



*Lesbian Theories/
Lesbian Controversies*

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Sinister Wisdom is a multicultural, multi-class, female-born lesbian space. We seek to open, consider and advance the exploration of community issues. We recognize the power of language to reflect our diverse experiences and to enhance our ability to develop critical judgment, as lesbians evaluating our community and our world. Statements made and opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the publisher, board members, or editor(s) of Sinister Wisdom.

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Notes for a Magazine

For me, the sites and moments of controversy are where some of our most important thinking and forward motion happens. They are also times that require extraordinary personal and community risk-taking. They create discomfort and, inevitably, pain. They also open new opportunities, new futures, and new ways of seeing the world.

When Fran Day asked me to guest edit *Sinister Wisdom*, I was honored, and in the issue that I agreed to edit I wanted to tackle some of controversies in the Lesbian community. Controversy is an important part of our community and has been no stranger to these pages during their august history. Many controversies arise out of our theories about the world and Lesbians in the world. *Sinister Wisdom* has a long been an incubator of important theories in the Lesbian community.

Theory of course is just a word to describe an analysis of a set of facts in relationship to one another. Lesbians have always had a profound stake in theory because we have so often been excluded from analysis. Here at *Sinister Wisdom*, theories begin, end and are grounded, ultimately, in Lesbians—Lesbian lives, Lesbian experiences, and Lesbian perspectives. Placing Lesbians in the center of theory, that is taking Lesbians as a starting point and the focus of the journey in thinking about theory, is a radical act. This radical act of Lesbian centrality has been repeated, explicitly and implicitly, throughout the history of *Sinister Wisdom*. The journal is a space where Lesbian ideas and Lesbian theories are expressed and explored by Lesbians and for Lesbians. Here in these pages Lesbian theories have been created, expanded, evaluated, and discussed, and with the Lesbian theories, controversies have also erupted. This issue continues that important dialogue about theories and controversies in our community today.

One of the first people I spoke with about the issue is Catherine Crouch. I wanted to include her story about what happened with her film *The Gendercator*, which was a flashpoint in the controversy about transgender people and Lesbian communities. Catherine's interview with Robin Epstein as well as information about her film, *The Gendercator*, is included in this issue. Throughout this issue *The Gendercator* is referenced explicitly and implicitly which I found quite gratifying as it is a provocative and important source of discussion in our community.

Also tackling transgender questions are Carolyn Gage and Bev Jo. Carolyn's one act play, *Bite My Thumb*, is a provocative exploration of gender and identity. Interestingly, the play has been optioned for a film by

Catherine Crouch. Bev Jo's article "In Love with My Lesbian Community" also grapples with the controversies surrounding transgender people and inclusion. Dianne Post addresses questions of genital mutilation at birth in service to the gender binary in her important piece, "What's in a Name?"

Three contributions from Australia provide fascinating perspectives on controversies that may be less familiar to North American readers. Jean Taylor writes about Lesbian solidarity with aboriginal people in Australia. Susan Hawthorne raises a series of important questions and synthesizes a great deal of important information from around the globe in her piece, "Do Lesbians have Human Rights?" Finally, Chris Sitka contributes a compelling piece about Parthenogenesis in her article, "Hope is at Hand."

Of course, creative work is included in the issue as often Lesbian poetry, drama and fiction are a fecund location for exploring the theories and controversies of our lives. I'm pleased to include new poems by Andrea Nicki, Melissa Wilson, Shawn Helmen, and Margo Solod. Carolyn Gage's one-act play, *Bite My Thumb*, is included in its entirety and is delightful. I am quite excited about the excerpt from an important book that Undine Pawlowski and Donna Giancola are writing titled *Her Underground*. This book builds on important work of Mary Daly and others in remembering and envisioning a world in which patriarchy is no longer. Lest I forget, the issue opens with a manifesta from Alix Dobkin reminding us all of "The Importance of Being Lesbian."

Putting together this issue of *Sinister Wisdom* was an honor and a wonderful experience. I am grateful to all of the contributors for their work in the journal. I also honor the people who declined to contribute to the journal in solidarity with bisexual and transgender people who do not have a voice in these pages. Finding a space to sit in this work as a writer and activist who cares passionately about both the Lesbian community and also about a broader community that is bi and trans inclusive has never been easy for me, and I appreciate the loving challenges and opportunities given to me while assembling this issue. Finally, I thank Fran Day for the opportunity to participate in this community in this way and for her work in sustaining the visions and commitments of *Sinister Wisdom*.

Julie R. Enszer
September 2008

Andrea Nicki

lesbian-Feminist

I entreat the woman to hire me
 We are both independent women
 We are both lesbian feminists
 I say I have had some hardships
 as a woman, as a feminist
 "lesbian-feminist" seems to mean
 nothing to her
 She looks at me as if drawing a blank
 I tell her I write for a feminist
 magazine, and that I am happy to be
 in a feminist space
 even though it is small
 only sixteen writers
 Her uncomprehending look
 shrinks this space even more
 Am I an anachronism?
 She frowns and says she doesn't
 read much feminist material
 I suppose she thinks there is no need
 Earning 100,000 a year, life is good
 I tally her death as a lesbian-feminist
 see her fossil sinking in the sand

Alix Dobkin

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING LESBIAN

“Lesbian Culture” is probably as difficult to define or to describe as “Lesbian Community” or even “Lesbian Identity.” This is due only partly to limits of patriarchal thinking and language. Mostly it’s because of the inexpressible uniqueness of a culture featuring properties true of none other yet reflecting all others. Like other subcultures, we exist in the world while comprising a world unto our selves, and since indigenous Lesbians represent every conceivable ethnic variation and inhabit every geographical location, we can certainly qualify as “world class.”

Our Culture, like our community and identity is, naturally, the most baffling, complex and contrary presence in patriarchy, a denial of male control and a monkey wrench in the Patriarchal Universe of Discourse (PUD)¹, hence the least apparent or comprehensible to male identified minds. In that case, can “universal” criteria begin to comprehend, let alone describe, the common identity, assumptions, and belief systems of this singularly mysterious and most ancient people and oxymoron of Patriarchy?

