack on their creation and their labor. I met them in Chicago, where the three of us were attending the MLA convention. The following interview took place in the Ladies' Powder Room (the only place we could find to plug in the tape recorder) of the Palmer House on December 29, 1977.

Catherine: *What was your immediate emotional response to the vandalism?*

Coletta: *I think the most upsetting part of what happened for me was coming in the shop that morning and seeing most of the work we'd done for the past five years destroyed. The original pasteup of Songs to a Handsome Woman, the first book we published, was torn down the middle on every page; and as I looked at it and saw back to the past--the many hours spent in setting type, pasting-up copy, hand collating that first book--I realized that this act of vandalism against us was truly that of people who hated women's culture and women's labor. It is a profoundly shocking experience to feel that there are people in this world who are so opposed to women's defining themselves that they would make such an attack on the very things that you have produced with your own hands.*

Catherine: *Did you arrive later at the shop, Casey?*

Casey: *We walked in about the same time. I didn't feel anything right away--I was numb. I started calling the police and dealing with getting everyone home. I went immediately to survey the damage--check the presses out. My first impression was that the presses were not wrecked, but later I discovered that a lot of damage had been done to them--subtle things to water and ink systems that took hours to clean up. I wanted to see it all so I could absorb it; I didn't want any surprises later, so I kept going around looking at everything, then talked to the police, tried to figure out how the vandals had gotten in--*

Catherine: *So you were suppressing your feelings...?*

Casey: *Yes, I was really holding in, just reacting to necessity very practically, and I wouldn't allow a lot of emotion right away. Later I couldn't sleep--and well, it's been quite awhile now and I still don't sleep well--but then I couldn't sleep. Someone always had to be at the shop, I just couldn't go away and leave it. I felt it was vulnerable, that more could happen, that someone was out to get us, that someone really hated us, that it was really hateful and spiteful, and that someone would do it again. I felt very vulnerable. And I had a strong emotional reaction to the paste-up area because that was a lot of what I did. To this day, I can't go and look at the damage to the covers, because I know I'll have to redo a lot of art work. My reaction is almost that I don't want to know, and yet I have to know to continue. For awhile, I went around thinking how glad I was that I hadn't finished certain things--all my covers, all my artwork--because they would just have been destroyed anyway. And that's what my attitude has been since then--that I don't want to do extra work for fear that it will all be for nothing. It's been hard enough to go along these past six years because you never get full appreciation from people, but when you have a direct attack against you it's almost like someone is saying they don't want you to be alive.*

Catherine: *Had you ever in your whole life felt that strongly violated?*

Casey: *No, you see, that's the longest period of my life that I've put so much of myself into what I still believe in, and felt that I had really accomplished something worthwhile.*

Coletta: *My emotional reaction was very different from Casey's. I think I was the only person to burst into loud tears at the shop within five minutes of seeing what had happened. My first reaction and what I still think is that it was an attack by the FBI. I felt that they had known that we were on the verge finally of reaching a lot more women with our books and that they had stopped us. I started raging and screaming at the walls that every time we would reach the point of building more of a mass movement that they would stop us, and that I hated men, hated the pigs, hated the government, and I raged on and on. And I still feel that way--that we were at a point of publishing a book that had the possibility of reaching a lot more women and of getting our books into a lot more bookstores; that publishing the Elizabeth Gould Davis manuscript would have put us over that very tight margin to the point of being able to hire*

more women to be sales representatives around the country. I think that distribution and sales are the biggest problems women's presses have and we were trying to make enough money to solve these problems. And now we don't have the money to do what we planned for the next year. Financially the attack was so well-directed and so smart: it was aimed at our financial survival. We as a women's business are always so close to the edge of being able to continue, so an attack like this has been a severe blow--a disaster.

Catherine: Did you ever consider giving up?

Coletta: Yes. I didn't think that right away, but about three weeks later I went into a severe depression in which I felt like it wasn't worth it anymore, and the reason why I think I went into that depression was that we were not able to make any kind of comeback. You see, in the first three weeks everyone at the press worked as hard as they could to try to clean things up and get the presses printing again, and after three weeks of hard work, of keeping our morale up as best we could, we were still unable to operate as a print shop. And I think that that's when the full impact of what the vandalism meant hit me. Up until then I'd kept thinking that with a lot of hard work we can get back in production again, but in fact, they effectively ruined our production for three months, they effectively got rid of half our fall books, they effectively put off publication of the rest of our fall books until the spring, they effectively got rid of the reprints so we didn't have any Ladder books to sell yet. So then I thought why is it worth it? why have I been killing myself working 12 hours a day for six years, why have I taught myself skills that are hard, stood up to male printers, male salesmen, male bookstores, and for no reason, in order to be crushed within a half hour? The vulnerability of women's culture and of women who are independent and try to stand on their own really struck me. And the necessity for women to bond together to support each other was crucial at that point, because I felt that without the support of women across the country, who sent us dollar bills, who sent us letters, who sent us postcards, who said don't bother to write and thank me just continue, was the only thing that saved me at that point.

Casey: Coming on this trip is to try to raise our morale.

Catherine: Has it helped?

Casey: Oh yes, it's been very good. It's been important to talk to people who felt that what Diana Press is doing is good and valuable. But when I see the press operating again, I'll feel better.

Coletta: I think one of the things that has been crucial to Diana Press and has distinguished us from other women publishers has been that we've felt this tremendous commitment to production, to women gaining control of production by actually learning to do the work themselves, and what Casey and I get the most personal satisfaction out of is seeing things run, and seeing finished books come out that we can hold and flip through and say, look how well this is typeset, and look how beautifully printed it is, and look at the binding, and so when nothing is running, it's like we have

nothing to get hold of in terms of satisfaction. I think we're both very tied to the production in terms of how we feel about ourselves and our work, and the production was what they stopped.

Send contributions and book orders to **Diana Press**, 4400 Market St., Oakland, Ca. 94608. Books currently available are listed below. Include 15% for postage and handling: **Edward the Dyke and Other Poems** by Judy Grahn, 2.50; **She Who:** a graphic book of poems by Judy Grahn, 6.00; **Child of Myself** by Pat Parker, 2.00; **Pit Stop** by Pat Parker, 2.00; **A Plain Brown Rapper** by Rita Mae Brown, 5.00; **Sex Variant Women in Literature** by Jeannette Foster, 8.00; **The Ladder anthologies: Lesbian Lives**, 5.75; **The Lesbians Home Journal**, 5.75; and **The Lavender Herring**, 5.75, edited by Barbara Grier and Coletta Reid; **All Our Lives: A Woman's Songbook**, 6.50; **Selene: The Most Famous Bull Leaper on Earth** by Z. Budapest & Carol Clement, 3.75; **Class and Feminism; Lesbianism and the Women's Movement**, and **Women Remembered**, edited by Charlotte Bunch & Nancy Myron, 2.25 each.

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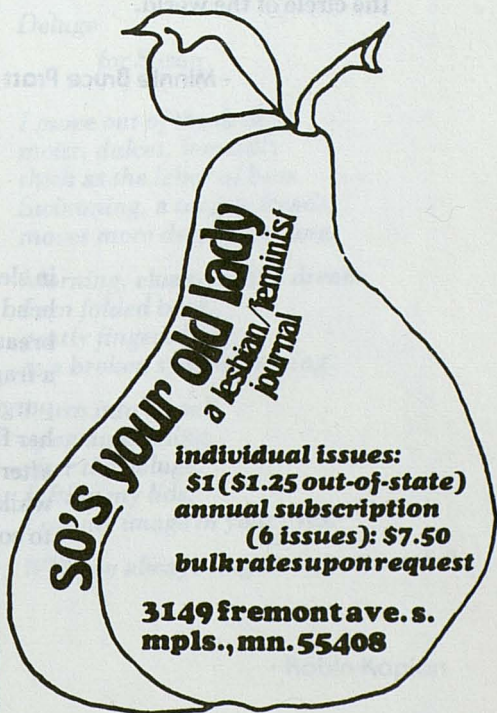
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**Her hands hold hand
to small of back hand
to back of head**

**weave me
into a web of certainty
place me**

**in the lightning pattern,
center. *Arachne aurea*
shakes the web**

lightly.

