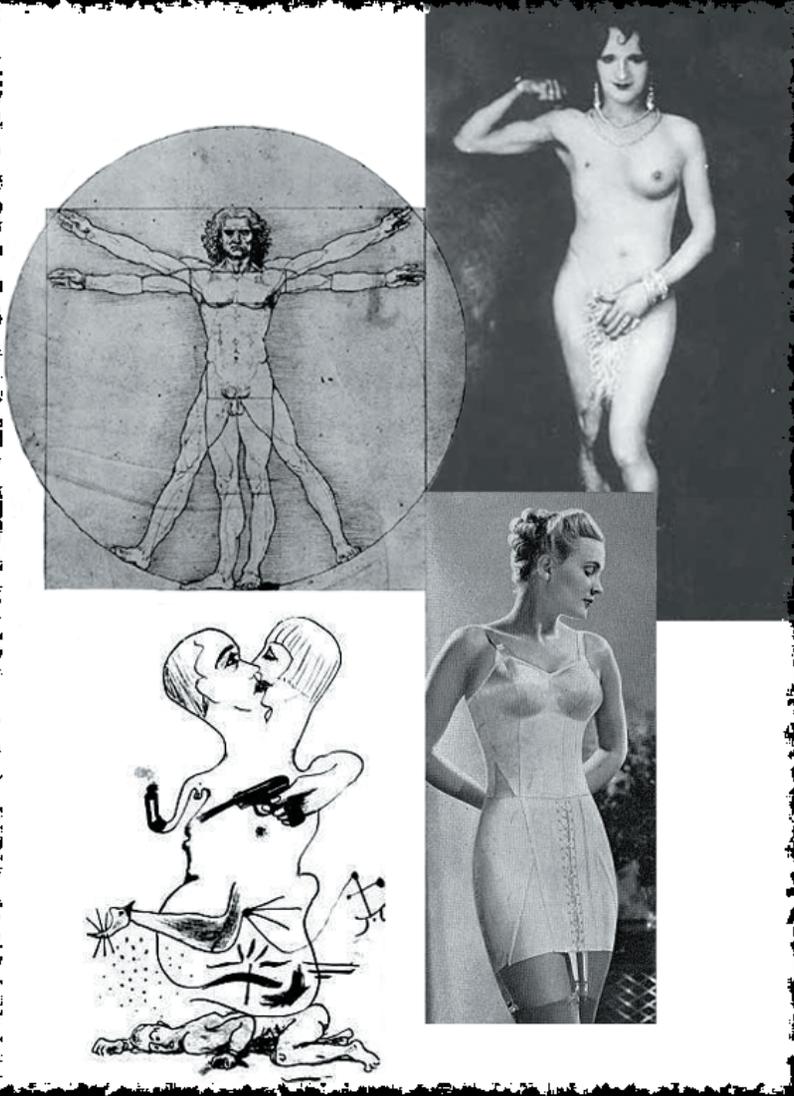


PIECES OF SELF

Anarchy, Gender, and Other Thoughts



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Edited by Wildflower

Pieces of Self

Anarchy, Gender, and Other Thoughts

*To those whose bodies have forgotten the rhythms of the Earth,
And to those who cannot let yourselves cry,
And those whose bodies have been used as though you had no heart,
And to those who feel you must hide your true selves,
And those who have been hated or hurt because of who you are,
May we all find our ways back home--back to ourselves and back to each other.*

An Introduction

My intention in putting this zine together is to make available essays that clarify the connections between the origins of patriarchy and civilization, that analyze the function of gender in this society and the effects that gender constructions have on our lives, and that challenge individuals to come to our own conclusions. Part of my reasoning for doing this is that I feel that gender is not adequately addressed. I feel like most people have only a vague idea of what gender means to their lives, and even less do they know what they want it to mean. It seems that most dialogue on gender rarely gets past identity politics, reactionary rants, and desperate attempts to place blame. I have sat through too many conversations where the nature of domination and submission were argued, where most everyone came away frustrated or with hurt feelings, and where there was never any movement towards healthier interactions.

I am also interested in challenging social roles wherever they come up and challenging boundaries (in this case between gender and sexual categories) to see if they indeed exist, and to begin to navigate where they might begin and end.

When I started this project I knew it would be difficult to find essays that I felt were powerful, inciteful, and challenging. The essays that I chose reflect an array of texts that I found within the anarchist (primarily insurrectionary and green) milieu. Unfortunately many of them address issues of "women" much more than they address "men." I think this reflects the way that gender analysis is often equated with women, partially because men are still viewed as the generic or normal category and therefore it is assumed that only an analysis of things that are different from or that go beyond this

thousand year old network of domination that has spread itself over the globe. Its destruction is the initiation of a marvelous and frightening journey into the unknown that is freedom.

--from *Willful Disobedience*



To put it another way, what all civilized societies have in common is the systematic expropriation of the lives of those who live within them. The critique of domestication (with any moral underpinnings removed) provides a useful tool for understanding this. What is domestication if not the expropriation of the life of a being by another who then exploits that life for her or his own purposes? Civilization is thus the systematic and institutionalized domestication of the vast majority of people in a society by the few who are served by the network of domination.

Thus the revolutionary process of reappropriating our lives is a process of decivilizing ourselves, of throwing off our domestication. This does not mean becoming passive slaves to our instincts (if such even exist) or dissolving ourselves in the alleged oneness of Nature. It means becoming uncontrollable individuals capable of making and carrying out the decisions that affect our lives in free association with others.

It should be obvious from this that I reject any models for an ideal world (and distrust any vision that is too perfect I suspect that there the individual has disappeared). Since the essence of a revolutionary struggle fitting with anarchist ideals is the reappropriation of life by individuals who have been exploited, dispossessed and dominated, it would be in the process of this struggle that people would decide how they want to create their lives, what in this world they feel they can appropriate to increase their freedom, open possibilities and add to their enjoyment, and what would only be a burden stealing from the joy of life and undermining possibilities for expanding freedom. I don't see how such a process could possibly create any single, universal social model. Rather, innumerable experiments varying drastically from place to place and changing over time would reflect the singular needs, desires, dreams and aspirations of each and every individual.

So, indeed, let's destroy civilization, this network of domination, but not in the name of any model or an ascetic morality of sacrifice or of a mystical disintegration into a supposedly unalienated oneness with Nature. Rather let us destroy civilization because the reappropriation of our lives, the collective recreation of ourselves as uncontrollable and unique individuals, is the destruction of this ten

starting point is necessary. And perhaps part of it is some type of apologist ideology that is trying to make up for all the wrongs of patriarchy by finally "allowing" women their space.

In any case, for many reasons, these are the essays that I found which I think best get at the heart of ideas of anarchy and gender. If you've seen some of these writings elsewhere, don't be surprised if they are included in a slightly different form here. I changed and edited them to better reflect my own ideas and understandings of the world.

This is a work in progress. I'm still looking for more essays to add to this zine. Specifically I'm looking for: an essay that draws strong connections between the origins of patriarchy and civilization, a critique of "radical pro-sex" ideas, an analysis of single-gender only spaces, and more thoughts on initiation and ceremony. If you have, or know where to find, writings on any of these topics or other topics you think are relevant, or if you want to give me feedback or criticism or just throw ideas at me, please contact me at:

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I assume that all anarchists would agree that we want to put an end to every institution, structure and system of domination and exploitation. The rejection of these things is, after all, the basic meaning of anarchism. Most would also agree that among these institutions, structures and systems are the state, private property, religion, law, the patriarchal family, class rule...

In recent years, some anarchists have begun to talk in what appears to be broader terms of the need to destroy civilization. This has, of course, led to a reaction in defense of civilization. Unfortunately, this debate has been mainly acrimonious, consisting of name-calling, mutual misrepresentation and territorial disputes over the ownership of the label “anarchist,” rather than real argumentation. One of the problems (although probably not the most significant one) behind this incapacity to really debate the question is that very few individuals on either side of it have tried to explain precisely what they mean by “civilization.” Instead, it remains a nebulous term that represents all that is bad for one side and all that is good for the other.