WHY WE NEED TO BE TOGETHER

- * One Lesbian
- * Two Lesbians
- * Three Lesbians
- * Four or more Lesbians

Each category brings with it specific general characteristics in terms of Lesbian self-knowledge and effectiveness in the world. One Lesbian might never know who she is because, as a Lesbian, she exists in an identity vacuum. A second Lesbian provides her with substance and location in *Lesbian Space* where *Lesbian Being* occurs, weird, perhaps, but real! Three Lesbians admit complexity and a larger universe into which she can now perceive herself not only as a Lesbian but also in a greater environment that reflects and supports her. Four or more, and she begins to feel power in *Lesbian Reality* which she now understands within *Lesbian Time*. She is

1 The phrase, “Patriarchal Universe of Discourse,” or “PUD,” was coined and analyzed by Julia Penelope in her brilliant, *Speaking Freely*, Pergamon Press, 1990.

presented with a past, present and future context for the drama of her own *Lesbian Possibility*.² She now begins to understand that she can live as she is meant to live, as other Lesbians before her have lived, and better, that there is a Lesbian heritage of self-loving, life-giving, internal imperatives. Now she can choose to make her place within an enduring, nourishing tradition which wants her at her best and which establishes a center where a Lesbian can flourish. For Lesbians, *Basic Lesbian Mode* corresponds directly with access to the power of authentic *Lesbian Life Living Itself*, and when we know a power source exists for us, we want it!

Expectations and passions predictably intensify in *Basic Lesbian Mode* which itself does not prescribe any particular behavior, so, at this most primal level of ontological self-awareness, **particular** behavior remains unspecified. It's a perfect opportunity to synthesize, compose, and practice "proper conduct."³ That is, to learn how to properly treat each other: how not to scapegoat, condescend, or otherwise disrespect, but to recognize and express deep regard for ourselves and everyone. **To treat each other with respect even when we don't respect each other**, was the most important lesson I learned working for 13 years at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival.

THE DIFFERENCE THAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

Mundane, daily moments of Lesbian life do not correspond to ANY moments EVER experienced by non-Lesbians.⁴ That's because any and every definition of Lesbian must begin and end with women in relation to each other. That is, how women are without men. The meaning of this in real life is what many of us, guided by feminism, have been attempting to discover. We had to see for ourselves by consciously living out that idea, drawing value from lives deliberately organized by, for, and around, women. This is what distinguishes Lesbian-feminists from everyone else.

Every culture exhibits universal and general sets of shared values and assumptions. To the careless observer, men's and women's institutions

2 Sarah Hoagland's ground breaking *Lesbian Ethics*, Institute for Lesbian Studies, 1988, provided me with this useful phrase, not to mention good ideas.

3 For these words and this concept I am indebted to a remarkable piece of sculpture by the equally outstanding Australian artist and visionary, Suzanne Bellamy. Her statue expresses intimacy and distance, closeness coupled with respect for privacy through artful dance of relationship and integrity.

4 Thanks to Marilyn Murphy and (Irene Weiss) whose excellent book, *Are You Girls Traveling Alone?* Clothespin Press, 1991, first introduced me to this explicit terminology.

of every culture may look the same, however, upon closer examination, a marked difference becomes apparent. In our Culture, these spring entirely from our need for a Lesbian environment. Even when the game is played with the same rules, men's and women's underlying priorities and attitudes differ sharply. We play softball, not to win or compete for victory, but to socialize and play with each other.

LESBIAN RECOGNITION

Our beloved Lesbian Code System (phrases, words, sounds indicating suspected, unexpected Lesbian presence) is routine for us, but remains virtually unknown to main streamers. These Moments of Recognition play a familiar tune for every Lesbian around the globe. Fondly, we consider and calculate another's individual physical and spiritual mix of comfortable clothing, body language, stance and bearing, direct gaze, confident voice and countless other barely discernible but unmistakable signals of a woman in charge of her own life. How obvious are we out there? Of course, now that contemporary young women have adopted so much of our style, dress and attitude, identifying each other is more difficult than before, not to mention that the Lesbian "look" itself has expanded in three decades of Lesbian Feminism.

Do other ethnic, interest, or religious groups have code words to identify themselves to each other in alien environments? Some "outsiders" like our gay brothers, might enjoy a variation, yet I doubt that it's as elaborate or as well developed as ours. Providing core identities for loyalists by the hundreds of thousands, and with many shared values, the Grateful Dead-Head community superficially resembled ours. However, mutual recognition depended upon superficial visual signifiers.

Lesbian identity has little to do with mutual attraction to a particular individual, music or art form. Losing an icon like Audre Lorde, for example, although tragic and affecting, did not shatter the Lesbian Community the way Jerry Garcia's death has scattered Dead-Head society.

LESBIAN IDENTITY/LESBIAN PRACTICE

As I've traveled through several western continents I've noticed another seemingly unique Lesbian practice when numbers— let's say, more than six of us—dine together either in a restaurant or in someone's home, where there is a sense, even among strangers, of shared responsibility for setting out, clearing away and cleaning up. Because it is a characteristic behavior of women, Lesbians, being women-intensified, magnify this quality of

interaction. In addition, our attention is naturally focused upon ourselves and each other rather than upon spouses or children as is generally true of non-Lesbian women. Between us there is an assumed bond and a common assumption that the group acts as a whole and for the whole.

When in a restaurant, we take it over, pushing chairs and tables around to allow convenience and access for the group. There is an expectation that we are, and should be, active agents in the pursuit of our own best interests both individually and collectively. No one questions affirmative conduct, and even if not all members of the group act assertively in one particular situation, that member's support and approval for such behavior is a given. We are proud of who we are. We are generally sensitive to, and considerate of, the waitress. Others are attracted to (or repulsed by) our spirit as we fully engage each other's attention and bestow value upon each other. We also tend to regard those not in our group as having value, not necessarily equal, but deserving respectful treatment unless otherwise indicated.

UNIVERSALITY OF LESBIAN CULTURE

Universality of Lesbian Culture presents itself as a range and variety of styles within which we each carry high expectations and demand good value from our institutions and relationships. Access (or lack of access) to individual *Lesbian Possibility* provokes strong feelings of personal justice achieved (or denied). Thus, the reluctance of not a few ex-Lesbians (or "has-bians") to lose the privilege of belonging to Lesbian Community, where we expect quality treatment from other Lesbians, and where, when events do not proceed as envisioned, we are laid low by disappointment, devastation and disruption. Longing for wholeness, we are trained to believe that only another person, religion, whatever, can restore to us our stolen and damaged parts. If that isn't a set-up for disaster, what is?

We expect the "best" behavior from each other, but our behavior reflects the sum total of social forces, personal experience and family scripts. Responding to failed expectations, we deploy powerful strategic defenses and impenetrable barriers, brilliantly conceived and perfected over a lifetime for surviving control/domination/abuse. Too often our predetermined "best" is none too good, when childhood emotional, psychic, or physical trauma, brainwashing/programming create distortions of being, produce splits in personality, and dissociative, hostile, self-destructive actions.

But despite these obstacles, because Lesbian society, by definition, is creative—as opposed to controlling—our styles and fads precede, and finally influence, mainstream and "alternative" society in disproportionate significance.

LESBIAN HEAVEN

Newcomers to Lesbianism universally entertain their individual fantasy of *Lesbian Heaven*. Most Lesbians I meet come to our Community and Culture as I came, with heartfelt ideals and splendid visions of belonging to a community of peers, valued by those who care about and for each contributing member.