**I rock here
with her
and rhythm**

**in the threads
of arms and legs
the circle of the world.**

- Minnie Bruce Pratt

**in sleep the child triumphs
head rested on my heartbeat
breasts flattened back to bone
a fragrance of talc and apricots
purges musk from the air
her flesh retreats to brief innocence
after the thicklimbed storm of sex
while i'm left awake and aging
to consider chronology**

- Holly Lu Conant

Sleep

*As you sleep, chestnuts
hide behind your lids.
Flirting with the dark,
they penetrate luminous dreams.*

*I am sitting on crisp sheets,
watching you flip
through a rash of situations,
your mood mirrored
by the corners of your applesweet mouth.*

*My eyes lower; your long lines
vee like victory, mine,
my orchid.*

Deluge

for Susan

*I move out of the dream:
moist, dulcet, inwardly
thick as the labor of bees.
Swimming, a tongue treads,
moves more deeply, curling.*

*Morning, elusive as the dream,
I am folded back,
gently fingered
as a broken sparrow's wing.*

*I turn into myself
upon awakening,
after the deluge.
Lifting my lids,
I see my image in your eyes.*

Will you always sing to me so sweetly?

- Robin Kaplan

THE POLITICS OF WHOLENESS II:

Lesbian Feminism as an Altered State of Consciousness

by *Susan Leigh Star*

REVIEW: *In Other Words* by Alice Molloy
Oakland Women's Press Collective, 1977

In Other Words: Notes on the Politics and Morale of Survival is a Whole Lesbian Catalogue of Delights and Challenges; one of those rare books that is a tool and a resource. For three years Alice Molloy wrote down, clipped out and annotated her own ideas and a wide range of information about consciousness, feminism, attention and the structures of "reality." The result, thanks to the cooperation of Oakland Women's Press Collective (and hours and hours of patient typing and layout by Alice) is a book whose form *and* content are congruent, are nonlinear, with power to alter.

One of my goals has been to transmit information and attitudes in a manner such that the process its self is transmitted/received, not just the end product. The process, a process, a way of seeing, hearing, a way of processing.

(p. v)

There is no point in setting out a whole trip where i say this is my theory, here's the proof, building up a ediface, no point in laying my trip on people.... it's simply because it doesn't work. it just gives people some thing, an other thing, to build up resistance against, and go away with enough information to build up an opposing structure.

(p. vi)

To order, send \$8.50 + 50c postage/handling to Alice Molloy, 4205A Terrace Street, Oakland, CA 94611.

In Other Words is an accurate title; and one of the impacts of the book is to show that “in other words” means “in other worlds.” Alice Molloy grabs the English language by its roots and shakes: how has this language structured our (patriarchal) reality? How can we pay more attention (at tension) to it?

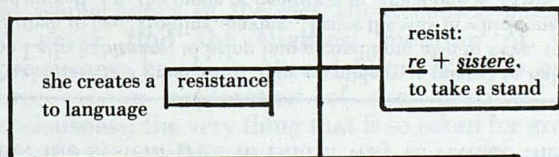
....so we talked feminism, anarchism, and lesbianism, and discovered we were talking witch craft.

as, the craft of witches.
witch craft, the
technology of anarchy.
for example, the right to
prescribe for your self.

things got even more interesting. and
when we started talking witch craft, as
anarchist feminist lesbians, it turned
out to be paranoid schizophrenia. and
it feels good.

(p. iv)

Part of the craft of witches is learning to be aware of what is holding your attention. Alice provides instructions on how to be aware, to notice what is holding your attention: the structure of language, body language, interpersonal politics.



She looks at Latin root words; her goal is to **resist** being manipulated by them. “Organizing language in a way that makes sense, i believe will further progress in the area of physiology, states of consciousness, call it what you will. emotions. behaviour. craft. power and its uses.” (*In Other Words*, p. vi)

I quote from the book throughout this article, and consider the article in part as a dialogue with Alice/her book (cited as *IOW*, with page number).

An experiment with form: we talked the other day about being sick of seeing rave reviews in feminist magazines. Better to try to convey information about/in conjunction with the book in case you won't have time or money to read it. A useful review.

In the issue before last I wrote an article entitled "The Politics of Wholeness: Feminism and the New Spirituality," which criticized male systems of "spirituality" and stated that Lesbian feminism is a "necessary but not sufficient" condition for "enlightenment."

Enlightenment is a bald and dangerous word although I did mean it quite seriously in the humorous context above. Most of me abhors writing about "spirituality" or psychic powers. I'm afraid to produce writing *about* instead of tools *for*; afraid of freezing on paper the lineaments of a world that is new and that is, above all, motion.

With this in mind I offer the following as a tool, a story and an ideal. I see it as the beginning of a map for a Lesbian feminist psychology: that is, a political awareness of our own psyche-logic that cannot be translated or symbolically imposed upon.

Introduction

The language and metaphors for the changes we experience as becoming Lesbians have often been reflections of patriarchal reality: a reality which may bend and stretch around the edges to include us as a "sexual preference" or "gay women"; as "out of the closet" or "into only making love with women," but which *cannot* include us if we articulate our experience *as a different* and incompatible reality. One way I have found to do this is to describe Lesbian feminism as an (or *the*) altered state of consciousness.

This article is for Mary Daly, who introduced me to feminist theory. Judith Musick, Robin Linden, Artemis March, and Julia Stanley helped to formulate and refine several of the ideas presented here. Other womyn's insights are also footnoted. Thank you!

To talk about consciousness is to talk about structures of awareness: energy that is channeled through paths of attention. The term "altered state of consciousness" has been used in psychology and religion to imply a very deeply changed (from some baseline or "normal" state) system of mental-physical structures.

To add the word "politics" means that the baseline from which the alterations take place is a socially-created, coercively maintained power structure.

I find it useful to think of Lesbian feminism as an altered state of consciousness in some of the same ways one would think of tripping, meditative states, hypnosis, visions or hallucinations as "alterations" of a "baseline" state of consciousness. Both Lesbian feminism and states like tripping take place outside of the everyday structures that habituate* one to living. They occur in a place where taking-for-granted stops; where ordinariness and custom dissolve.

The basic reaction from *status quo* society toward both of them has been that they represent a type of madness; something beyond the pale, untranslatable. Given enough time, the system tries to find a way to reduce the threat to

**habituate* is a great word. The etymology is related to habit, from the Latin *habituare*, to bring into a condition; also to have, to be constituted, to be. "Holding, having...hence the way in which one holds or has oneself, i.e. the mode or condition in which one is, exists, or exhibits oneself, a) externally; hence demeanour, outward appearance, fashion of body, mode of clothing oneself, dress...b) in mind, character or life; hence, mental constitution, character...way of dealing with things..." (OED)

itself that the presence of this other world creates. Thus, for example, the initial potentials for radical change that perception-altering drugs caused were quickly ripped off into the language of humanism, love, peace and brotherhood. It became fashionable to study marijuana and LSD in the laboratories; to use the drugs to alleviate the boredom of living inside the social structures without challenging them.