In order to develop a more precise definition of civilization, it is worthwhile to examine when and where civilization is said to have arisen and what differences actually exist between societies currently defined as civilized and those not considered as such. Such an examination shows that the existence of animal husbandry, agriculture, a sedentary way of life, a refinement of arts, crafts and techniques or even the simple forms of metal smelting are not enough to define a society as civilized (though they do comprise the necessary material basis for the rise of civilization). Rather what arose about ten thousand years ago in the “cradle of civilization” and what is shared by all civilized societies but lacking in all those that are defined as “uncivilized” is a network of institutions, structures and systems that impose social relationships of domination and exploitation. In other words, a civilized society is one comprised of the state, property, religion (or in modern societies, ideology), law, the patriarchal family, commodity exchange, class rule everything we, as anarchists, oppose.

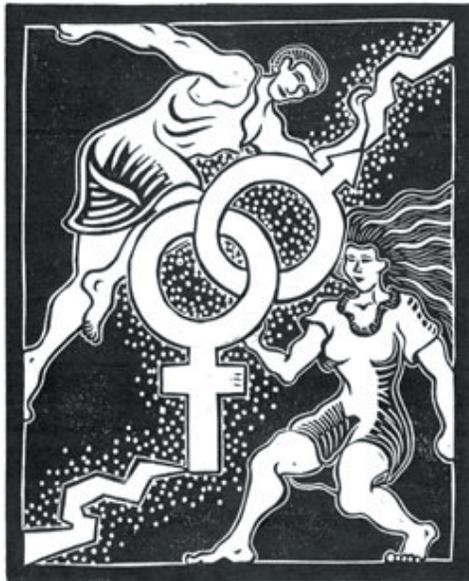


and protected from all that would steal it away.

One day I rode in the backseat of my parent's car across a freeway overpass. The freeway was a sacred site in my childhood cosmology because it led to Oregon, and Oregon was where my parents had lived in that mythical time-before-me. I associated the whole state with their love. At that moment while my parents talked of some errand and I daydreamed about playing with a neighbor boy. I realized that this "love," this mysterious stuff of fairy tales, is really just a friendship where you play and fight all over the place, even all the way to Oregon.

This insight didn't replace my cultured despair--now I can worry that I have not yet found my friend--but I'm a little less deluded than I could be. In the absence of falling I have learned to walk on my own, carrying my heart contained. What I offer does not melt sweetly but stands and fights to defend any small space where my heart can run free. I'm learning not to throw myself at pain, to be compassionate while still caring for me. These are lessons of friendship and partnership, and of relationship to place. This effort is vital to being a friend, a lover, and a human.

--from *Fire and Ice* by Laurel Luddite and Skunkly Monkly



Patriarchal Conquest and Industrial Civilization

The apocalyptic horrors we face today--the looming nightmares of nuclear war or ecological catastrophe--are a direct consequence of the civilization created by (mostly) male power elites for the past 10,000 years. These threats to our survival are entirely unique to this modern era, and would have been virtually inconceivable to people of former times. However, the true roots of civilization--the consciousness and attitudes that eventually enabled such a civilization to come into being--first began to fester in the societies of our ancestors long ago. Why we have only so recently come to be faced with the nightmarish reality of a crisis of extermination is because the modern era is the first in which the actual potential for extermination exists. It was only through the actualization of an advanced industrial civilization that the machines, weapons and industrial processes were created which are now threatening the survival of life on Earth.

The present industrial and technological civilization is, in its global and its actual physical manifestations, vastly different from all others of civilized history. From the stupefying rate of expansion of the "industrial revolution," and with the colossal productive capacity of massive factories, the immense output from power projects, and the utilization of mega-scale resource extraction, etc., etc., ad nauseam, there is little question that the modern era, in a material sense, literally stands beyond history. It has facilitated the most consumptive and materialistic societies ever--which are surely a science fiction fantasy when compared with even the most developed urban centers of the 18th century.

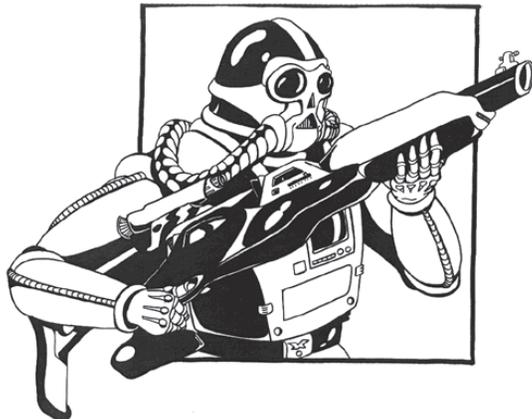
Industrial civilization has evolved from the cumulative effects of an unbroken adherence to perceptions, concepts and philosophical values that are negative and essentially anti-life. For example, the capacity of human beings to want to wage wars of total annihilation against their enemies, or the quest to manipulate the natural environment to our anthropocentric ends, or to lust after material wealth with insatiable greed--these machinations which are so prevalent among the ruling classes of today--have also dominated the pursuits of previous eras and civilizations. Clearly, far back into history,

well before the beginnings of the Judeo-Christian era, the dominant conceptual outlook of civilization can be described as being that of “patriarchal (male-dominated) conquest.” I believe that within this mode of thought are ways of perceiving and being, sometimes subtle and sometimes brutally apparent, which must be rejected if we are to survive and recreate lives and cultures of freedom and harmony.

At some point in our distant past, around 10,000 years ago, when early patriarchal societies began to develop and then become established and powerful, a distancing and disregard, and eventually contempt and conquest, over womyn, other peoples and finally the natural environment came to be the principle underlying premises upon which the ruling males governed. Since those times, the magnitude of patriarchal conquest has steadily expanded, and “human development” has been synonymous with the ever-increasing institutionalization of patriarchal domination. The tragic effects of this domination are not only evident today in the material conditions of human societies, but as well, in the inner world of human beings.

Over thousands of years, the patriarchal culture of conquest has virtually destroyed our inner grounding with what can be termed “a natural and holistic appreciation of life.” Such a severe spiritual crippling has left us collectively wounded and astray. This is particularly true in advanced industrial societies where an extremely distorted and lifeless view of living exists. Not only has much of the reverence and worship of life itself vanished, but it appears that these societies have become incapable of recognizing the fact that they are creating an execution chamber world by the very manner in which they are functioning and by the very motives which drive them onward.

Patriarchal conquest has become an all embracing battle of conquest over all life for the ends of greed and power for rulers and empires--to bury variety, spontaneity and



many questions. If you talk about it, it'll go away (like an erection.) Drink our beer. It's easy. It just comes natural. You'll know it when you meet The One. And they lived happily ever after...

We begin to believe any lie repeated often enough, no matter how ridiculous. But the secret to being a good liar is to work in as much truth as you can. Love is powerful. Sex is magic, and may be the sacred ceremony that might have been able to save us. But it's been stolen like all the rest. They injure us where it hurts most so that when we try to embrace, our wounds bump and bleed.

Maybe love is not even a noun. Perhaps it's not something we feel. Perhaps it's not a gooshy pit we fall into. Maybe it has nothing to do with chubby naked archers, chocolate, and push-up bras. It could be that the word “love” is a verb. It's something we do. Not only that, it might be something we choose to do, even when it doesn't come easy.

Love is a combination of trust, commitment, care, respect, understanding, and responsibility. It involves affection, honesty, effort, and discipline. Loving is difficult, and therefore worth doing. It requires intimacy with oneself as well as the other person and a willingness to risk, grow, hurt, forgive, and heal. All these things take energy and time.

Cynically, I sometimes joke I have a terrible example to live up to: my parents are still together and still love each other. I didn't say that they are still in love. Over the years I've seen a connection not based on the starry-eyed feelings they shared when they met. I've seen the daily work they do to love each other and to raise children who know they are loved, and who are capable now of loving others.

Still, as a young girl I was sold the Barbie-and-Ken fairy tales of “true love” and “happily ever after.” I believed them and despaired that, at twelve years old, I had not yet found my prince. I believed love was a scarcity in the world--certainly it was scarce in my culture. I believed that, once found, love was to be guarded

comfort, which would turn inevitably into making out. In exchange he often promised to love me forever. I would return the promise, feeling passionately our mutual dependence. I gently slipped the noose off his neck and tried to kiss the pain away. This was the day I first had sex. We were both fourteen.