We know instinctively that for us to live full lives we must be Lesbians having fun together, making ourselves up as we go. This pursuit more than sports, music, art or political events bring us together. It is THE reason for Lesbian Culture, and is documented by our ephemera, codes, art, crafts, and institutions which exist exclusively to support our Lesbian identity, our work, our destiny, and our delight.

Robyn Epstein, Interviewer

CANARY IN A COAL MINE

Catherine Crouch interview

In the summer of 2007, Catherine Crouch's 15-minute short film *The Gendercator* became the focus of intense scrutiny and controversy by audiences worldwide when the San Francisco Frameline Film Festival suddenly cancelled the programmed screening.

In the film, Crouch posits a dystopian future in which gender expression is rigid and mandated by law and custom. If you do not fit the gender binary, you will be forcibly and medically reconstructed to accommodate social norms. *The Gendercator* had been accepted and programmed (and was screened, despite the Frameline cancellation) in many other 2007 LGBT film festivals including New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Seattle, Philadelphia and Miami.

What happened between the confident reception of the film and what became a censoring of the film? At a Chicago screening in May, two people in the audience of fifty considered the representation of transgendered characters "transphobic," and contacted allies in San Francisco. With a stated agenda to have the film removed from the Frameline lineup, the San Francisco activists produced a harshly worded flyer attacking and misrepresenting Crouch and the actual film content, forwarded it through cyberspace via grouplists and gathered 150 signatures (overwhelmingly of people who had heard of the film only through the negative critique and never viewed it).

The negative critique of the film emerged not from the film content, but from the ideas motivating the plot, especially when combined with Crouch's own words. In an effort to clarify the intent and motivation for making the film, Crouch had included a director's statement on her website <http://www.CatherineCrouch.com> :

Director's Note - Things are getting very strange for women these days. More and more often we see young heterosexual women carving their bodies into porno Barbie dolls and lesbian women altering themselves into transmen. Our distorted cultural norms are making women feel compelled to use medical advances to change themselves, instead of working to change the world. This is one story, showing one possible scary future. I am

hopeful that this movie will foster discussion about female body modification and medical ethics.

As Crouch points out below, we cannot know how the film may have been received without this director's statement. However, what was born as an intra-community concern for what Crouch sees as ethically questionable medical techniques and a potential loss of gender-pluralism, particularly for masculine women, has become a polarized debate about the meaning of where our community boundaries are: Can a butch-queer-woman such as Crouch critique masculinizing medical technologies within her community/ies, or is this the same dangerous "transphobia" which contributes to violence against transfolks?

In either case, the simplistic construction of the contentious debate became – "is the film transphobic or not?" - and failed to offer any meaningful discussion of medical ethics, social construction of gender/sex, or representation of female masculinity as Crouch had intended.

Crouch has been making films since 1990, many of which have engaged the stories of genderqueer women from a multiplicity of perspectives and settings. Her films have screened regularly and with critical acclaim at film festivals, especially LGBT film festivals, worldwide since 1997. Crouch's lesbian characters have been controversial in the past, particularly the tragic character of Aunt Jolene in her feature length film, *Stray Dogs*, but never before had any of her films been retroactively cancelled after being programmed.

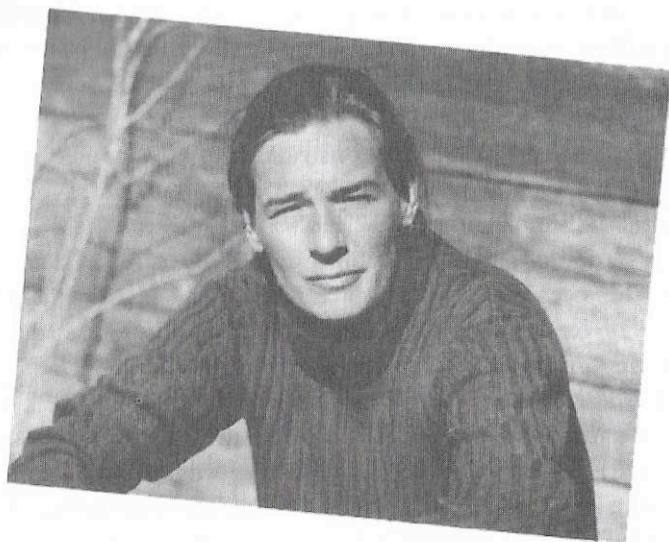
Keeping in mind that "transphobia" is a dangerous tool of heteropatriarchy and that Crouch is a butch lesbian film maker, it is crucial that we keep this complicated conversation going rather than succumb to our fear or discomfort with controversy. How has this film been censored as "transphobic" and why? I sat down with Catherine to find out her perspective on how this happened, why it happened and what it means for her and her future filmmaking as well as our queer communities. A key issue in this controversy is who can respectfully critique whom in our queer communities?

How would you describe *The Gendercator*?

The Gendercator is a science fiction satire, exploring a "what if" alternative reality wherein a lesbian feminist from the 70s who is at ease with her body, sexuality, and gender expression is dropped into a future where her appearance and sexuality are not only socially unacceptable but illegal. In

many ways, she is approached by the medical and government officials of this dystopic world as a feral child without agency, needing to be medically evaluated and assisted in her social acclimation and integration.

And yet, people received *The Gendercator* as a very different film, no? There was a dramatic shift after a few people ignited a protest of the movie. From your perspective, what do you think happened with *The Gendercator*?



Catherine Crouch

Photo by Joslyn Virgen Crowe ©2006

In early May of 2007, there was an enormous amount of misinformation circulating in San Francisco and cyberspace about the content of the film. An incendiary flyer was posted online and on telephone poles in San Francisco claiming (amongst other fallacies) that *The Gendercator* represented transpeople as “monsters and science fiction freaks” and that I was refusing to engage in dialogue about the film. Many people quickly became focused on *The Gendercator* as very politicized art, as a political act that demanded a political response in some way.

As a result, a cyber wave of outrage washed over Frameline and they were unable to withstand it. I was disappointed in Frameline for being unable to say – “Thanks for your interest. We accepted *The Gendercator* as an accomplished lesbian film also of interest to genderqueer and transpeople. Please come see the movie and then let’s discuss the issues raised by the film ” – this was the responsible tactic of film festivals in NY and LA and

Michigan Fest and Chicago and Montreal and Seattle – we had panels, dialogue, and even conflict which many folks felt was important and productive.

I have always seen Frameline as “our” festival, and San Francisco as a kind of queer Mecca, where conversations, especially politically charged conversations about representation in film, could and should happen. It is very unfortunate that Frameline reacted out of fear, avoiding the conflict rather than engaging it. Their own selection committee had programmed the film with no issues raised. Frameline did not support their programming committee or their filmmaker during this historic moment and I was very disappointed with their final decision.