Power Versus Energy

(or: *I Don't Need Life I'm High on Dope*)

The reason for the cooptation of these altered states of consciousness is that they remained apolitical. Drug users and meditators became alienated from the system, or perhaps decided to work to "change" it; *but no one articulated what it is about the system that works to suppress altered states of consciousness*, or what the cultural investment in containing those states as *private* individualized experiences is.

The theory that was written in the late sixties and early seventies that addressed "altered states of consciousness" (sometimes called the 'psychology of consciousness') leaned heavily on the idea of "energy": tuning into cosmic energy, re-channeling psychic energy, aligning one's vibrations with the universe. Psychologists like Robert Ornstein and Charles Tart developed elaborate diagrams and explanations for how mental energy (consciousness) changes within a person's mind while under the influence of drugs or during meditation.¹

One key concept which underlies all theories about altered states of consciousness is quite simply that a changed state

implies change *from* something into something else. Unfortunately this simple fact has been widely ignored among psychologists of consciousness; it is not uncommon to read whole books of theories about consciousness-altering and never find the slightest mention of what the consciousness has been altered *from*. What is missing, of course, is an exploration of the "normal" state of consciousness; the very thing that is so taken for granted that it is nearly impossible to see.

Tart mentions the baseline state of consciousness in his work, and I think he does intuit the importance of exploring its dimensions in order to chart changes from it. But he never does *more than mention* its existence, and never its content.

By designing theory which purports to explain changes of consciousness, but which ignores *who* invests in the status quo and *how* they teach us to ignore cosmic energy in the first place, the psychologists and philosophers of altered states of consciousness contribute to the idea that the authorship of reality is arbitrary. Tart could even make the following statements about the "social construction of reality":

One of the greatest problems in studying consciousness and altered states of consciousness is an implicit prejudice that tends to make us distort all sorts of information about states of consciousness. When you *know* you have a prejudice you are not completely caught by it, for you can question whether the bias is really useful and possibly try to change it or compensate for it. But when a prejudice is implicit it controls you...

The prejudice discussed in this chapter is the belief that our ordinary state of consciousness is somehow natural. It is a very deep-seated and implicit prejudice. (*States of Consciousness*, p. 34)

I stress the view that we are prisoners of our ordinary state of consciousness, victims of our consensus reality, because it is necessary to become aware of this if we are to have any hope of transcending it, of developing a science of the mind that is not culturally limited. (*States of Consciousness*, p. 48)

and then use the generic “he” all through his writing; and not hint that consensus reality requires a *consensus*-real people who believe in the prejudices mentioned above, and who react when those prejudices are challenged. He assumes that reality-creating and maintaining is arbitrary, and that “transcending” it can be done *apolitically*.

As a Lesbian feminist, I make no such assumption. I want to examine the *politics* of reality maintaining, and answer the following questions:

in whose interest is it to maintain the consensus reality? If we are “prisoners,” who is guarding the prison and what means of coercion are used to keep us there? Who *threatens* the existing created reality? Why, and under what conditions? What is involved in creating an alter* reality?

I want to name names.

Patriarchy as a state of consciousness and a consensus reality has depended upon the silence of Lesbians.

It’s vitally important that we begin to name (and therefore create and strengthen) our reality-changing for the depth change that it is. In order to talk clearly about our changes and possibilities, we need a

*I use the word “alter” here to imply *changed*, *altered*; instead of “alternate,” which implies a freely-chosen preference.²

language that can say in no uncertain terms: this new world challenges everything. Its potential goes as deep as perception itself, as wide as a totally new political structure. When seen from the baseline, it throws us into madness, into chaos, into an other world.

Language is like an oil that slips through consciousness and its attendant structures; almost imperceptible while the machinery is working unquestioned. Lesbian feminism is an alteration from the structures--linguistic, neurological, emotional, historical, physical--that reflect our experience back to us and which we are coerced into accepting through “female socialization.”

Perception, Cognition and Lesbianism

My favorite sign in the Gay Pride March in San Francisco read: “Lesbianism is More Than a Sexual Preference.” As I mentioned above, one of the ways that we are tolerated is to be defined as women with tastes that run a little counter to the usual. Women who have certain feelings the origin of which may be uncertain but which can be included in the smorgasbord of sexual “preferences” that “happen” to “people.”

I propose that there is a vital component of Lesbian feminism that has been theoretically ignored in descriptions of the “etiology” of Lesbianism: a perceptual, cognitive

component. I think that Lesbian feminists *see* and *think* things that are counter to patriarchal descriptions of reality, as well as *feeling* that which is forbidden.*

The implication of this view is that Lesbian feminism is created as an altered state of consciousness (cognition, perception) by women who are willing to question the perceptual bases of our worlds. It doesn't *just* come out of feelings, or *just* out of political analysis.

And when something "happens" that is an alternative to a coercively enforced social structure (heterosexuality in this case), it doesn't happen without someone making it happen, making decisions, saying no to coercion, resisting, creating. I don't *just prefer* to do something that requires a challenge of reality to do; and when I give language to my reality-challenging, I destroy old worlds and create new ones.

Whenever a Lesbian writes or speaks about herself it is a political act, because it is our silence that has underpinned

*It seems odd to be posing these as different because I don't believe they are, of course. The purpose for phrasing it this way is to fill in a gap in both the way we think of ourselves and how we are conceptualized by patriarchal ideology. Also, psychologists have traditionally posed perception and cognition as different processes (i.e., using your senses and then construing/thinking about the "data"), and psychological institutions for the control of sensing and construing depend on maintaining the split. Among ourselves, far from the interface of worlds, we can say loudly that thinking feeling and seeing are *not* different processes for us--and perhaps coin new terms that can encompass all of what was previously meant by these parts. Thus, Margie Adams' song about the unicorn stands in counterpoint to patriarchal thought: "seeing is believing, in the things you see..."

patriarchy for centuries. Because we do not fit into patriarchy's basic structures, our language has both the power to shatter and to expose. Conjoined, the words of Lesbian feminists represent the politicization of the deepest structures of consciousness.

Women have been driven mad, "gaslighted" for centuries by the refutation of our experience and our instincts in a culture which validates only male experience. The truth of our bodies and our minds has been mystified to us. We therefore have a primary obligation to each other: not to undermine each other's sense of reality for the sake of expediency; not to gaslight each other.

Women have often felt insane when cleaving to the truth of our experience. Our future depends on the sanity of each of us, and we have a profound stake, beyond the personal, in the project of describing our reality as candidly and fully as we can to each other.

-from Adrienne Rich's *Women and Honor:
Some Notes on Lying*.³

When I speak directly I feel it throughout my whole body. The sensation of not translating is quite distinct; a new experience for me. As most of us, I have always been a Lesbian a witch a madwoman inside. But until I began to speak *directly* (and can't always do that all the time yet) from that experience, it was not empowered with reality. It had neither the power to *be* reality or to challenge the static reality handed to me growing up.