I wonder what I learned in his room with centerfolds covering the walls. What did I believe about the use of my body and the value of my self?

This is what I thought I knew about love: it is a desperate fragile grasp on something slipping away. You throw out a line and hook something--a person, a place--that is going down fast. A drunken crying lover, a forest as the saws approach. Hard as you pull, you can't stop their descent. It is stronger than the line, your love, and eventually you're left with cut and empty hands.

Don't worry, there's always more fish in the sea.

We are conditioned to obsess over love while avoiding any attempts to understand or even define what it is. Movies and ad agencies sell love as a magic elixir to fix all our problems and make us the happiest monkey in the world. We could build a pyramid with all the self-help books, glossy magazines, and romance novels that either taunt us outright or imply that they will reveal the secrets of the universe. But strangely, after all these decades of advice columns and talk shows, functional relationships seem even more elusive.

Could it be that Glamour magazine and Hollywood, for all their homilies, don't know the first thing about love? That even if they did know the truth, they wouldn't tell us? If we were not sexually frustrated, clueless, and obsessed, who would support the cosmetic, perfume, beauty, cinema, fashion, pornography, and music industries? How would they sell Budweiser? How would advertisement agencies sell anything? If people knew how to relate to their families, if they really loved, would they still agree to spend the majority of their waking life with random workmates? Would they agree to march off obediently to wars overseas?

My God! What would become of the economy? Don't ask so

vitality in a coffin of artificiality, domination and control. Male rule, womyn hating, racism, warfare, imperialism, materialism, aggression, competition, believing humanity to be separate and superior to the natural world, psychic and emotional encasement, invulnerability, hierarchialism, objectification, exploitation, techno-rationality, lack of intuition or insight and a spiritual voidness--these are some of the negative attributes which are consistent with a patriarchal/civilized culture. Taken as a whole, they form the cultural archetype now exhibited in the military industrial imperialism of our present times. Throughout patriarchal history, these attributes have more or less determined how we have lived, and how civilizations have developed. Today much of humanity, most men and all imperialist economic, scientific, political and military leaders are imbued with many of these life-smothering characteristics. The brutal landscapes and stagnant cesspools of modern industrial civilization are a real life mirror reflecting the extent to which the human spirit has been extinguished by the culture of patriarchal conquest.

The ceaseless dark ages of history, now epitomized in crises of species extermination, starkly reveal that the longer human beings have adhered to, or been forced under domination of, the various strains of patriarchal thinking, the greater the anti-social centrality of such thought has permeated the character of human societies; and therefore, the greater the degree of violence, destruction, and misery that all living beings and the environment of the Earth have experienced. On the path of patriarchal conquest things haven't gotten better, they've gotten worse. All the multitudes of negativity found throughout patriarchal history have compounded, mutated and expanded over time, eventually culminating in the toxic realities of modern times.

With the advent of industrial civilization a qualitatively new era of destructiveness has come into being. Before industrialization, though there was often unfathomable suffering and brutality, actual threats to the survival of all life on Earth did not exist. Therefore, regardless of the many terrors people faced, in their dreams they could visualize an open-ended future full of possibility. Today this is no longer true: we live in dread of the horrors of industrial civilization, and daily we are confronted with the very real possibility of extinc-

tion. Industrialization has not only magnified the basic anti-life dynamic of civilization, it is, in fact a Frankenstein created by it.

The existence of industrial civilization cannot be divorced from the historical process that eventually enabled it to be created--that process being patriarchal historical development. Civilization stems from within the conceptual framework of the patriarchal mindset, and it is from that mentality that the strivings to pursue it dwell. It would never have come into being without human cultures having first been mutilated by patriarchy, and our identification with the natural living world severed. If we fail to make this connection, then we fail to understand the real "nature" of civilization.

Industrial civilization is the definitive product of patriarchy. Industrial development is not wrong simply because it is recklessly utilized towards the ends of power and profit. Its very essence is wrong: all the premises upon which it was founded, and is maintained, are negative and anti-life. It is inherent within the essential "nature" of industrial--civilization for it to be life threatening. It is entirely consistent, therefore, that its existence has become such a grave threat to the survival of life.

To survive this crisis of extermination, it is simply not enough to isolate nuclear war, large-scale pollution or relentless profiteering as being the offensive realities of industrial civilization, and therefore, as the only parts of it that should be done away with. To do that would mean that we still embraced, on the whole, most of the industrial "way of life" created in the image of the patriarchal mentality. It would mean that we still adhered to the culture of patriarchal conquest. It is essential we come to realize that it has been, and will continue to be, our basic adherence to the patriarchal mentality, which is the real threat to life, and the fundamental reason why the likelihood for doom is ever consuming us. Inevitably, if we are to survive and create a better world without warfare and the possibilities of extinction, a complete abandonment of the culture of patriarchal conquest must occur. Such an abandonment must certainly include civilization in its entirety.

We must come to recognize the degree to which our understanding and perceptions of life and the external world have been determined by patriarchal conquest, and how we have developed

What is Love?

My parents were married for thirty-five years, but I have to wonder if they ever really loved each other. They said the words, "I Love you" often enough to each other and to me. But was it love if I had to hide my true self? Does love depend on good grades and proper haircuts? I lived with nagging anxiety that one day the gig would be up. I would be found out, deemed not good enough, and rejected.



Later in life, I've often mistaken desperation for passion, complimentary neuroses for understanding, and selfish cravings for love. The more fear involved (of rejection, abandonment, loss) the more powerful I thought the passion. I would often say I was "crazy about" or "stupid over" someone, without realizing how honestly I was speaking.

I've thought that I "fall in love easily" and "I'm just a passionate person," but I fall out of love just as fast when the new romance fails to make my life wonderful. I've also caught myself tweaking out, crying and thrashing around in a fit eerily similar to a junky in withdrawal, after someone informed me she did not want to have sex.

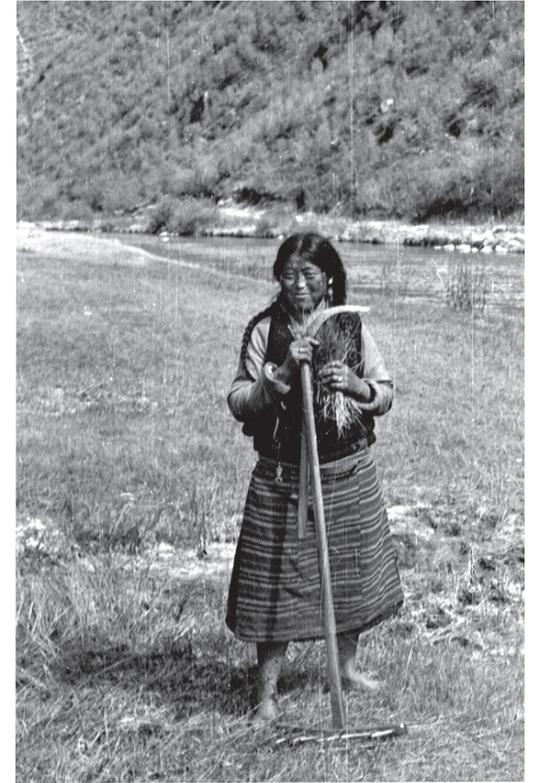
I walked into the room and found Michael lying on the bed with a noose around his neck. It was one of his father's belts; I somehow managed to notice as I knelt down by his side. A would-be final message addressed in dark irony to the man who had beat him bloody with that belt many times. Michael would come to me for

nipulation of the feminine cycle. In the history of patriarchy and civilization, women and nature have both been subject to intense fear and control. As well, both are now devoid of spiritual metaphor. We suffer for this tremendously, in ways that we are just beginning to understand.

--from *The Ecology of Being Female* by Tamara Slayton



our societies as a result of this. Then we can clearly see how history has been charted, civilizations built, and finally, how industrialization has come to dominate and threaten our existence because of the lifeless images and vision of the patriarchal mentality. We will be far better able to make positive choices about what kind of communities we want to create, and about what we need to do to survive, if we realize the extent to which the “developments” of history, and the technological systems of today, are actually the manifested realities of this entirely morbid process of thought.