So how about this reception of *The Gendercator*? What does it mean to you?

One of the things that I find both fascinating and frustrating is the way that the response to *The Gendercator* is itself a binary response to a critique of binary thinking. *The Gendercator* itself does not fit into a simplistic binary of “good” or “bad” representation, therefore some audiences find it difficult to interpret.

The Gendercator doesn't fit the current categories of celebration or denigration of trans identities; it is a bit critique, a bit fiction, a bit satire, valuing gender pluralism, including trans identities, at least those were the guiding principles in creating *The Gendercator* in my heart and imagination.

Because it defies any simplistic categorization, *The Gendercator* makes some people uncomfortable and they don't quite know what to make of it. When things don't fit a category – rather than change the categories to accommodate new information that doesn't fit - we often shun the new thing or try to force it to fit rather than expand our understanding to include it.

And when you were making this film, how did you anticipate its reception? What was your sense of how it would be understood and received? Did you expect these kinds of dramatic reactions to your film?

Despite the fact that it has never happened, every time I finish a film I anticipate that audiences will recognize and applaud my talent (laughs). I think all artists would tell you this is their expectation. After all, we don't put the work out there until we are completely satisfied with it.

I recognize that the film brings up complicated ideas and subject matters

in a very short amount of time and does not treat the ideas with what have become the community expectations of celebration. In a way, I was aware of this making the film, on another level, I wasn't. There were some rumblings of discontent about the script from a few readers, but I didn't anticipate the outcry and cancellation — no one that I know has ever heard of this happening to a film that had been accepted and programmed into a film festival.

I'm a storyteller, and I follow my inspirations and questions rather than making political comments or interventions. And I feel that's my role in the community: to tell the stories that speak to me. I have my political, cultural, and social loyalties, but even more so, I have my artistic voice. This is part of the responsibility of the artist, to expand the boundaries of the socio-cultural worlds we create and live in.

What is your sense of the controversy around *The Gendercator*, after all the panels you've participated in and the academic papers that have been written about this film?

We are in the middle of massive change in our alphabet community (of LGBT) and that is threatening to many of our comfort zones. I hear some people feeling that their voices are neglected while others appear privileged. The truth is, in this situation, among other things that are happening, both lesbians AND trans-folks keep voicing a perception of their "side" as neglected and the "other side" as privileged. Why there are "sides," I don't know. I don't like it, and then suddenly I find my work caught up in it.

I think we—lesbians/masculine women/genderqueer—are the same kinds of people with the same core issues—am I a woman or a man? What kind of woman am I? How do I fit into this highly gendered and misogynist world? The current differences between us are how we respond to these questions and feelings. There is a range, a continuum of experiences, and then also what I know as a uniquely butch dilemma. In my day-to-day life, I move through the world as a masculine woman, representing a possibility for young lesbians as well as "freaking out the straights." In many ways, people like me challenge and educate people who come in contact with us.

Lately I have come to feel like we are participating in similar discourses about how "we"—masculine women and/or transgendered folks—are transcending gender and heteronormative gender roles. However, we are living different practices in that some of us are using elective medical procedures to confirm a gender/sex identity and others of us live in the gray spaces. In my opinion, which has become so controversial, some elective

transgendered medical surgery looks like accommodating the binary. It is the converse of female body modification, which exaggerates female secondary characteristics. It seems like an obvious, however somewhat unintentional, relationship between the two: body modification to intensify or exaggerate characteristics that society identifies as male or female, for example - rounded or flat chests.

In both cases, you are changing your body in response to feeling "wrong" or "incomplete" or in order to "fulfill yourself" rather than looking critically outward at culture. There just shouldn't be a limited tolerance for gender variables, in fact we need more gender/sex options, which is where we need education and activism. Is it out-dated of me to want social change rather than new ways to revise your self-presentation?

What about your director's comment? A lot of people saw this as re-framing the film as anti-trans in so far as you were supposedly placing the conservative right and trans-political agendas on the same page.

Of course, when there are unwanted political overlaps, we get anxious. But it does happen. The practices of folks touting repressive agendas can overlap with those pushing progressive agendas. It is uncomfortable to think that what some lesbian women are doing with their bodies right now might actually conform to the gender/sex binary. None of us want to believe that our actions might overlap with people we see as our adversaries, and dangerous adversaries at that. I wonder about the shared agendas of right-wing Christians, medical/pharmacy industry, popular culture and gender/sex representations and out of my wonder comes the film.

You have also elaborated saying that you felt some anxiety about the rapid changes in queer communities as potentially compatible with conservative agendas. I'm curious about this, can you say more?

Yes, co-optable by conservative agendas, as for example - heteronormativity and the ex-gay movement, where there is this notion that we can be, or need to be, "fixed." I refuse this notion to fix myself. I want to "fix" culture and society, which is the much more daunting, yet more important work. I want to live freely in my body as the kind of woman I am and while there are not many places where I can feel fully accepted and free, I see that as part of the challenge of my life and the value in my persistent expression of my gender as I see fit.

Interestingly, the group that has identified with and appreciated the message of *The Gendercator* more than any other has been the intersex

community. These are people who do not find the plot unrealistic or unthinkable – because these are people who are gendered at birth, by doctors and parents and society. Like the character in my film, intersex infants are generally not allowed to leave the hospital until their genitals have been surgically adjusted to fit cultural norms.

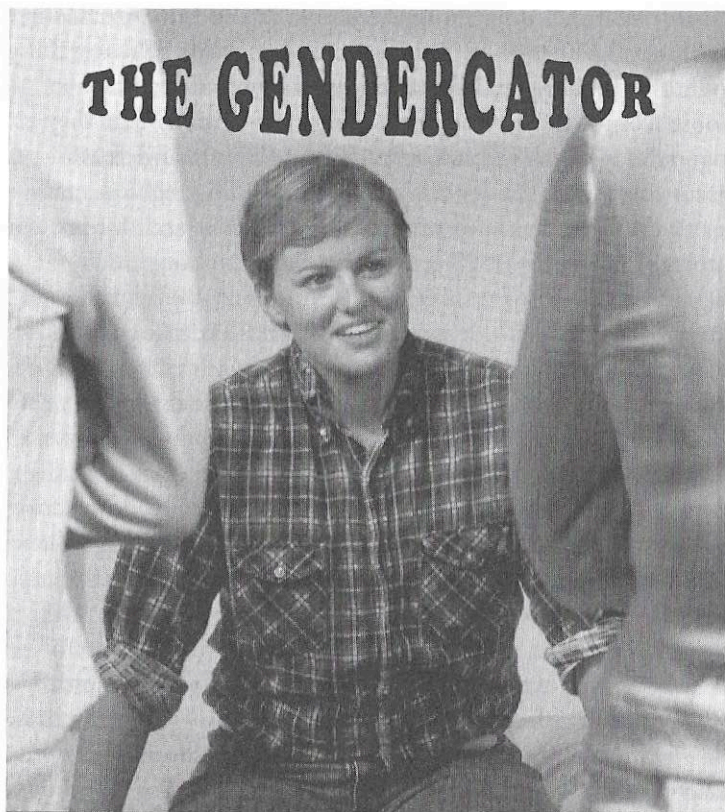
As a writer, I find words are most often the best way for me to translate my intentions, yet they still leave a lot of space between my imagination and what I can make intelligible; there are always limitations in our explications and representations. But if I were asked to use another medium of expression, I would be even more stuck. I am very aware that people keep asking you to use language while your preferred language for expression and particularly for the subject at hand, is film, right? What has this been like for you?