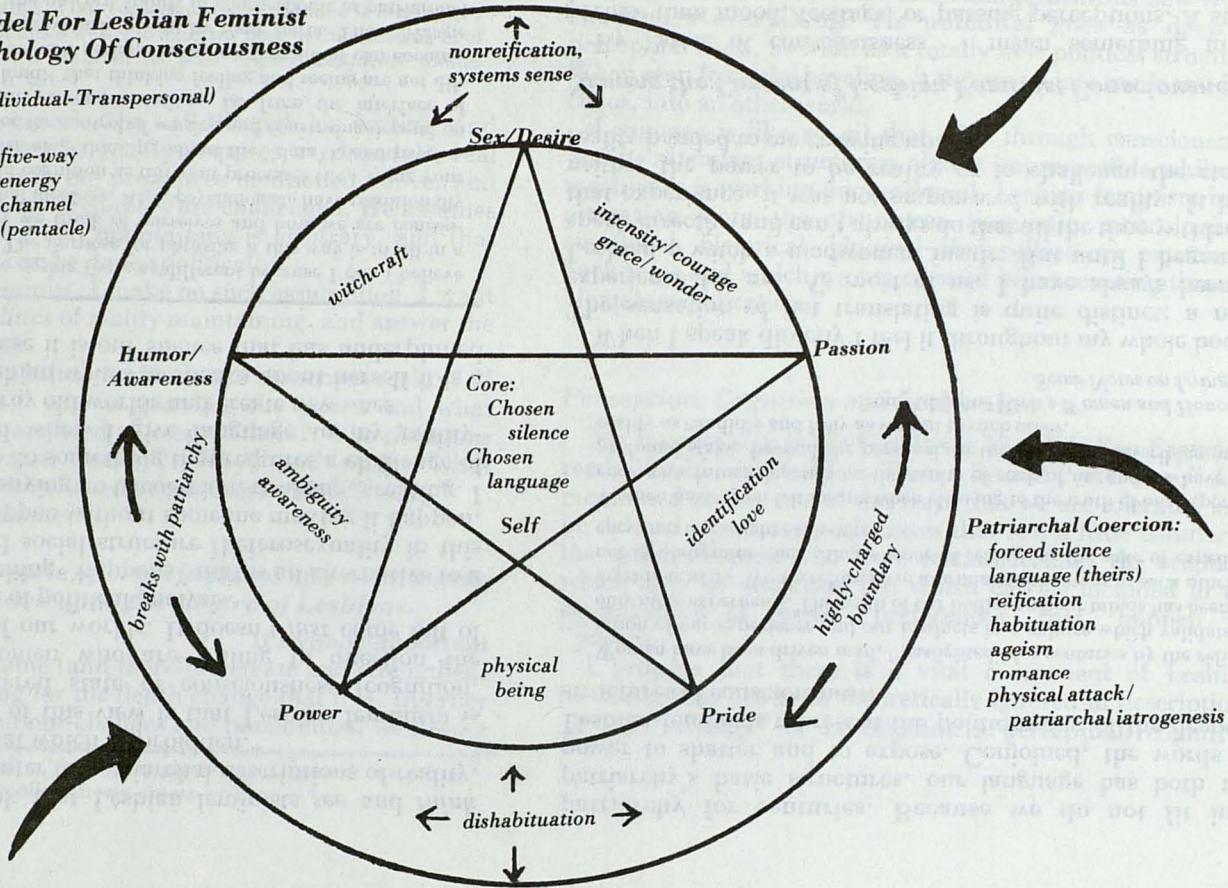
Naming the Content of Lesbian Feminist Consciousness

By "state of consciousness" I mean something more precise than mood, feelings, or passing perceptions. A state of consciousness is "a unique, dynamic pattern or

A Model For Lesbian Feminist Psychology Of Consciousness

(Individual-Transpersonal)

five-way
energy
channel
(pentacle)



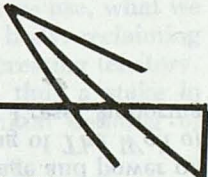
configuration of psychological structures, an active system of psychological subsystems." Although each of the substructures, or any of them, can change from time to time, the overall patterns of a state of consciousness remain recognizably the same.

The unique, dynamic configuration of consciousness that is Lesbian feminism is both individual (personal) and generalizable as a recognizable common state of consciousness (political).

In order to more clearly communicate an "alter reality," I'll describe how I conceptualize several matrices or components of my own awareness/consciousness. They are names of parts of myself; a personal/personal configuration. But they are also me *as* a Lesbian feministwitchspiritual-sexualpolitical, etc. The names are drawn from common experience, and perhaps can reflect back out toward that experience for other womyn.⁴

The matrices are layered in varying thicknesses around a core of silence and language, of inner "space" (sometimes that I'm aware of, sometimes not) and are constantly shifting, in motion. They are political, real, and material.

1. language, which encircles and roots in all the others
2. habituation (awareness and attention)
3. intensity/courage/time
4. nonreification/systems sense/ambiguity
5. relationship to patriarchy
6. witchcraft/psychic tools/history
7. identification
8. physical being
9. love/romance/sex
10. grace/wonder



Notes for the Model:

This is my visual conceptualization of Lesbian Feminist consciousness. At the center is a five-way energy channel whose five points symbolize Sex/Desire, Passion, Pride, Power and Humor/Creativity (self-perspective). I've found it useful to think of these as parts of a system without confounding them. The points circle around an inner core of Self, chosen silence and chosen language. The outer circle represents the boundary of our consciousness with patriarchy: the inner arrows suggest mobility and a highly-charged energy area. The outer area, patriarchy, is symbolized by the larger arrows (coercion).

The reason for the "individual-transpersonal" notation on the top of the chart is that while this model is drawn in terms of an individual woman's psyche, it is also a composite of womyn's (Lesbian feminists') consciousness *as I've perceived it* in a general way. This, like any theory, is a statement of how I perceive, how I perceive myself and others.

Because of my limitations in drawing, the model is frozen in time and space. Remember while looking at it that an accurate model would have many thousands of circles overlapping and in different relations to patriarchy and to each matrix.

The chart above shows that several of the matrices have a boundary-maintaining or filtering aspect as well as a creative aspect. The chart can't grasp the element of time or of social interaction, the changing layers and dimensions of consciousness, but should be imagined within patriarchy as a mobile and creative strategy for its destruction. At the same time, it is affected by its presence within that coercive social structure, and thus is historically placed in the present, at a time when our social reality is still precarious.

Below, I describe the function/structure of each of the matrices--again, they can only analytically be separated. In reality, they function as an interlocking system, irreducible.

LANGUAGE

...the fundamental coerciveness of society lies not in its machineries of social control but in its power to constitute itself and to impose itself as reality. The paradigmatic case of this is language.

To deny reality as it has been socially defined is to risk falling into ir-reality, because it is well-nigh impossible in the long run to keep up alone and without social support one's own counter-definitions of the world. When the socially defined reality has come to be identified with the ultimate reality of the universe, then its denial takes on the quality of evil as well as madness.

(from *The Sacred Canopy*)⁵

The first and most important matrix is language. As far as we can extend language is as far as our imagination goes.

The first and most important matrix is silence. As far as we can extend silence is as far as our imagination goes.

Language arises from necessity and from power: the need to name and the political power to do so. The need and the power function together to shape a reality bounded by the language. The worlds, the realities are not contained *in* the language; rather, the language reflects and in turn shapes them in a changing and systemic way. The farther limits of language are thus the farther limits of reality, but neither is causal. If the language incorporates and reflects mobility, change, and non-reification (i.e., Lesbian feminist language) the reality need not be "bounded" in the usual sense.

Unchosen silence can come from either a lack of language or a lack of hearer. As Lesbians we have experienced all three: lack of language, lack of audience, lack of both words and listeners.

The three lacks produce different kinds of madness, madnesses which are maximized and accentuated by patriarchy in historically changing patterns.

Time

Marking the passage of time in new ways could be a method of uttering ourselves. Celebrating solstices and moon phases instead of Christ's birthday and wartime victories and capitalist work-weekends; expressions of rage and power on the anniversaries of things like the banning of *The Well of Loneliness* or the vandalism of Diana Press; honoring menarches and menopauses.