For us to really become clear about what we need to do in this struggle for life, we must rid our inner beings of the negative attributes of patriarchal thinking, but as well, we must rediscover our physical connection and dependency upon the Earth, and reunite ourselves spiritually within nature. Only from a renewed appreciation and knowledge of natural life processes can we once again come to possess a meaningful understanding of other ways to live. Through such an understanding we can gain the direction and strength necessary to wage the struggles that are needed, and the vision to fight against the deadly, artificial existence of civilization, not to reform it, but to do away with it completely.

--by Brent Taylor, from *Writings of the Vancouver 5*

An Anti-Gender Rant

The concept of gender is an artificial definition, an attempt to order us. It is absurd. It is a limitation on our diversity. It is a lie.

Gender is nothing more than a social role. Its attachment to our genitals is purely a convenience not unlike the convenience of using skin color to determine who should be slave and who should be master. The development of the genitals in the fetus shows that “male” and “female” genitals are really just variations on the same basic theme, which occur for the purely biological convenience of reproduction. Yet this socially defined, artificial role seems to be the most important thing for one to learn in this society. The first announcement when an infant is born is, “It’s a boy!” or “It’s a girl!” But the baby doesn’t accept this definition. It has a voracious desire to know all, to be all. It encompasses a universe of possibility in which any concept of gender must disappear.

But such a way of being cannot be allowed to go unchecked, for it would undermine authority and destroy order. So from birth, the infant is surrounded by images of its social gender. Those with cunts are kept in lace, made delicate and taught to imitate mother. Those with cocks are taught to fight, to be tough, and to imitate father. The family insures that the roles are instilled. The infant’s wild divinity is buried and it starts to be made into a boy or a girl.

But some of us just would not fit. The molds didn’t work. Oh, they stifled us, they choked us, they hurt us like hell. But we never quite became the girl or boy they wanted. Society filled us with shame, made us feel less than those who conformed.

No more do we embrace the lying order of society or mourn that we cannot fulfill its roles.

--by feral faun



Devaluation of Menstrual Blood

Presently a male-designed and dominated market, menstrual products originally sprang from a woman’s own ingenuity and connection with nature. Menstrual blood itself was coveted for ceremony, writing on rocks, marking time, trapping or discouraging animals, and fertilizing crops. The ability to gather one’s menstrual blood was part of a tapestry of spiritual and practical applications. As humans moved farther away from nature and towards civilization, menstrual blood lost its value. When women were devalued, menstrual blood was devalued. Once sought out as a sign of fertility and one’s intimate connection to the Earth, menstrual blood was forced into hiding.

Bird feathers, cattail down, moss, buckskin, rolled buffalo skin, shredded bark, and sheep pelts were perfect vehicles for the flow. These materials were also easily worked into ceremonies or altarpieces. Tampons made of papyrus were the Egyptian woman’s preference. As we continued to move away from nature, woven cloth became the receptacle of the monthly blood.

As early as 1886, disposable cloths were available but could not be publicly advertised. Kotex, in 1924, manufactured the first gauze Kotex successfully, with tampons introduced in 1936. Still close to natural materials of cotton and paper, these products reflected civilized women’s concern for freedom from the demands of their reproductive cycle and entrance into the work world. A work world that confirmed the already existing shame associated with menstruation: women simply could not bleed in public or identify their behavior with menstruation, in any way.

Ever concerned with how long a woman can “protect” herself and maintain her “freedom” in relation to her bleeding, the menstrual industry introduced plastics into the cotton fibers of the original menstrual products. In the mid-70’s, technology made it possible to manufacture super-absorbent tampons whose thirsty fibers were first used on seeds and soil to increase water retention, then put to use by tampon manufacturers. They are also used in sanitary pads and diapers.

This manipulation of agriculture in many ways mirrors the ma-

Maybe in the communities we are creating, initiation won't be necessary, or it will take on a completely different form from the many different cultural forms found today.

I know a lot of confused young men in the world, what is the answer? My parents told me when I was out of the home, we're sorry, we made mistakes raising you, and we didn't really know what we were doing. That freed me up in some ways, but also sent me spinning like a top to try and find the way to go, what to be, who am I?

For a while now I've been craving a wise old artist to offer me guidance in life. But elders are rare. Not old people, but people with a deep understanding and feeling, wisdom, people who have the gleam in their eye and even though they grew up in a world vastly different than the young, they still understand what the kids are going thru. I don't think I even know any such elder. The world has changed so much in the last hundred years, and even now changing so fast, that even I couldn't understand some of what kids are going through in high school today. How am I to extract guidance from someone who grew up before there were nuclear bombs, before corporations had over taken every aspect of our lives?

Maybe it's up to the kids. Humanity may have reached a point of social evolution and is ready to shed the cocoons of rigid gender roles and social positions. The future is looking more interesting by the minute.

--from *girl-boy, boy-girl* #2



Beyond Feminism, Beyond Gender

In order to create a revolution that can put an end to all domination, it is necessary to put an end to the tendency we all have to submit. This requires that we view the roles that this society imposes on us with a cruel and penetrating eye seeking out their weak points with the aim of breaking through their limits and moving beyond them.

Sexuality is an essential expression of individual desire and passion, of the flame that can ignite both love and revolt. Thus, it can be an important force of the individual's will that can raise her beyond the mass as a unique and indomitable being. Gender, on the other hand, is a conduit built by the social order to constrain this sexual energy, to confine and limit it, directing toward the reproduction of this order of domination and submission. Thus, it is an obstruction to an attempt to freely determine how one will live and relate. Nonetheless, up to now, men have been granted more leeway in asserting their will within these roles than women, a reasonable explanation for why more anarchists, revolutionaries and outlaws have been men than women. Women who have been strong, rebellious individuals have been so precisely because they have moved beyond their femininity.

It is unfortunate that the women's liberation movement that re-emerged in the 1960's did not succeed in developing a deep analysis of the nature of domination in its totality and of the role played by gender in its reproduction. A movement that had started from a desire to be free of gender roles in order to be full, self-determined individuals was transformed into a specialization just like most partial struggles of the time. This guaranteed that a total analysis would not be possible within this context.

This specialization is the feminism of the present era that began developing out of the women's liberation movement in the late '60's. It does not aim so much at the liberation of individual women from the limits of their gender roles as at the liberation of "woman" as a social category. Within mainstream politics, this project consists of gaining rights, recognition and protection for woman as a recognized social category under the law. In theory, radical feminism

moves beyond mere legalities with the aim of liberating woman as a social category from male domination. Since male domination is not adequately explored as an aspect of total domination, even by anarchy-feminists, the rhetoric of radical feminism frequently takes on a style similar to that of national liberation struggles. But in spite of the differences in style and rhetoric, the practice of mainstream and radical feminism often coincide. This is not by chance.

The specialization of radical feminism actually lies in the cataloguing of wrongs suffered by woman at the hands of man. If this catalogue was ever completed, the specialization would no longer be necessary and it would be time to move beyond this listing of wrongs suffered to an actual attempt to analyze the nature of women's oppression in this society and take real, thought-out action to end it. So the maintenance of this specialization requires that feminists expand this catalogue to infinity, even to the point of explaining the oppressive actions of women in positions of power as expressions of patriarchal power, thus freeing these women from responsibility for their actions. Any serious analysis of the complex relations of domination as it actually exists is laid aside in favor of an ideology in which man dominates and woman is the victim of this domination. But the creation of one's identity on the basis of one's oppression, on the victimization one has suffered, does not provide strength or independence. Instead it creates a need for protection and security that eclipses the desire for freedom and self-determination. In the theoretical and psychological realm, an abstract, universal "sisterhood" may meet this need, but in order to provide a basis for this sisterhood, the "feminine mystique," which was exposed in the 1960's as a cultural construct supporting male domination, is revived in the form of women's spirituality, goddess religion and a variety of other feminist ideologies. The attempt to liberate woman as a social category reaches its apotheosis in the re-creation of the feminine gender role in the name of an elusive gender solidarity. In the forms in which it has been practiced, feminism has failed to present a revolutionary challenge to either gender or domination. The anarchist project of total liberation calls us to move beyond these limits to the point of attacking gender itself with the aim of becoming complete beings defined not as a conglomeration of social identities, but as

parts of an economic machine to me than actual men, too tired after long hours at work to possibly communicate to me the deep feelings of masculinity and what it all meant to them. I imagine they did not know themselves. In many ways I feel that I have not been initiated yet at all, not welcomed into manhood by the elders. What elders?