This has been an extremely difficult time for me. Many people ask me to interpret the film for them or explain it and I honestly feel like – didn't you just watch it? Tell me what you got from it. I already did my part, as best as my talent and resources allowed. To me, language itself feels inadequate for this subject matter of contemporary gender flux. At this point in time, even basic terms are in dispute. Consider the director's statement for the film, which seemed simple enough at the time. But if I hadn't made the statement, the film would have been received very differently, and now we'll never know what might have happened.

I think that the ideas about gender and medical ethics in the film are much milder and gentler than the points I made in the statement, yet the statement was seen as the Rosetta Stone for interpreting the film. I wanted the statement to be short and to the point, as a director's statement should be. I may have sacrificed some nuance, but you can't undo something and I still agree with the statement. The truth is, many people who stay silent publicly, or feign deference to the leading critics of the film, also tell me privately that they are having similar concerns, but they cannot risk saying it out loud.

In my own discussions with people, I have also experienced people making private confessions of appreciation for many aspects of *The Gendercator* and then hesitating to publicly support the film. Why do you think that this is happening and what does it mean to you?

We are living in a time of great change and my film has given me an opportunity to express my concern about the rapidly increasing number of young lesbians transitioning to male-identified persons. I'm concerned and I feel it is my duty to express my concern through character, image



THE GENDERCATOR

COTTON LOVER FILMS PRESENTS "THE GENDERCATOR"

EMILY WOOD JOEL UмбаUGH KELLY GERARD BOB BERRY
CONSTANCE MACY GREG STEELE EDDIE CURRY NICK ANNO

SCRIPT BY LETICIA ALVAREZ COSTUMES BY ANN SIMPER MUSIC BY THE STEWED TOMATOES EDITOR ELLEN ROSNER

PRODUCTION DESIGNER SHANNON KAY WILSON EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS RYAN CONLY AND JASON BOYER DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY HANNAH DAVID

PRODUCED BY JOEL UмбаUGH AND SHARON ZUREK WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY CATHERINE CROUCH

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Advertising poster for The Gendercator, courtesy of Catherine Crouch.

and metaphor. Other people, it turns out, are also concerned, but are not willing to express this, or unable to figure out how to best share their concern.

I believe the attention given to the film is due to our current interest in the variables of gender expression. Our genders shape so many things and controlling or limiting representation just reduces the number of genders we choose from—and people choose from the options that they can see. Getting publicly slammed and shamed is difficult and frustrating, but the discussion about gender has opened up or highlighted many varied genders that we need to keep central—our histories and our presents and our futures.

Perceived criticisms of transgender identities in the film are not really important to the goal of the film; we need all of us and all of our options. For many, the point of film, and then me, became canaries in a coal mine. Will the expression of these lesbian concerns be squelched? Or can we tolerate many different kinds of ideas in our imaginations and worldviews?

You have been harshly accused of having basically destructive aims (transphobic) with making *The Gendercator*, which I do not believe is the case. Could you elaborate on from where your inspirations for your films originate. How do you choose a topic?

My inspirations and stories do not come to me from a core of politics, but from questions about people's lives, and most often, questions about the full-bodied complexities of women's lives. It was surprising to me that *The Gendercator* received so much attention in a specific way when my approach to it was as much about fiction, satire, and drugs in the 70s as it was about gender. I think that this speaks to the value of following your artistic inspirations. I cannot anticipate how different audiences will receive my work; my experience with *The Gendercator* is an excellent example of how this is so. I don't like that some people felt negatively affected by this film, but I embrace the multi-layered and fiery dialogues for which this short film has been the catalyst.

Sometimes I am conflicted about some ideas or with how I feel about a certain theme, and my creative process becomes a way to solve the tension; I follow the story and put forth the truths that I see. It is important to me to keep from reducing a story or my perspective about the story to a "good" or "bad," representation. As a result of my ambivalence towards a filmic right/wrong, or realistic/fantasy portrayal of life and how to live it, my characters are often not as heroic as some audiences expect them to be,

and the endings of my stories are often bittersweet.

I am an artist who must follow the personal experiences that guide me and tell the truths that arise as most pressing to me with all their complexities. As much as I am loyal to my alphabet community, I am first loyal to the process of being an artist and creating good art—art and representation that has integrity rather than a transparent political agenda.

To me it is clear that while *The Gendercator* does stand on its own as a film, it also has developed from your larger body of work. In fact, I would encourage people to view your other films as they analyze *The Gendercator*. In any case, could you speak to how you see *The Gendercator* in relation to your larger body of work?

In *Vanilla Lament* (1997), the lead is the same kind of masculine female character. The girl in the hat gets dumped and then thinks, “okay this is as good a time as any to reinvent myself.” She tries on a femme-presentation and then a male persona, but decides that she is just “Georgie Girl,” comfortable as a natural born butch.

Why do all the boys just pass you by?
 Could it be because you just don't try?
 Or is it the clothes you wear?

Also, I think there is a direct link between the 8 year old Teen Miller in *One Small Step* (1999) who wants to marry the girl next door in 1969, and Sally in *The Gendercator* in 2048. Both of these characters are repressed and limited by the normative social and cultural constraints placed on women, girls and lesbians.

One of my most controversial characters, Aunt Jolene from *Stray Dogs* (2001), is tortured by her repressive religious beliefs and endures a closeted love life. At several festival screenings, audience members walked out on this film because of the tragic nature of Aunt Jolene. They thought that the representation wasn't celebratory enough of lesbians. Of course, I wasn't criticized as lesbian-phobic because of the anchor of my own identity, but it was the same kind of thing as *The Gendercator* on a smaller scale.

Most people who attend LGBT film festivals do not want to see this difficult kind of representation, even though it is true to an experience. These film festivals are not events that embrace complicated films, instead, they are basically gay pride parties. I have never made the big fun movie; I am drawn to make the heavier, dark films that make segments of the

audience squirm. I don't shy away from themes that are provocative, which is evident in my body of work.

Why do you think that *The Gendercator* has come to be spotlighted in the particular ways that it has been?