Dreams

Dreams can provide new language. I had a dream of a world in which there were only three words to describe different ways of being:

labyris--cutting, incisive, warrior-womon;

labyrinth--complex, weaving in and out, mystery;

labia--unfolding, wonder, gentleness;

from which I wrote this poem:

labyris

labia

labyrinth

Artemis

*I have dared to spin your name into the small hollows
tucked beside my cervix*

I have plaited your open soul between my hands

labyrinth

labia

labyris

my core of language.

I am Amazon,

left breast unscathed.

speaker and essence

this truth leaps from my brain:

we are the first and last structure of madness;

its constituent form.

And from our silence

are woven all the cycles in which madness

articulates

its nature.

We re-order priorities, we choose to use certain words more and more frequently. We name what we use, what we have, what we care for. It begins with the body, reclaiming territory, and extends to the imagination, creating territory. Monique Wittig's *The Lesbian Body*⁶ is thus a stake in "irreality," in madness that way: an initial defining of territory, hitherto silenced.

Getting down to the nitty-gritty of changing the language we are habituated to is a collective undertaking. Here are a couple of instances I have experienced.

Names

Are you alright?

Do you sleep at night?

*Do you have enough time
to use your mind?*

*Do you remember
your own name?*

-Meg Christian

Our names are basic. I took back a great deal of strength and power when I decided to choose my own name, and can still be reminded when I use it that it is a symbol, an aspiration, a source of self (the Star is a Tarot card representing integration of inner and outer, dreams and action).

The names that womyn choose represent a rite of passage into Lesbian feminist culture; a refusal of the naming of the child (non-person) by the adult (in power), and of the womyn and children by the father.

HABITUATION (*ATTENTION and AWARENESS*)

“What holds my attention has my energy.”
(*IOW*, p. 5)

We are habituated to patriarchy. Femininity is a habit-learned.

In psychology, habituation is a precise term that applies to the inability to perceive a stimulus after it's been presented to you a number of times. Your brain waves literally flatten out and stop responding to it after a short period of time.

There are Zen monks who have trained themselves, by controlling their attention patterns (maintaining their awareness), never to habituate to anything.⁷ In other words, they notice every time a stimulus is presented to them. In one experiment, a tone was presented to them a number of times and their brain waves registered at the *same intensity each time*. Subjects without the training became habituated to the tone quickly; within three or four times, they stopped being able to really notice or perceive the tone.

I have always been particularly struck by this experiment. I know the one way “they” can really get to me is to *bore* me to death. Patriarchy produces an endless drone of empty words, of sameness, of contentless messages that have linear and monotonic rhythms. I usually “tune out” the messages, try to ignore them in order to have some sanity. But I'm actually not convinced that this is the best thing to do--the drone does take some of my energy even by doing this. The hum and buzz of noise, even where I do not perceive it as *sound* (i.e., as meaningful), requires a portion of my

attention. And, like it or not, some of the messages do get in. Am I more well-guarded if I try to ignore them, or if I can pay a controlled amount of attention to them and *not* be drugged by them? A further lesson to be learned from the Zen monks is that while they *noticed* each tone, and registered it in their brains, they did not physiologically *react* much to each tone. In other words, they knew *precisely* (i.e., just so much but not more) what was being presented to them, but were not affected by it beyond the noticing.

the rhythm, the beat, the tempo, if it is different from mine, i will begin to feel agitated. or, i can be lulled into the other rhythm. babies are lulled to sleep more openly, the lulling to sleep of adults is more co

vert

from *vertere*,
turning

(*IOW*, p. 8)

Calmly, lucidly, I repeat (and I cry, and I rail, and I pronounce, and I explain, by speech and by writing, to the end): I believe in the generality in the profundity, of the fact of misogyny: yes, always and everywhere, in the home of the capitalist, or of the proletariat...I believe in phallocratism at every second, of everyone, in each class and each country...

The fact of misogyny, as with all repressive relations, is not created from the good will of Tom, Dick and Harry. It stems, cruelly, from individuals. It is the starting point for institutions, it maintains mental structures. One will not be able to understand the feminine state of wretchedness if one does not fundamentally grasp it as such: a community, historical, general, daily, world-wide phenomenon, a fundamental relation between women and non-women....It affects all cultures...it is at once the most intimate of our particular life and the most common of our collective. It is the air we breathe.

--*Le féminisme ou la mort* (*Feminism or Death*) by Françoise d'Eaubonne⁸ (my translation)

I think the most strategic survival skill is to neither be agitated by the input of patriarchal energy nor to be lulled into ignoring it. We should know precisely what is being put out at us; and I am *not* saying to defect from our anger or to “plan” our responses. We must learn not to let them deploy our attention into mindless structures; and learn to turn our own attention into mobile, political, exciting structures.

Language

Alice speaks of “becoming literal” as a way of counteracting the lulling effect of patriarchal language. Good examples of what she means by literalness can be found in *Alice in Wonderland*--much of the humor of the book hinges on taking the metaphors of language literally.

Going *into* the puns, as well as into the etymology of the language, does help to dishabituate from it. For example, Alix Dobkin takes a step away from the language by emphasizing the “coincidental” construction of certain words:

if we don't let *maneuvering* keep us apart,
if we don't let *manipulators* keep us apart,
if we don't let *manpower* keep us apart,
or *mankind* keep us apart
we've won--
what i mean is
we ain't got it easy--
but we've got it. (from “Talking Lesbian,” *Lavender Jane Loves Women*)

and so doing refuses to partake of a linear or “serious” same-form refuting of oppression.

Which turns into my next point, that another way to sidestep boredom is to put our arguments into surprising form:

Humor

Humor is a way of confronting people indirectly--of dishabituating them. Patriarchy has used ridicule and reduction to cripple us and stop us from taking ourselves intensely; but we use humor to defend ourselves from being lulled into their structures.

Humor consists essentially in being outside of ordinary structures. An apocryphal story was circulating at one point when Susan Saxe gave her T.V. message: “I will fight on as a woman, a Lesbian and an Amazon”--the FBI had seized on the word “Amazon” and was frantically running it through their computers, trying to decode the “secret message” Saxe had presented to the womyn of the world.

“Your friend is not a warrior,” he said. “If he were, he would know that the worst thing one can do is to confront human beings bluntly.”
“What does a warrior do, don Juan?”
“A warrior proceeds strategically.”
“I still don't understand what you mean.”
“I mean that if our friend were a warrior he would help his child to *stop the world.*”
“How can my friend do that?”
“If one wants to *stop* our fellow men one must always be outside the circle that presses them. That way one can always direct the pressure.”
(*Journey to Ixtlan*)⁹

To be outside the circle that presses them.
To be authors of our own open circle.

INTENSITY/COURAGE/TIME

"The thing to do when you're impatient," he proceeded, "is to turn to your left and ask advice from your death. An immense amount of pettiness is dropped if your death makes a gesture to you, or if you catch a glimpse of it, or if you just have the feeling that your companion is there watching you..."

He replied that the issue of our death was never pressed far enough. And I argued that it would be meaningless for me to dwell upon my death, since such a thought would only bring discomfort and fear.

"You're full of crap!" he exclaimed. "Death is the only wise advisor that we have. Whenever you feel, as you always do, that everything is going wrong and you're about to be annihilated, turn to your death and ask if that is so. Your death will tell you that you're wrong; that nothing really matters outside its touch. Your death will tell you, I haven't touched you yet."

(from *Journey to Ixtlan*)¹⁰

We have refused, or begun to refuse, a great deal of the institutionalized death that is dealt to womyn. We feel it so deeply when we see other women accepting the death: a gut-level horror of living death.

Claiming one's intensity is a profoundly feminist act. We each have a history as Lesbian feminists of being told not to take it all so "seriously, dear"--I'm certain. "You can't have everything," they say. But as Lesbians we refused to settle.