If initiation is a community, social thing, then you cannot initiate yourself. Many men talk about how they feel they have initiated themselves, because no one else was there to do it. This is a painful ordeal; try shaking your own hand, it doesn't work. You've only got one right hand, only one left. The result is grotesque.

It's been suggested that mothers cannot initiate boys into manhood, and fathers cannot initiate young girls into womanhood. I think about my own daughter, and I wonder. I could give her advice and a different perspective that might be helpful, and I know something about women, but essentially I do not know the whole story that she needs to know, I am not a woman. Is the difference mostly from socialization, or is there something biological in us that we need the connection to our sex to feel healthy?

Industrial society often leaves the son in the care of the mother for much of his young life as the old man goes out to slave away at the factory [ed. Note: this has mostly been true of wealthier families. For hundreds of years, poor women have often been forced into wage labor, regardless of whether or not they had children to take care of. And today even wealthier mothers are being forced into financially supporting their families]. This is how I grew up, my father wasn't there too much--busy with his business, he calls himself a workaholic. Maybe his own way of trying to achieve adult initiation, thru success in business, working himself to death to show the non-existent old men who never initiated him that he was worthy of being a man. If you aren't accepted then you could spend your life trying to gain acceptance, having to prove you deserve to be accepted as a man, endlessly, over and over.

Do we need to be initiated?

It has been stated that the uninitiated male attempts to seize power thru force and domination, to validate his existence as an adult. Is this true or does the violence come from other socialization, behaviors that are learned. Do we need to be initiated at all?

shop environment, the piercing could have more of a commodity feeling attached to it, instead of a spiritual movement or acceptance between the male piercer and the boy being pierced.

Tattoos could also serve as initiation. Many indigenous people use tattoos as an initiation rite, and it is done by hand in a long and painful process. In capitalist countries tattoos are purchased in the setting of a business, and the potential spiritual meaning may be lessened. They are initiated in a setting that accepts the world of money, so that is what they are initiated into. People come in and pick out a tattoo like they might pick out a burger and fries at a fast food restaurant.

Sometimes the initiation isn't perceived as what it is, in the emotional mud of the alienated youth in rich countries, a cigarette extinguished on the arm or other self mutilation could be a push to create a physical manifestation of the pain the youth is feeling as he separates from childhood. I have known pain; I have marks, respect me as an adult.

Sometimes it seems to me that kids might be using the sub-cultures, such as heavy metal, punk, dance, rave, hippy, as methods of self-initiation, a way to break away from their parents and make a statement to them, "Hey, I can cut my hair into a mohawk and stick a safety pin thru my nose, and you can't do anything about it because I am free of your influence." Or, I have the same power as you, I am an adult. And since the rebellion was only needed to break free of their parents, when the person feels fully initiated, they might shed the style of the sub-culture and merge into mainstream culture and be assimilated into the workforce where such colorful stylistic rebellion might not be welcomed. They might also keep some of the style as a reminder or a badge that, yes, they have been initiated into the adult world.

I have thought about my own initiation, was it when I got my car at graduation? Was it when I first had sex? Was it when I got married? Was it when I went to college? Was it when I helped organize political rallies? Was it when my daughter was born? Individual men briefly congratulated me on these things, but never as a group, and never a group of people I had deep respect for. Most of the men in my life have been wage slaves, often times seeming more like

unique, whole individuals.

It is both cliché and mistaken to claim that men and women have been equally oppressed by their gender roles. The male gender role does allow a greater leeway for the assertion of one's will. So just as the liberation of women from their gender role is not a matter of becoming more masculine but rather of moving beyond their femininity, so for men the point is not to be more feminine but to move beyond their masculinity. The point is to discover that core of uniqueness that is in each of us that is beyond all social roles and to make that the point from which we act, live, and think in the world, in the sexual realm as in all others. Gender separates sexuality from the wholeness of our being, attaching specific traits to it that serves the maintenance of the present social order. Thus sexual energy, which could have amazing revolutionary potential, is channeled into the reproduction of relations of domination and submission, of dependence and desperation. The sexual misery that this has produced and its commercial exploitation surround us. The inadequacy of calling for people to "embrace both their masculinity and femininity" lies in the lack of analysis of the extent to which both of these concepts are social inventions serving the purposes of power. Thus, to change the nature of gender roles, to increase their number or modify their form, is useless from a revolutionary perspective, being nothing more than mechanically adjusting the form of the conduits that channel our sexual energy. Instead, we need to reappropriate our sexual energy in order to reintegrate into the totality of our being in order to become so expansive and powerful as to burst every conduit and flood the plain of existence with our indomitable being. This is not a therapeutic task, but rather one of defiant revolt--one that springs from a strong will and a refusal to back down. If our desire is to destroy all domination, then it is necessary that we move beyond everything that holds us back, beyond feminism, yes, and beyond gender, because this is where we find the ability to create our indomitable individuality that rises up against all domination without hesitation. If we wish to destroy the logic of submission, this must be our minimum goal.

--by Wolfi Landstreicher, from *Against the Logic of Submission*

The Ideology of Victimization

In New Orleans, just outside the French Quarter, there's a bit of stenciled graffiti on a fence that reads: "Men Rape." I used to pass by this nearly every day. The first time I saw this, it pissed me off because I knew the graffitist would define me as a 'man' and I have never desired to rape anyone. Nor have any of my penised friends. But, as I encounter this spray-painted dogma every day, the reasons for my anger changed. I recognized this dogma as a litany for the feminist version of the ideology of victimization- an ideology which promotes fear, individual weakness (and subsequently dependence on ideologically based support groups and paternalistic protection from the authorities) and a blindness to all realities and interpretations of experience that do not conform to one's view of oneself as a victim.

I don't deny that there is some reality behind the ideology of victimization. No ideology could work if it had no basis whatsoever in reality. As Bob Black has said, "We are all adult children of parents." We have all spent our entire lives in a society that is based on the repression and exploitation of our desires, our passions, and our individuality, but it is surely absurd to embrace defeat by defining ourselves in terms of our victimization.

As a means of social control, social institutions reinforce the feeling of victimization in each of us while focusing these feelings in directions that reinforce dependence on social institutions. The media bombards us with tales of crime, political and corporate corruption, racial and gender strife, scarcity and war. While



Institutionalized ritual initiation in Western society is often ineffective, a Jewish boy might have a bar mitzvah and feel like a man that day, but if nothing else acknowledges the change in his life then he might realize his religion is not inclusive of the world situation that he is aware of, unless he exists in a very narrow, enclosed community, and very few are.

When do boys officially become men in our industrial society? When we learn how to hook up a VCR to a TV? When we get our license and can drive a car by ourselves? At 18 when we can be drafted into the military and die for this country, or at 21 when we can buy alcohol? Or is it the first time we have sex with a woman? I know a lot of young men who are spiritually, soulfully empty and aimless, searching for what to do in life, how to be happy, where to be accepted and loved. How should I offer to bring them into the world of men, invite them to a keg party to lust after endless quantities of beer, teaching them to be a proper consumer?

Some kids find a rite of passage in certain body piercings, thru the septum in the nose, thru the tongue, or thru the head or skin of the penis. More often it is a rebellious transition, to push both mother and father away so the kid can live their own life. It's not a given that men should pierce men or women pierce women. In a sterile



out with. It's a tough life; he must be initiated with toughness. They take him to an area where there will be no interference, they surround him and raise their fists, he fights them as best he can, fights until he is down on the ground, bruised and bleeding and broken. He tells his family he got jumped in an alley by some strangers. He is now accepted into the gang. Someday he will help initiate other young men into the gang, if he survives that long.