I think the reason *The Gendercator* has been received so differently is because gender/sex representations in general and the lesbian community in particular are so different now than they were when I made those earlier films. Things are shifting quickly and dramatically, which is a large part of why *The Gendercator* has been important to many people as both positive and negative criticism of queer identities and cultures.

Take for example *One Small Step*, which came out in 1999. This film could be retroactively claimed as including transgendered representation, but I didn't conceptualize it that way when I made it and people didn't seem to read it that way when it came out.

One Small Step is set in 1969 and the key events in the film are a little girl (Teen) falls in love with another little girl (Peggy), learns that two girls can't get married, and then attempts to change herself from a girl to a boy in order to marry Peggy. In the film, the Dad-character gently explains the way of the world—that Teen can't be anything she wants to be: "Teen, you can't change from a girl to a boy, and you can't marry Peggy. I am truly sorry if you misunderstood me." But of course today in 2009 – little Teen could envision both realities.

I think that today, some audiences would look at the little girl in *One Small Step* who tries to kiss her elbow to be a boy and see a trans character, but nobody interpreted her that way in 1999. I don't know what this means and I'm not quite sure that I am supposed to; I'm participating in the conversation as an artist, not a theorist.

And then, in 2001, in *Stray Dogs*, I created the character of Aunt Jolene who embodied a heartbreaking portrayal of repression, guilt and gender agony in the Appalachian backwoods of 1958. At that time, Aunt Jolene was often seen as "a man, at least I thought he was a man" as the technician at Chicago's Astro film lab told us when he was reviewing the footage.

What were Jolene's relationships to gender/sex identities?

Her self-assessment – "I just never felt right" – is the simplest expression of the butch dilemma.

I didn't do a panty check scene in *Stray Dogs* because it was irrelevant to me. I didn't want to "say" what Jolene "is" – that is the same as gendercating

her. The point of her story was how repressive the culture was to a person outside the binary. There was some talk of a curse on Carter Mountain. No girl babies born, except Jolene who was not “really” a girl/woman. I never defined what that meant. It was a subplot of *Stray Dogs*. I wrote her character in, she was a man in the original play. I am interested in these characters and their struggle.

I appreciate your complicated view of female born persons and masculinity. There are so few complex perspectives in the dominant conversations within queer communities and forums. I feel that you are concerned with gender representations, including trans-gendered, but also including butch-dykes among many others. Is it fair to say that you are interested in as some say “multiplying gender?”

I love gender bending. It’s fun and it’s funny and it’s nothing new. For example, I think of a femme I know, who has a moustache. She is my favorite. She just totally freaks people out! Everywhere she goes, she challenges the gender/sex binary with her beautiful anomaly. I get so energized and inspired thinking about her defiance since she doesn’t alter her appearance to more “cleanly” fit into a current gender category.

So, yes, I want to “multiply gender.” I care about plural genders. This is a key subject matter in *The Gendercator*. I don’t want to see queer people, particularly queer youth of course, feeling like there are basically two gender options, and I want more representation of varied gendered identities. People choose from the options they can see.

I think that your relationship with conceptualizations and performances of queer gender/sex/sexuality identities may be in some ways different from leading contemporary thought. Do you see it this way? Have your experiences been different or is it something else?

When I think of the Barbie and Ken 1950s, I know I am so blessed to have grown up in the Peppermint Patty 1970s. The mere existence and normalization of her character really excited me. Plus, I suspected she and Marcy had a “thing.”

I understand being young and looking around at the world and thinking “gosh, I’m not like Barbie” - but that doesn’t need to equal “then I must be Ken” - that’s binary thinking. Maybe you are more like Peppermint Patty. Maybe you vibe Marcy or Lucy. There are a multiplicity of gender options we can name and live that honor our autonomy without the pathology or medicalization of our bodies.

But why are you so concerned about what is going on now in LGBT communities? What makes your perspective important now?

New things that push the boundaries of what can be done in our tech-revolution and medicalized world should be cautiously approached. Queer worlds aren't immune to trends and the excitement of what's new; they never have been immune—and trends can stifle individual uniqueness. That there are trends isn't news, but talking about the trends in medicalization of queer bodies has somehow come to be collapsed with a hostile perspective about trans-folks. This simplistic interpretation disregards my love and concern for our alphabet realities. I know there should be space for more voices than the most popular or academic voices that are making claims about where the lines are. All of my work is about the negotiations of people's lives, which are ultimately complex. I strive for this complexity in my work.

Some people want you to stay out of this conversation, which is frustrating given the historical struggles of LGBT peoples for respect and room for our voices. Why do you take the risk of putting your voice out there in this way?

I believe I have a legitimate voice in the alphabet community. I made this film for us with love and compassion from a place of concern. It is a cautionary tale for my people. I know my inspiration and intentions and I stand behind my work. I'm pretty sure that the negative reactions to the film also come from a place of love and compassion and a righteous protective instinct. But no segment of our community is beyond criticism or analysis. And to think feminist women will not speak up when the issue is women's bodies is naïve.

I would like to think that in your future work, you will continue to include and/or focus on gender-queer female characters. Will this be the case?

I always have focused on these characters and I think I will continue to, and still my inspiration has a life of its own as art does. My experience has its own relationship to mainstream trends and pressures and so the stories I come to, or that come to me, will continue to emerge from my own engagements with the alphabet community.



Photo ©2006 Joslyn Virgin Crowe

A scene from *The Gendernauts*: Sally (Emily Wood) prepares to take her trip to the future with the help of her best friend Linda (Amanda Coppes.)

Melissa Wilson

(dis)Course Die/looted

my heavy sigh, narrowed eyes
glance south
scanning without studying
your typical, tiresome, tedious
request

WOW i reTort
huh? your lethargic words make de.man.ds
shark music men.i.mized
glance reTurned at an angle
your quizzical beMused stupor

WOW
my self has your attention
lucky me
shark music amplifies
mo.men.tum

WOW
EXPRESSING ADMIRATION, WONDER,
PLEASURE
A TRANSITIVE
TO IMPRESS, DELIGHT GREATLY
TRIUMPH, SENSATION

oh, your here, near, still
lucky me, still
my explanation not owed to you
grace i will bestow

re/ject, re/fuse, re/buff yoor reQuest?
 deny yoor de.man.ds?
 yoor re/quired explanation
 (dis)Placed as my own

WOW

solitary syllable
 sole-soul declaration
 single morsel is all i
 grant yoo

a (dis)Tinct unit, then
 yoo are (dis)Missed
 to promptly re/turn
 to scurrying about
 yoor (dis)Mal day