Why we did not settle is a better etiological question to ask about Lesbians than "how did this pathology occur?" But the most *useful* question for us is: *how* did we not settle? Each of us has extricated herself from some or all of the gender system, and each of us has had (and some of us nearly alone) to figure out a strategy for doing so. What were the strategies?

When asked once *why* certain people were self-actualizing, psychologist Abraham Maslow couldn't answer. He finally came up with something called the "chutzpah factor": an extra bit of spunk coming from no one knows where.

We need to name the silent strategies by which Lesbians have used our chutzpah factor to affirm self: to name, share and teach it as resistance to bullshit; the power to question authority; *the refusal to settle for less*.

Age/Aging/Ageism

One of the heaviest tactics of muting our intensity and courage is anchoring and imprisoning the way we perceive age and aging. Ageism and sexism/patriarchy stand in incredibly complex relation to each other, and there isn't space here to more than mention it. The motif I carry in my mind is that men have found it necessary to reduce the three-fold nature of womyn--Virgin, Crone and Mother--which was once found (or could be found) in all wimmin at all times to only one or another, frozen in time.

An essay/story by River Malcolm helped me imagine the consciousness-shattering/building possibilities of an ageist-less world:

They say we do not occupy a part of time, that each of our lives is a consciousness which extends through the whole of time. Each of our consciousnesses is a way of knowing, a knowledge, a conception of the whole of time. Therefore there are many times, and not one. Therefore we are each elder to the other.

They say elder is the term of greatest respect, with which we remind ourselves that we are listening to a sovereign and separate truth which we can never reduce or contain within our way of knowing...

(from "The Women Talk About How They Live")¹¹

NONREIFICATION/SYSTEMS SENSE/AMBIGUITY

The women say that they perceive their bodies in their entirety. They say that they do not favour any of its parts on the ground that it was formerly a forbidden object. They say that they do not want to become prisoners of their own ideology.

(from *Les Guerilleres*)¹²

To form a movement that is really movement. By questioning every assumption, a really mobile vision.

To build into our ideology a nonreification clause:

one must have a vision;
but then put the vision
out of the way, so to speak, of the vision
that is actually created
(step by step) in the outer
world. Otherwise, the vision
blocks the vision. (IOW, p. 41)

In 1948 Simone de Beauvoir wrote *The Ethics of Ambiguity*--an incisive statement of the sameness of all political formulae and how they interact with the psychology of the individual. She proposes there a mode of politics that sidesteps simplicity without negating political action; a way of creating a vision, as the quote from *In Other Words* suggests, while not idolizing the vision or proselytizing for it.

Lesbian feminists are uniquely advantaged to opt for ambiguity, complexity, mobility, change. Balanced on the edge of patriarchy, we see the danger of falling into it, or falling out of it into a mirror image of it. Mary Daly's concept of "boundary dwelling" describes a high-energy state, an interface which demands constant self-scrutiny and change, motion. And maintaining an ethics of ambiguity also requires a systems sense--seeing that all the parts work

together; any one thing affected affects the whole system. The personal is the political is the everything else. Patriarchy is *systematic*: thorough, one by one, linear. Feminist analysis is *systemic*: of the whole, nonlinear, from the perspective of the outsider.

TO BE (left brain) AND NOT TO BE (right brain)
THAT IS THE ANSWER. (IOW, p. 58)

Maintaining the vision, opting for complexity is difficult and exhausting. All of us have been trained to think in terms of simple solutions, formulas which produce cause-and-effect changes.

Much of what is narrowly termed "politics" seems to rest on a longing for certainty even at the cost of honesty, for an analysis which, once given, need not be re-examined. Such is the dead-endedness--for women--of Marxism in our time.

Truthfulness anywhere means a heightened complexity. But it is a movement into evolution. Women are only beginning to uncover our own truths; many of us would be grateful for some rest in that struggle, would be glad just to lie down with the sherds we have painfully unearthed, and be satisfied with those. Often I feel this like an exhaustion in my own body.

The politics worth having, the relationships worth having, demand that we delve still deeper.

(from *Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying*)

To reify any part of our complex vision is to jeopardize both our honor and our viability as a world.

RELATIONSHIP TO PATRIARCHY

the awareness of rape
spoken or unspoken, the
threat of violence

lies at the periphery of my consciousness during even the simplest act

the line between rape and rapefreedom circumscribes our lives. We must begin to image/imagine a world where rape is *unthinkable*, impossible.

The idea that the perceptual interpretations that make up our world have a flow is congruous with the fact that they run uninterruptedly and are rarely, if ever, open to question. In fact, the reality of the world we know is so taken for granted that the basic premise of sorcery, that our reality is merely one of many descriptions, could hardly be taken as a serious proposition.¹⁴

It has been important for me to begin describing patriarchy (the system wherein rape is possible) to myself as a constructed reality; as one of many possible descriptions of the world. But again, not as an arbitrary description: someone(s) authored and continue to author (an ongoing verb, not one-time) the structures. Invested in, authored by, those who profit from it.

we should at least understand just what it is the system has been doing to us, and the extent to which they are getting better at it. "better" doesn't begin to describe it; they are making a qualitative leap in their ability to keep us locked in our places.

definitely a challenge. an occasion to rise to. (IOW, p. iv)

institutionalized

the individual loses power to institute when there is institutionalization
the institution acquires the power
THE PLOT AGAINST US

(IOW, p. 3)

I think that *how* we conceptualize ourselves in terms of fighting or "trying to change the world/create a new one" is vitally important. One of the values of thinking about our lives as altered states of consciousness is in helping us to conceive the outrageous, the unthinkable, the mad: the very things that will *surprise* them. In terms of our own consciousness, we must become chameleons, quick-change artists, while avoiding deception and lack of identification with ourselves. For a long time now I have thought in terms of guerrilla warfare; that I am a resistance fighter. What we are facing is a massive war being waged against us at every level (physical, moral, psychological and spiritual), and in that context it is difficult to talk about the "ideal" shape of a "politically correct" plan of action. I feel the need to give full credence to our battle scars, to trusting that each of us will do what she can where she is with the tools that she has. (Not to ignore the possibility of coopting or pouring our energy out for nothing; not to ignore the utter necessity for visions and possibilities.)

What I am saying here is that what I am habituated to is precisely what makes me dangerous to myself and to other wimmin, and also what makes me predictable in terms of the system. I cannot imagine myself out of patriarchy in terms of wishing away the violence and the brainwashing; but I *must* imagine myself out of patriarchy in order to know what my bottom line is, and how to make it bottomer.

The more serious (and Less Serious) I become, the more ways I become *alter* in the deepest sense with relation to patriarchy, and at the same time *alter* with relation to old

elves. Thus, the ways we do that are both individual and political; for me, writing theory is a way of envisioning (*en--* to place within; *vision--* placing my perception within a vision). The theory I wrap with alter visions is a weapon/tool/defense/grace and meaning.

WITCHCRAFT/PSYCHIC TOOLS/HISTORY

I take the word *witch* as seriously as the word *Lesbian* in talking about myself. Historically and politically, the word has had many meanings: as a female-centered religion, as an ancient form of social organization based on agricultural and lunar cycles, as a resistance to patriarchy/Christianity, as healer, wise woman, as knower and user of psychic skills/power.

For myself, now, I center the word in a combination of historical/traditional meanings and new feminist ones implying strong, powerful, self-identified woman. There exists still a small pagan community, hidden for the most part, now male and female, who have preserved some part of the old traditions handed down through and before the burning times. They are linked by a common choice of female symbolism and energy in their rituals (the Goddess), preserved in a fragmented, pluralistic (not that pluralism is negative) tradition. Part of the pagan community is in contact with the "spiritual feminist community" in some places.