A young man at his first year of college, he's invited to a party by some classmates. He goes, and they shove beer after beer into his hands. When he's drunk they give him shots of hard liquor. They convince him to do ridiculous things, he tries to convince a girl to have sex with him, he vomits, falls down. If he's lucky he won't have alcohol poisoning the next day, or have driven his car drunk and crashed, or raped a woman.

The next day as he lays in bed deathly hungover, his friends congratulate him.

Searching for acceptance into the adult world a young boy lusts after women, encouraged by his friends, thinking that to become a man he must have sex with a woman. He succeeds and then brags about it to his friends, yet still he feels empty.

Seeking to bring into existence a tangible legend of his man hood, a boy plays chicken with his friends, if he doesn't swerve the car he proves his courage and becomes a man. Neither boy swerves their cars and in the head on collision both of them die.

From compulsory violence, reckless dares, alcohol and drugs, the depth of spiritual feeling in these rites is very shallow, and instead of initiating boys they cover up or numb the lack of soulful connection the boy feels to the rest. Essentially American society doesn't have healthy initiations into manhood. It happens accidentally, randomly, or not at all. Boys may be confused when it seems that girls their age are accepted as women from the start of their menstruation, blood coming from the body, an actual physical sign that they are becoming women. Not that women's initiation is so easy, when the adults around her may make her feel ashamed for what her body is going thru, or that it's not important. Boys may begin to grow facial hair and pubic hair, but it's often not explained by the older generation, leaving unanswered questions and confusion.

these tales often have a basis in reality, they are presented quite clearly to reinforce fear. But many of us doubt the media, and so are served up a whole slew of 'radical' ideologies--all containing a grain of real perception, but all blind to whatever does not fit into their ideological structure. Each one of these ideologies reinforces the ideology of victimization and focuses the energy of individuals away from an examination of society in its totality and of their role in reproducing it. Both the media and all versions of ideological radicalism reinforce the idea that we are victimized by that which is 'outside', by the Other, and that social structures--the family, the cops, the law, therapy and support groups, education, 'radical' organizations or anything else that can reinforce a sense of dependence--are there to protect us. If society did not produce these mechanisms--including the structures of false, ideological, partial opposition--to protect itself, we might just examine society in its totality and come to recognize its dependence upon our activity to reproduce it. Then, every chance we get, we might refuse our roles as dependent/victim of society. But the emotions, attitudes, and modes of thought evoked by the ideology of victimization make such a reversal of perspective very difficult.

In accepting the ideology of victimization in any form, we choose to live in fear. The person who painted the "Men Rape" graffiti was most likely a feminist, a woman who saw her act as a radical defiance of patriarchal oppression. But such proclamations, in fact, merely add to a climate of fear that already exists. Instead of giving women, as individuals a feeling of strength, it reinforces the idea that women are essentially victims, and women who read this graffiti, even if they consciously reject the dogma behind it, probably walk the streets more fearfully. The ideology of victimization that permeates so much feminist discourse can also be found in some form in gay liberation, racial/national liberation, class war and damn near every other 'radical' ideology. Fear of an actual, immediate, readily identified threat to an individual can motivate intelligent action to eradicate the threat, but the fear created by the ideology of victimization is a fear of forces both too large and too abstract for the individual to deal with. It ends up becoming a climate of fear, suspicion and paranoia, which makes the mediations that are the

network of social control seem necessary and even good.

It is this seemingly overwhelming climate of fear that creates the sense of weakness, the sense of essential victimhood, in individuals. While it is true that various ideological “liberationists” often bluster with militant rage, it rarely gets beyond to that point of really threatening anything. Instead, they ‘demand’ (read “militantly beg”) that those they define as their oppressors grant them their ‘liberation’. An example of this occurred at the 1989 “Without Borders” anarchist gathering in San Francisco. There is no question that at most workshops I went to, men tended to talk more than women. But no one was stopping women from speaking, and I didn’t notice any lack of respect being show for women who did speak. Yet, at the public microphone in the courtyard of the building where the gathering was held, a speech was made in which it proclaimed that ‘men’ were dominating the discussions and keeping ‘women’ from speaking. The orator ‘demanded’ (again, read “militantly begged”) that men make sure that they gave women space to speak. In other words, to grant the ‘rights’ of the oppressed is an attitude, which, by implication, accepts the role of man as oppressor and woman as victim. There were workshops where certain individuals did dominate the discussions, but a person who is acting from the strength of their individuality will deal with such a situation by immediately confronting it as it occurs and will deal with the people involved as individuals. The need to put such situations into an ideological context and to rent the individuals involved as social roles, turning the real, immediate experience into abstract categories is a sign that one has chosen to be weak, to be a victim. And embracing weakness puts one in the absurd position of having to beg one’s oppressor to grant one’s liberation--guaranteeing that one will never be free to be anything but a victim.

Like all ideologies, the varieties of the ideology of victimization are forms of fake consciousness. Accepting the social role of victim--in whatever one of its many forms--is choosing to not even create one’s life for oneself or to explore one’s real relationships to the social structures. All of the partial liberation movements--feminism, gay liberation, racial liberation, workers movements and so on--define individuals in terms of their social roles. Because of this,

cover that essential, sacred relatedness we have to other men and all life.

...However, before we can effectively begin to properly initiate our young men, we must first build a community of Adult men whom they can respect and wish to join.”

- Aaron R. Kipnis

“... We’ve been initiated too well...not the way we might be by some wise, caring, gentle, generous father. We have grown to be the men that patriarchy needs and forces us to be, “real men”, angry and frightened of women, other men, and ourselves. We inflict rape and other violence; we are cannon fodder in war and compulsive consumers of worthless products, unquestioningly remaining within oppressive gender, racial, and economic systems... We are initiated by our fathers and brothers with the same scarring, humiliating rites that they experienced.”

- Joseph Weinberg & Michael Briembaum

Unguided initiation

I’m going to focus on male initiation because I am a male and, male initiation is what I have become deeply curious about, but some of it will have meaning for womyn too.

Imagine you’re in America, Los Angeles, and the time comes for a young man to be accepted into the street gang he’s been hanging



Initiation

Initiation into adulthood has been slipping away from many communities for thousands of years, as those in power need individual laborers and consumers, not functional individuals. To acknowledge that men and women could live happily among themselves, without buying a lot of beauty products and shiny sport cars to impress each other, is not useful to the goals of capitalism. What is desired by the greed system is human robots that take orders, and infantile consumers rushing to purchase products and satisfy their inner emptiness, not men and women who are fully alive and aware of their deep feelings. Instead we are pitted against each other in fear, or urged toward each other, by the hands of the capitalist elite, moving ever towards their goals.

Many groups of men and women are resurrecting the old rites of passage from tribal cultures that have been exterminated or are presently being wiped out. These old religions and rites might be useful as a guidance towards something new for our changed world, but to live in the past following the traditions of the “noble savage” a creation of the capitalist society that realizes just how boring it has become, is a sad thing to see. Watching rich white people raise Elk horns over their head and drum out Native American ritual chants is really repulsive to me..

It seems to me that we must feel our way towards a new reality, shedding old religions and ideologies that are harmful to us, and move toward communities that respects all life and does not brutalize the planet we all must live on. At the same time, if a society desires to keep their old ways, they must be respected, as long as their religious ways do not directly oppress other people.

“What has been lacking for us...is a sense of a traditional male brotherhood into which young men can be initiated.

The masculine field to support that experience- the underlying mythological ground- has not been lively in the collective consciousness of contemporary Western males... We need to build real, lasting, ongoing community. Western culture today is tragically impoverished. The mythological ground is barren. What has been lost, however, can be recovered. Our work is to help reverse the soul crushing trend of modern times, to plow those fields of the masculine soul and redis-

these movements not only do not include a reversal of perspectives, which breaks down social roles and allows individuals to create a praxis built on their own passions and desires; they actually work against such a reversal of perspective. But the essence of these social roles within the framework of these ‘liberation’ ideologies is victimhood. So the litanies of wrongs suffered must be sung over and over to guarantee the ‘victims’ never forget that is what they are. These ‘radical’ liberation movements help to guarantee that the climate of fear never disappears, and that individuals continue to see themselves weak and to see their strength as lying in the social roles that are, in fact, the source of their victimization. In this way, these movements and ideologies act to prevent the possibility of a potent revolt against all authority and all social roles.