Woman
 Oriented
 Woman

i re/state, re/affirm, re/avow

now, yoor turn...
 WOW? yoo ponder
 yoor eyebrows raised
 yoo never heard

of Course not
 yoo did not invent
 yoo did not create
 of Course not
 yoor unknowing

i deFine, deCide, inForm
 enjoy, emBody
 craft, construct, compose
 My Present Reality
 Pure Lust

i deNy, deFy
 reFUse to be contained
 corralled, cajoled,
 chained
 to (dis)Missive jargon

reStraint, confine.men.t
 yoo aspire to exert
 with yoor limp magic wand
 pale, bland, insipid
 exposed

(dis)Tressed, (dis)Traught,
 (dis)Turbed
 yoo reSort to exploit
 vernacular
 penalize, punish, restrict
 sanction

yoo reGroup
 reAssert privilege
 bitter, leaden, sterile
 frigid coarse blanket
 heavy & drenched

(dis)Inclined endeavor
 i e.man.cipate myself
 of yoor tedious, loathsome
 mind- numbing presence
 comatose

yoo, predictable de.man.d more
 more notice, more attention
 more significance, more relevance
 more of yoor lingo
 more for yoor ego

WOW?

yoo query with (dis)Trust
with yoor too familiar goo
oozing on my expression
startle, surprise, alarm
(dis)Quiet, (dis)Appear

free of yoo, goo, and cage
(dis)Close wrath, rage, (dis)Dain
eager to reTurn, to reClaim
images, memories
of her

awakening at dawn, her eyes
releases digits, hands, arms, shoulders, veins, cells, spirit
unfolds, elongates, extends
reaches out

the arching of her back

her body soaking wet
sharing of her soul
voracity, enthusiasm
tingling toes

WOW

breathe deeply, commence my journey
to her, innocuous still
obstinate, tenacious, (dis)Gruntled
releasing before reUnion
goo will not infect her
she is knowing

2007

Author's note: This poem is dedicated to Mary Daly. She who unEarths, reClaims, reFormulates & transForms Ancient text into utilitarian vernacular. Her courage to look to the past to give voice to A Present Reality inspired me to consider the present and "maximize available resources". It is (dis)Concerting, My Present Reality includes a (dis)Mal array of postulates. It is with (dis)Dain I make use of Acronymic verbiage. But what if... what if shared language connects.

Jean Taylor

Lesbians Pay the Rent

I had been active as a radical lesbian feminist in the Women's Liberation Movement here in Melbourne Australia for number of years before I finally became a founding member the Aboriginal Rights Solidarity Group in 1986 in order to support the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in their fight for Land Rights, Self-Determination and Sovereignty.

Up till that time, I hadn't had the opportunity within the feminist collectives I was active in nor in the broader WLM to work in solidarity with the Aboriginal and Islander communities because there were no feminist collective specifically set up to deal with racism nor did feminists at that time offer any on-going practical support to the Indigenous struggles. I suspect many of us, as I certainly was, were too immobilised by our guilt about what had been done to the Indigenous people of this country and were too ignorant to even know where to begin addressing the terrible inequities in our society let alone addressing our own racism that had been taught to us from an early age.

One of the requirements of being a member of the ARSG was that I had to agree to the concept of *Pay the Rent*. *Pay the Rent* was introduced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a means by which non-Aboriginal people could acknowledge that Indigenous people lived on this land prior to the European invasion and are still the traditional owners because they have never ceded Sovereignty. *Pay the Rent* could be in the form of money or in-kind support in any number of ways and was 'paid' in order to support Aboriginal and Islander people in their fight for justice. As the saying goes: 'Australia always was and always will be Aboriginal and Islander land'.

We also had to agree that we would only work at the direction of the local Koorie community and that our main functions were to educate the broader community about Koorie concerns by running video and discussion nights, publishing a newsletter and raising much-needed money by organising 'Bash Against the Bicentennial' dances.

I learnt a great deal during the time I was a member of the ARSG, not least the fact that even though I'd been a political activist for 15 years there was still a great deal I needed to learn about how racism was institutionalised and deliberately designed to oppress the Indigenous population. It wasn't

easy going from a position of righteous anger about my own oppression as a womyn and a lesbian to accepting that as a member of the dominant culture I was also an oppressor and benefited, as did all non-Aboriginal people, from the continuing oppression of Indigenous people whose land we'd appropriated in 1788.

As far as I'm aware, the first time that the concept of *Pay the Rent* was introduced to the lesbian community was in the lead-up to the first Lesbian Festival in Melbourne in 1990. I was a member of the Lesbian Conference organising collective and we agreed to offer free registrations to any Aboriginal and Islander lesbians who wanted to attend the conference. We also decided to set a 10% *Pay the Rent* levy on the conference registrations and at the end of the conference to hand that money over to the Koorie community with no strings attached.

Much to our surprise not all lesbians in the community agreed with us that it was a good idea to part with any of our hard-earned money and I found myself having to argue that as lesbians we needed to acknowledge our racism and make ourselves accountable to the Koorie community. In the event, making an effort to *Pay the Rent* was one way of raising the consciousness of the lesbian community about the issues involved as well as offering practical support to the Koorie community.

With over 1000 participants at the conference we were able to raise over \$5,000 which in due course was handed over to and accepted by the Aboriginal Community Elders Services (ACES) and went towards the newly opened Aboriginal Elders Caring Place, the first Hostel and Nursing Home for Indigenous Elders.

The concept of *Pay the Rent* became more or less an accepted part of many of the larger lesbian events over the years. There were still lesbians who didn't agree that lesbian money ought to go outside the lesbian community but on the whole there was more of an awareness about the issues than previously. There were two ways that lesbian gatherings undertook to 'pay the rent':

(a) by offering free registration (which covered the cost of attendance by Indigenous lesbians but didn't generate extra money)

(b) by adding a 10% levy to the registrations overall (which had the potential to generate a great deal of money depending on the overall budget) to be used by the Aboriginal and Islander lesbians who attended the lesbian gathering at their own discretion

Most organisers offered Aboriginal and Islander lesbians free registration so they could attend lesbian gatherings without cost to themselves. Others

added in the 10% levy which was then handed over to Indigenous lesbians to use as they saw fit.

And yet, just a couple of months ago I was shocked out of my complacency about the lesbian feminist community's awareness about and necessity for 'paying the rent' by yet another debate about why we needed to offer free registrations to Indigenous lesbians. I have to add that most lesbian feminists who participated in the discussion were in agreement that we needed to continue to offer free registrations at our lesbian gatherings to Indigenous lesbians at the very least. But there was still enough of an element of doubt about the concept that we were unable to reach consensus.

However, while we weren't able to decide on a hard and fast ruling about a *Pay the Rent* policy, (it was left to future organisers to decide about how they want to present this), it did seem as if free registrations for Indigenous lesbians have become an accepted part of most of the larger lesbian gatherings these days.

There's still a long way to go, of course. Many Australians, the recent apology to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by our newly elected Prime Minister notwithstanding, seem to think, despite evidence to the contrary (higher infant mortality rates, the inordinate number of Black deaths in custody, the much lower age at which Indigenous people die compared to the rest of the population) that Indigenous people have never had it so good. And while we like to imagine that all lesbians are more aware and don't discriminate the fact of the matter is that we can't avoid being racist in some way or another no matter how hard we try.