I am learning what I can of the old traditions, rooting myself in a goddess-centered religion. There is no counterpart in god-centeredness nor in what is usually called religion--just as maleness is not the counterpart for femaleness.

I'm very scared of institutionalization of any of this.

A woman in my coven pointed out that Wicca (witchcraft) means “knower of changes or changer.” Fundamentally, to be a witch means to have the ability to transform energy, embedding the transformations 1) in a knowledge and respect for the natural rhythms of the earth, and 2) in a five-fold energy system, symbolized by the pentacle. The five points of the pentacle stand for sex, for self-awareness, for passion, for pride and for power. These points rest, in turn, reflexively, on change and transformation, and understanding them as a system negates the possibility of power-over or of fetishizing any one of them. The ability to transform, to change, to create refers always back to a core self:

and you who think to seek for me
know that your seeking and yearning
shall avail you not
unless you know the mystery:

that if that which you seek you find not within you
you shall never find it without

for behold, I have been with you from the beginning
and I am that which is attained at the end of desire.

(Invocation to the Star-Goddess)

Myra Love has expressed some of the self-referent power of witchcraft in her poem “Sister-witch”:

pure will:
focus in transforming
flame burns on
finely narrow fierce flame
rages up from her source

witchcraft is not an exercise of
but a focusing in the will and through
indrawing to the center and outward
shooting forth to connect to encompass to effect

(quoted in part, unpublished poem, with permission
© 1977 Myra Love)

Politics

Berger has described, unconsciously, the politics of feminist witchcraft with relation to patriarchy:

The sheltering quality of social order becomes especially evident if one looks at the marginal situations in the life of the individual, that is, at situations in which he (sic) is driven close to or beyond the boundaries of the order that determines his routine, everyday existence. Such marginal situations commonly occur in dreams and fantasy... Whatever the epistemological status of these constellations (usually decided upon much too sanguinely by psychiatry, precisely because it is firmly rooted in the everyday, ‘official,’ social definitions of reality), their profound terror for the individual lies in the threat they constitute to his previously operative nomos (constructed world)...

...in other words, the marginal situations of human existence reveal the innate precariousness of all social worlds. Every socially defined reality remains threatened by lurking ‘irrealities.’ Every socially constructed nomos must face the constant possibility of its collapse into anomy.¹⁵

A hunch: psychic skills are like any others, it’s 99% practice and taking it seriously while practicing. *Crafting*. Paying attention to all of the input from the environment: dreams, hunches, “funny feelings,” all the things that you might dismiss as nonsense (and some might indeed be nonsense!).

The system you embed your psychic skills in can be looked at separately from the skills. In other words, the CIA and the Russian KGB can learn to do mind control and ESP experiments. But the system also gives form and shape to the skills: there is a function and structure to the politics of witchcraft.

Alice has a drawing in the front of her book that says, witch or feminist alone, or Lesbian alone, or anarchist alone is fascist.

I wouldn't choose to use that word--I feel it belongs to an whole other order of murderers and politicians and torturers. But I think I know what she means. When all of those potentialities--witch, Lesbian, anarchist and feminist--come together, something very different happens from any one or two of them separately. I would rather look at them when they're connected, and compare that to patriarchal status quo, than to take one element at a time and compare it to what it's not. Uff.

visionary ecology
political joy
individualistic collectivity
a tradition of constant change

and always the question:
what knowledge was destroyed with the
nine million burned?
with what was it replaced?

IDENTIFICATION

"Have you had sex with girls much before?"

"Only since I've been at the Rubber Rose. Between Miss Adrian and Delores, every eligible male's been scared away from here, and there's usually trouble of one kind or another if we fool around with the hicks in Mottburg. That leaves your fingers or other women, and at least half the cowgirls on the ranch have been in each other's pants by now. There's not a queer among 'em, either. It's just a nice, natural thing to do. Girls are so close and soft. Why did it take me all these years to learn that it's okay to roll around with 'em? It's 'specially good when it's somebody you really like a lot." She hugged Sissy and sugar-doodled a few kisses around her neck and ears.

(from *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*)¹⁶

Consciousness is rooted in experience but altered by linguistic awareness.* The statement "I am a Lesbian" could describe the womyn's awareness of their experiences. Robbins chooses to say, "There's not a queer among 'em." The difference is one of worlds, of reality, of cognition and of consciousness. By choosing to deny the interrelatedness of the women's actions with the gender system, Robbins annihilates the political, patterned nature of their silencing. He coats the women's sexuality with a phony glaze of acceptance--effectively silencing for the naive reader any awareness of the reality of Lesbian oppression, the blood-struggle each of us has made, going from aloneness to Lesbian-identification.

*Analyses of shamanism and the alteration of consciousness in a culture, for example, always examine the induction of the altered state and the *translation* of the experience into a system of interrelated explanations, woven into the culture.

As most of us, I spent high school immersed in silence. The woman I loved and toward whom I directed all of my emotional energies was not my lover in a genital sense; yet, even had we been, I doubt that the linguistic category of "friendship" could have been cracked open in our minds--we never talked about sexuality and making physical love wouldn't have altered that.

Lesbian is the word, the label, the condition that holds women in line. When a woman hears this word tossed her way, she knows she is stepping out of line. She knows that she has crossed the terrible boundary of her sex role. She recoils, she protests, she reshapes her actions to gain approval. Lesbian is a label invented by the man to throw at any woman who dares to be his equal, who dares to challenge his prerogatives (including that of all women as part of the exchange medium among men), who dares to assert the primacy of her own needs.

(from *The Woman-Identified Woman*)¹⁷

The womyn's movement forced me to a choice between silence and naming: the word Lesbian compelled me like a moth. And as soon as I spoke the words, *I am a Lesbian*, I knew there was no going back. The alteration of our consciousness through the identification of ourselves as Lesbians is in some ways the profoundest alteration of all, it is the keystone of our arching consciousness.

ROMANCE/LOVE/SEX

Romance is the bottom line for change for many of us, the place where we abandon honor and the reality of our own perceptions. All of the creations (community, politics, friendships, work) we build can be jeopardized by the

betrayal which results from love-relationships (romance-relationships) we **commit** ourselves to.

as in, hand over

The romance can't be simply analyzed in terms of "monogamy" or "nonmonogamy," although the romance is usually placed within the overlaid structure of monogamy. Our consciousness is bounded within the limits of our ability to *conceive of* ourselves as alone and healthy--i.e., not "involved" in a "relationship" which delimits our sexuality, or our sense of ourselves.

We are taught to sexually respond rather than sexually create.

The state of falling in love can obscure our ability to love.

Hunting.

Objects.

Emotion-binding that is like footbinding and mindbinding.

But the openness, the vulnerability, the power and passion and pride. The sex. The selfawareness--also parts of our consciousness in an opening way.

open-open to another person: the willingness to let that person put me through changes, as most clearly indicated in body-loving. I will let you touch me. My body armor will be down. I will let the feelings happen, permeate me. I will be vulnerable.

I want to put you through changes. rare for me. Don't yet understand the wanting or the non-wanting.

But for me the result of this, when both parties are open-open, is that they can then begin to exchange what i've been calling secrets; the thoughts, feelings that one hardly says to one's self; these thoughts can not be elaborated on, expanded--until they are spoken to another person. For our revolution to move forward, they must surface.

(IOW, p. 24)

PHYSICAL BEING

Many of us, and me not least of all, are held by Western medicine. Even at feminist health centers a lot of the health care is based oftentimes on Western premises: i.e., drugs "cure"; diseases are "caught"; you "naturally" get "sicker" as you get older, etc.