True revolt is never safe. Those who choose to define themselves in terms of their role as a victim do not dare to try total revolt, because it would threaten the safety of their roles. But, as Nietzsche said: “The secret of the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment of existence is to live dangerously!” Only a conscious rejection of the ideology of victimization, a refusal to live in fear and weakness, and an acceptance of the strength of our own passions and desires, of ourselves as individuals who are greater than, and so capable of living beyond, all social roles, can provide a basis for total rebellion against society. Such a rebellion is certainly fueled, in part, by rage, but not the strident, resentful, frustrated rage of the victim that motivates feminists, racial liberationists, gay liberationists and the like to ‘demand’ their ‘rights’ from the authorities. Rather it is the rage of our desires unchained, the return of the repressed in full force and undisguised. But more essentially, a spirit of free play fuels total revolt and of joy in adventure--by a desire to explore every possibility for intense life which society tries to deny us. For all of us who want to live fully and without constraint, the time is past when we can tolerate living like shy mice inside the walls. Every form of the ideology of victimization moves us to live as shy mice. Instead, let’s be crazed & laughing, joyfully tearing down the walls of society and creating lives of wonder and amazement for ourselves.

--by Wolfi Landstreicher

Beyond Sexual Identity: An Anarchist Critique of Social Roles

It is common practice in many anarchist circles to pay lip service to a critique of the institutions of patriarchy and heterosexuality and to make at least some (often vague and half-hearted) effort to reject gender roles. Frequently, however, the analysis that is put forth is weak and superficial and becomes fixated around creating single-gender spaces as well as using spellings such as “wimmin” and “humyn” and referring to all individuals as “co” or “they.” There is little attempt made to examine what is at the root of gender, sexuality, patriarchy, and domination or to discuss what tactical measures can be taken to dismantle them.

Heterosexuality is a patriarchal system that sets up rigid guidelines and power relations for individuals to interact within. Heterosexuality exists within this society as an institution, a social contract, and as well, as an identity category that is used to shape individual experience into a single, collective, and homogenous classification. Discourses such as queer theory often describe heterosexuality as being violent, dominating, and repressive. However, such discourses generally present this as being somehow unique to the system of heterosexuality while describing alternative systems, such as homosexuality, as being inherently liberatory. This argument overlooks the nature of categorization upon which heterosexuality and homosexuality are both based.

All institutions, social contracts, and classifications are based on denying our individual desires in order to engage in predetermined interactions with others. Any time a label or definition is applied to human existence there is the necessity of creating set boundaries where certain behaviors fit within the category created and certain others do not. This defining of lived experience creates limits on what is acceptable and then pushes individuals to try and live by these limits. These limits rule our lives. They destroy our ability to make our own decisions and to relate to the world in a subjective, spontaneous manner.

In addition, for categories such as heterosexuality, which are

X or XXY. These variations are often lumped together and referred to as intersex.

It seems that it is beneficial for individuals to allow themselves to be fluid, complex, and spontaneous, thus defying assigned categories of gender. At the same time, it also seems that it would be beneficial to learn how physiological, functional, and psychological differences affect each of us and to create spaces that we can share with individuals who have similar physical and/or cultural experiences. This would hopefully be part of a larger project of connection: with ourselves, with our human communities, and with the earth.

--by Wildflower



masculine, or neuter. Today, the word sex retains most of its original meanings, but gender has taken up many of these meanings as well. In some cases, the two words are used almost interchangeably to refer to any characteristic that is labeled masculine or feminine.

This modification of terms makes it even more difficult to have a dialogue about how sex and gender affect our lives. It often becomes confusing when someone declares that they wish to dismantle or do away with the category of gender. “But wait,” comes the response, “we can’t completely do away with gender, there are still physical differences between males and females to take into account!” And indeed, there are physiological, functional, and psychological differences that distinguish females and males. These are, however, differences of sex, not of gender. The anthropological usage of the terms sex and gender (see definitions at top) seem to make the most sense to me at this time. It seems useful to be able to distinguish between physical categories and social or cultural categories, while also acknowledging the ways that nature and culture can affect each other and overlap.

It seems like beyond the complex task of understanding how gender and sex categories affect each of lives there is also the important question of: how do we honor sex, learning to become aware of our bodies with their own uniquenesses as well as their similarities and distinct differences to other bodies, without cementing gender roles?

Perhaps the most useful idea is not to erase either gender or sex categories (although I do think it is necessary to move beyond all social *roles*), but to open them up. It is unlikely that there is any individual who completely fits within the idealized gender categories of feminine or masculine. There is variation in all natural things, and humans are in no way exempt from this. Even in terms of physical sex there are more than two options. Not infrequently individuals are born who cannot, genetically and/or physically, be categorized as male or female. Physically this often means having some combination of female and male reproductive organs (such as genitalia that, externally, is similar to a cunt but also having testes that are often tucked away in the abdominal cavity and not fully formed). There are also genetic variations on the common XX or XY, such as



deemed as particularly important to those who wish to uphold the civilized ideals upon which this society is based, there is an overt external policing of boundaries that takes place. The policing of heterosexuality comes in both legal and extra-legal forms. Legally parameters are set up wherein “rights” and “privileges” are given to those who fit within the created category while these same legal “rights” are withheld from

those outside of the boundaries of the category. This can be clearly seen in the debate over homosexual marriage. Traditionally legal marriage has been set aside as something that only a biological female and a biological male can enter into together. Once married the two partners are awarded certain “privileges” such as being able to will each other property after their death, the ability to visit each other if they are hospitalized, the ability to share health insurance coverage, and legal recognition of their control of their children should they have any. This type of policing is supposed to both keep in tact both the moral fiber of the society as well the patriarchal ideas of property, ownership, and power upon which the society is based.

Another form of policing that is used is more violent and spontaneous and can, at times, be both overt and subtle. This type of policing can be called homophobia (meant here as the hatred and or fear of Gay Lesbian Transgender Intersex and Queer (GLBTIQ) peoples) and heterosexism (meant here as the often unchallenged belief that heterosexuality is the preferred form of human interactions and which often works to hide, ignore, or deny the existence of other ways for humans to relate). These forms of policing can be seen in hurled insults coming from strangers, in bursts of physical violence, and in families who refuse to acknowledge their children

once they come out as queer. This violent behavior is directed at those who exist beyond the confines of heterosexuality. It occurs when individuals internalize the dominant ideals of this society and take it upon themselves to see that these ideals are upheld and enforced. There are many reasons that this happens but it seems that this behavior is often generated by fear as well as from a redirecting of the oppression of heterosexuality that the individuals themselves feel. The later is often used by those who feel limited by heterosexuality but lash out at others instead of trying to dismantle heterosexuality or challenge the power it has over them. They feel that they must constantly prove that they have successfully internalized heterosexual ideals by patrolling others' behavior and thus affirming their own correctness.

Heterosexuality is precipitated on the necessity of rigid social roles. It is a social relationship that relies upon otherness, difference, binaries, and polarities. On the most basic level it centers upon the oppositional categories of male and female. In order for heterosexuality to exist there must be a clearly defined female just as there must be a clearly defined male and these two sites of identity must be defined against one another. The male individual is male because he is not female, just as the female is defined as such because she is not male.

Defining one's self in relation to an other is reactionary and requires a distancing from one's own subjective experience. In order to define one's self in opposition to something else, one must repress one's individual desires and experiences and concentrate instead on channeling them into a rigidly pre-fabricated set of behaviors and perceptions. It is also necessary to objectify those that one sets one's self in opposition to, turning wild, free, spontaneous, and fluid individuals into characters who are predictable in their opposition and difference to one's self.

To some degree identifying with either of the set categories of gender means objectifying one's self. In order to call one's self male or female, you must reduce all of the myriad ways that you behave and experience the world into a single, clearly defined, way of being. Identifying as male or female also means identifying with a repressive system that tries to limit who we are, what we can or can't

Towards a Redefining of Terms And a Reconnection of Lives

Gender 1. Grammar. a grammatical category used in the analysis of nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and, in some languages, verbs that may be arbitrarily based on categories such as sex or animacy. **2.** Sexual identity, especially in relation to society or culture.