I don't know enough to convey much useful information here that can't be found elsewhere easily (information on herbs, acupuncture, fasting, nutrition, psychic healing). I have been able to heal myself of fairly serious illness several times; enough to know that I can take care of myself if I want to.

Some general discoveries: we need to learn that *everything* that goes into our bodies (energy in any form)* has an effect. Bodies don't let you get away with anything permanently. Ever.

Mostly what Western medicine provides is a temporary and speedy suppression of symptoms. Which living in speeded-up U.S. many of us need to use to keep up. Self-

*Lesbians age really differently than straight women, for example. Look at our faces.

healing requires a different time orientation and a great deal of responsibility (not delegating any of the responsibility out to a doctor or another--they *can't* cure).

GRACE/WONDER

In order to be a sorcerer a (wo)man must be passionate. A passionate woman has earthly belongings and things dear to her--if nothing else, just the path where she walks....

"Only as a warrior can one survive the path of knowledge," he said, "Because the art of a warrior is to balance the terror of being a woman with the wonder of being a woman."

I gazed at the two of them, each in turn. Their eyes were clear and peaceful....For an instant I think I *saw*. I *saw* the loneliness of woman as a gigantic wave which had been frozen in front of me, held back by the invisible wall of a metaphor.

(from *Journey to Ixtlan*)*¹⁸

Perceiving the enormity, the monstrosity of what has been done to womyn--and feeling the wonder of being alive and loving womyn. As a Lesbian, a monster, I create degrees of freedom that are magical.

Lesbian feminism: terror and wonder in dialectic. The Beast and the Goddess.

I cannot write about the wonder yet without putting it into relation with the struggle it took/takes to create the space to feel it. Yet the joy, the magic, the unfolding is central to our consciousness, in whatever counterpoint to the death culture trying to destroy it. We create a genuinely passionate wonder.

*I changed the "generic" masculine to female, which makes the passage true.

Afterword

In the first issue of *Sinister Wisdom* Julia Stanley wrote of her experience of writing as a personal dialogue, with oneself, as a way of creating a challenge and new honor for oneself:

....I believe that every speech act involves personal risk on the part of the speaker or writer, if she is being honest with herself. And I believe that taking this risk is necessary and healthy....As I wrote the fable, and as I spoke it at the GAU conference, I was shaking, shaking because my *self* was "on the line." I was frightened, and I am still frightened when I read it, because I cannot match my words. But I was writing out of my self, writing of a self that does not yet exist, a self that has not been born. But I am engaged in dialogue with her.¹⁹

Writing theory is for me an intense dialogue with myself: the integration of all of my experience, all of my transformations. I don't cover everything of course in writing something; but I am committed to a methodology of honor--not ignoring any relevant questions in order to impose my view of reality in a dishonest way. I see this as what "science" has proposed, but the antithesis of what it has become in men's hands and minds.

The state of consciousness I've tried to give language to here exists as an ideal, not a "fact." At best, I catch glimpses of it in its totality: moments of self-awareness in the middle of busyness and change.

Footnotes

1. See, for example, *States of Consciousness* by Charles Tart (NY: Dutton, 1975) and *The Psychology of Consciousness* (SF: Freeman, 1972) by Robert Ornstein.

2. Distinction developed in conversation with Artemis March, Santa Cruz, California, 1977.
3. Adrienne Rich, *Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Motherroot Publications, 1977). Available for \$1.50 from Motherroot, 214 Dewey St., Pittsburgh, Pa. 15218.
4. The womyn in Boston I interviewed for my senior thesis helped me crystallize some of these ideas as well. "Feminism as a Process of Change and the Psychology of Consciousness: A Comparative Structural Analysis," unpublished manuscript, 1975.
5. Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (NY: Doubleday, 1967), p. 37 and p. 39.
6. Monique Wittig, *The Lesbian Body*, transl. David Le Vay (NY: William Morrow, 1975).
7. Kasamatsu and Hirai, "An Electroencephalographic Study on the Zen Meditation," in Charles Tart, ed., *Altered States of Consciousness* (NY: Anchor Books, 1972), pps. 501-514.
8. Francoise d'Eaubonne, *Le feminisme ou la mort* (Paris: Pierre Horay Editeur, 1974), pp. 18-19.
9. Carlos Castaneda, *Journey to Ixtlan* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1972), p. 11.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
11. River Malcolm, "The Women Talk about How They Live," *Sinister Wisdom*, 3, Spring, 1977, pp. 23-26.
12. Monique Wittig, *Les Guerilleres*, (NY: Avon, 1973), pp. 57-58.
13. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (NJ: Citadel, 1972).
14. *Journey to Ixtlan*, p. 9.
15. *The Sacred Canopy*, pp. 22-23.
16. Tom Robbins, *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* (NY: Bantam Books, 1976), pp. 180-181.
17. Artemis March, Ellen Bedoz, Cynthia Funk, Rita Mae Brown, Lois Hart, and Barbara Gladstone, with other Radicalesbians, *The Woman-Identified Woman* (NY Women's Liberation Center, mimeo, 1970). pp. 314-315.
19. Julia P. Stanley, "A Cursory and Precursory History of Language and the Telling of It," *Sinister Wisdom*, 1, July, 1976, p. 12.

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

Ellen Bass teaches writing workshops for women in Santa Cruz, California. Her most recent volume of poetry, *Of Separateness and Merging*, has just been published by Autumn Press. This summer she'll be offering a week-long writing workshop for beginning and experienced writers and she welcomes inquiries.

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Flying Clouds. "I am living in Los Angeles where I have a good job. I hope to live in Oklahoma in the country in a few years time. I am very excited about writing."

Barbara Grier. "I was born in 1933 in Cincinnati, Ohio, and raised all over the United States. I am a writer, a bibliographer, a lecturer, a publisher, an editor and I have been active in the gay movement (Lesbian, Lesbian/feminist, homophile, homosexual, gay) under its various and sundry names since 1956."

Gloria Gyn, Lesbian gadfly, lives in Charlotte, N.C.

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Melanie Kaye and Paula King recently did a combined show of Melanie's writing and Paula's stitchery and graphics at the Women's Studies Gallery, Portland State University.

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Adrienne Rich's most recent volume of poetry is *The Dream of a Common Language*, W.W. Norton, 1978.

Sandia (Bear). "Came out, 1974. My first book coming out this year: *At the Sweet Hour of Hand in Hand*, a translation of Renee Vivien's poetry. My next book, *Children of the Second Birth*, is also wanting someone to bring her out."

Judith Schwarz teaches a course on lesbian history at the Washington, D.C. Area Women's Center and is researching a book on lesbian history tentatively called, "Close Friends and Devoted Companions."

Claudia Scott lives in Philadelphia. *Portrait*, a book of her earlier poetry, was published by Lavender Press.

Joanna Spilman lives in Chicago. (She is a double Scorpio, which may account for the intensity of her work.)

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Chocolate Waters is a Denver Dyke Poet Aqueerian. "Disturbance" is part of her second book of poems, *Take Me Like a Photograph*, which can be ordered for \$4.00 + 50c postage from Eggplant Press, P.O. Box 18641, Denver, CO 80218.



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by Tee Corinne

In the spring of 1977, this Tee Corinne photograph appeared on the cover of *Sinister Wisdom 3*, followed by a deluge of requests for a poster. And now the poster is ready: a duplicate of that cover, black on gray, 17" x 22". You can have your own for a contribution of \$3.00 toward the survival of *Sinister Wisdom*, plus 50¢ to cover mailing costs. (They make nice gifts for friends, too; so write for bulk rates.)

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