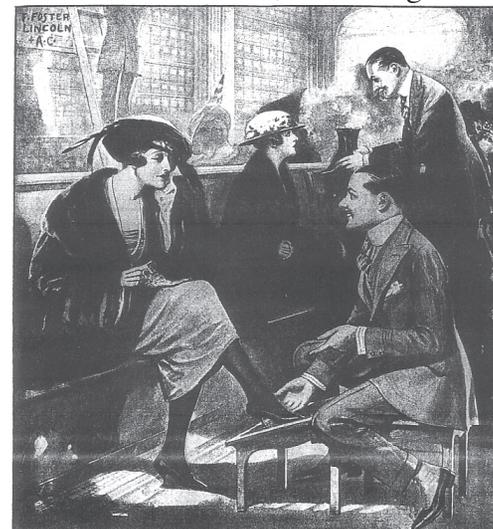
USAGE NOTE: Traditionally, gender has been used primarily to refer to the grammatical categories of "feminine," "masculine," and "neuter"; but in recent years the word has become established in its use to refer to sex-based categories. This usage has been supported by many anthropologists, who reserve sex for reference to biological categories, while using gender to refer to social or cultural categories. This distinction is useful in principle, but it is by no means widely observed, and considerable variation in usage occurs at all levels.

Sex 1. The property or quality by which organisms are classified as female or male on the basis of their reproductive organs and functions...**3.** The condition or character of being female or male; the physiological, functional, and psychological differences that distinguish the female and the male. **4.** The sexual urge or instinct as it manifests itself in behavior. **5.** Sexual intercourse. **6.** The genitalia.

--*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition.*

As often happens, definitions of words evolve and change with time. This sometimes occurs in order to take into account new experiences or understandings of the world. Sometimes more than one word simply meld into each other, their previous variances lost.

As I understand it, something akin to this later situation has been



happening with the words "sex" and "gender." Sex was once primarily used to describe the body (referring to one's reproductive organs) or the act that takes place when two bodies come together in (non-) reproductive union. Gender referred almost exclusively to grammatical categories, wherein certain nouns, adjectives, pronouns, etc., were declared feminine,

many of us our ability to know what is right for us. It can be beneficial to form relationships that cut across gender, being open to creating sensual relationships with many bodied/sexed people. Challenging the dominant idea of sexual acts as something that centers on vaginal penetration by a penis can be liberatory for the persons involved and it can also begin to tear through the social fabric that confines us. Having intimate relationships that exist outside of the constructs of normative sexuality can challenge our own socialized behaviors and ideas and these experiences can also lessen the control that heterosexuality and patriarchy have on our lives.

There are also many ways of fighting the external manifestations of heterosexuality and patriarchy. This can come in the form of confronting rapists, misogynists, and homophobes, learning self-defense, helping loved ones heal from domestic/intimate abuse, or engaging in direct action against patriarchal institutions that define, manage, and control our existence.

1. Pat Califia, *Public Sex: The Culture of Radical Sex*, (San Francisco: Cleis Press Inc., 1994) 179.

2. This is also used against socialized males in the expectations of masculinity that are set up by the culture: emotional repression, discouragement of intimacy, and encouragement of tough and aggressive behavior. The policing of these ideals often comes about in forms of violence similar to those used against peoples considered to be queer. This is because when a man does not fully live up to masculine ideals he is seen as violating the institution of heterosexuality and is thus brought down to the status of queers.

3. D. Travers Scott, *Pomosexuals*, 67.
--by Wildflower



do, and how we interact with others. In order for a stable category of “woman” to exist it must be defined in opposition to “man” and this opposition creates precisely the power dynamics that anarchists attempt to critique and destroy.

The oppressive nature of heterosexual interactions, however, is not inherent in the interactions themselves. Despite the theories of some lesbian feminists, there is nothing inherently oppressive that occurs when female-bodied persons engage in erotic interactions with male-bodied persons. Authoritarianism and domination does not evolve out of our bodies, it is created through domestication, objectification, self-repression, and the violent oppression that occurs in civilization. It is always possible for people to rid themselves of the damaging socialization one receives from society and to learn to interact on real, subjective, and intimate levels. One need not identify with any part of heterosexuality or any set category in order to have a relationship with another individual. It is more than possible to move beyond scripted modes of interacting and to live outside of the character roles that society sets out.

Identities and communities that are often seen as liberatory, such as those that fall within the acronym GLBTIQ, can be just as constraining and oppressive as those that fit within the dominant understanding of heterosexuality. GLBTIQ identities in many ways uphold the same system that they supposedly are fighting against. Writer, Pat Califia, argues that, “To the extent that homosexuality is based on being able to make distinctions between two sexes, albeit for the purpose of choosing the ‘wrong’ one, gay people, too, have an investment in maintaining a dual-sex system.”¹ Homosexuality, as it is constructed as one person’s sexual desire for another person of the same gender, does nothing to interrupt the rigid idea of gender categories. In fact, the category of homosexuality requires stable gender categories for its existence and is therefore still based upon limiting one’s experience to fit within a repressive social category.

Those people who blindly choose homosexuality as a political act often simply replace one oppressive system with another. Choosing to change one’s behaviors so that they do not fit in one category but instead fit into the opposite category requires an act of self-repression. This self-repression can often be just as oppressive as the

domination one feels under heterosexuality; one simply replaces one authoritarian dogma (that of the State and the dominant culture at large) with another (that of an alternative or counter institution).

Although it is important to deconstruct set categories of identity it is hard to deny that there are occasions when these categories can help create healing spaces and relationships. I would like to acknowledge that historically there is a measurable difference between the experiences of those who have been called male and those who have been called female. To not acknowledge that people with certain (perceived or real) attributes, identities, or bodies have faced incredible violence, humiliation, and limitations on their freedom because of these attributes is to rewrite history in a problematic and negligible way. Because of the violence caused by patriarchy that has been disproportionately unleashed upon those perceived to be female and those perceived to be GLBTIQ², individuals facing violence often desire to create safe spaces along lines of identity. I would like to suggest, however, that the healing that can come from women's only spaces is created by shared experiences and not by shared identities. There is no reason that (for example) a person who identifies as a bisexual female and a person who identifies as a heterosexual male could not come together over a shared experience of being raped and support each other's healing processes. This in fact might be more of a beneficial experience, for example, than the same woman sharing her experience with another self identified bisexual female who has never had the subjective experience of being raped. Trying to put set limits on our identities and interactions can severely impact our capacity to have amazing, healthy, loving relationships with ourselves, with each other, and with the world around us.

Human existence is ever changing, expanding and shrinking as individuals take into account new experiences. To allow for this, to refuse to perpetuate pre-fabricated patterns for behavior or identity, is to begin to challenge the hold that power structures have over us. As D. Travis Scott states, "Polymorphous desire and the fluid, non-fixed identities they entail do not allow for the power hierarchies many wish to erect and maintain...I don't want to be identified, named, pinned down, understood. Those are all the first steps

toward manipulation and control."³ Once something is fixed in time and space it is much easier for it to be controlled. When things are not concretely defined, when they are not linear but are slippery and full of complexities, it gets much harder to institute hierarchies because there are infinite possibilities which cannot easily be classified and assigned value. Allowing for infinite possibility in our interactions with one another means opening up our capacity for immeasurable emotion and experience. It also means beginning to attack the socialized fears and behaviors that have been put upon us by civilization.

Beyond refusing to allow one's self to be determined and controlled by this society there are many ways one can actively work to dismantle patriarchy. Patriarchy is held in place by an internalizing of various ideals as well as through overt and subtle threats of violence and ostracization if one defies the set behaviors and power structures that the system creates. Patriarchy relies upon people not only personally perpetuating the society's ideals but also passing them on to future generations. Because of this, how one relates to children becomes quite important. It is beneficial for those who spend time with children to encourage them to live out their desires and to diffuse the sexual socialization that they may have received. On a personal level, it is also important to begin to truly listen to our desires and act on them. Socialization has taken from