The most we can do is educate ourselves about the oppression of Indigenous people here in Australia, do what we can to lessen the influence of the dominant culture and try in our own communities to be as open-hearted and aware about the impact of racism on the Aboriginal and Islander lesbians as we possibly can.

Carolyn Gage

Bite My Thumb A Skirmish in One Act

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For Pat Schmatz

*For the courage and integrity of her life
and her generosity in sharing the story of it with me.*

Introduction to *Bite My Thumb*

This play was originally written in response to a call for plays by an all-women theatre company specializing in sword fighting. Very quickly, the play evolved into a critique of companies like theirs that exploited the trendiness of "cute-girls-in-tights" cross-dressing roles from the classical repertory.

Much of my work explores the heavily censored role of the lesbian butch, and two decades of attempting to market, produce, and tour in these works has confirmed my suspicion that the reason for the resistance to this archetype lies in its indictment of traditional gender roles. The lesbian butch is living proof that qualities traditionally ascribed to "masculinity" are not innately linked to the Y chromosome. The butch also gives the lie to the belief that passivity is an essential female trait. As an archetype, the lesbian butch demands a radical paradigm of gender, one that goes to the

root of male dominance. The narrative that emerges from this archetype and paradigm is one of almost unimaginable liberation.

In *Bite My Thumb*, I began with the idea of two rival “gangs” of actors from competing productions of *Romeo and Juliet*, one of which was being done by an all-women company. This set-up provided the opportunity to explore all kinds of notions about gender and about fighting, against a backdrop of gender roles so familiar that “Romeo” and “Juliet” have come to represent the global epitome of a young, heterosexual, romantic couple.

In the play, the males challenge each other on notions of machismo, while the lesbian romantic couple has, unfortunately, replicated the traditional, casting-couch dynamic of mainstream, heterosexist theatre. Against these gendered roles, it is the female-to-male, transgendered actor and the lesbian butch who stand out as deviant.

Their marginal status is highlighted by their strategies for making a place for themselves in the heterosexist narrative: The transgender male is passing in order to play Mercutio in the male-dominated company, while the lesbian butch in the all-women company has accepted the role of Juliet’s Nurse, a “character part” which mocks her non-traditional looks and desexualizes her.

In the course of all the sword fighting, it becomes apparent that it is “Mercutio” and the “Nurse” who are the real warriors—a status that will never be acknowledged in the world of mainstream drama. This is apparent from their both being fired from their respective companies. Confronting this injustice, the two form a subversive bond that holds the promise of a new archetype in which the fierce warrior spirit is fused with the tender vulnerability of being woman-identified in a patriarchal rape culture.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

JOE: A traditionally handsome young man in his early twenties.

BEN: Romeo’s sidekick, a stout young man in his early twenties.

MARK: A new member of Romeo’s company, young, twenty-something.

JULIE: A traditionally beautiful young woman in her early twenties.

JO: A large, older, butch lesbian.

ROZ: Juliet’s lover, the head of an all-women Shakespeare company, an alpha femme.

Scene: An alley outside the stage door of an Off-Off Broadway theatre.

Time: The present.

Lights come up on an alley in New York City, just outside the stage door of an Off-Off Broadway theatre. There is a dumpster, with several trashcans, outside the door. Depending on the ambitiousness of the stage-fighting choreography, there can be a variety of objects, pallets, etc., which would lend themselves to creative weaponry and various playing levels.

Three figures enter furtively. They are dressed in male period costumes from an Off-Off Broadway production of Romeo and Juliet. JOE, who is dressed as Romeo, has the traditional male-model looks of a romantic lead. His sidekick BEN, dressed as Benvolio, is stockier, a traditional supporting actor. MARK, dressed as Mercutio, is skinny and masked. All three carry the swords that are a part of their costumes. JOE advances aggressively toward the stage door, MARK in tow. BEN tries to block them.

BEN: (Blocking JOE.) Come on, man! We can't be screwing around like this! We've got a show to do!

JOE: (Continuing to advance.) Get out of my way, Ben. I don't want to have to hurt you.

BEN: What's up with that, "I don't want to hurt you?"

JOE: I'm serious, Ben. Get out of my way.

BEN: (To MARK.) Mark, man, what are you doing? You don't want to encourage him, do you?

MARK: This is men's business.

BEN: "Men's" business? Have you both lost your minds? What about "actors" business? Joe, you're playing Romeo in forty-five minutes, and Mark—dude—you're playing Mercutio. We don't have time for this shit!

JOE: (Advancing.) Then think of it as a little pre-show warm-up.

BEN: Warm-up? Man, what if they kick your butts?

JOE: (Turning.) Ben, they're girls.

BEN: So?

JOE: So you really think they're going to kick our butts? (MARK *sniggers.*)

BEN: (*Serious.*) Yeah, they could kick your butts. How long have you two been taking stage-fighting classes?

JOE: That's not the point.

MARK: Yeah!

BEN: That is totally the point. You don't know what the hell you're doing!

JOE: Do you want me to prove it? (*Drawing a sword.*)

BEN: Oh, man, I can't believe this shit!

JOE: Scared?

BEN: Come on, this is me, Ben—your best friend. Me, Ben. You, Joe. We're in New York City, Lower East Side. Yo—This isn't Verona. We're in a play. And it sure isn't West Side Story, with a bunch of guys running around in tights.

JOE: Ben, you don't understand. This is war.

BEN: No, no... War is when big metal things drop out of the sky and explode, knocking down buildings and killing people. It's not when an underemployed actor goes looking to have a duel with his ex-girlfriend's new lover.

JOE: War is when you have an enemy, and we have an enemy.

BEN: No, we don't. We have competition.

JOE: (*Exploding.*) Competition! Do you think it's a coincidence that there happens to be another production of Romeo and Juliet at exactly the same time as our production?

BEN: Hello? This is New York City... Happens all the time.

JOE: No, it doesn't happen all the time, because this production is an all-female one, and their Juliet happens to have been my Juliet, and their Romeo just happens to be her new girlfriend, and this is an act of war. (*Turning to MARK.*) Right?

MARK: Right!

BEN: You're just going to make a fool of yourself.

JOE: No, you're the one making a fool of yourself, letting these dykes steal our box office and pretend they've got a better show than ours, when all they are is a bunch of freaks, and all they've got is a freak show, and that's what people are paying to see: a bunch of drag kings with socks in their codpieces, running around pretending they're us. They want to be men, fine. Let 'em come out here and fight us like men.

MARK: Yeah!

BEN: You're just pissed because your girlfriend left you for a woman.

JOE: (Enraged.) No! No, she did not! She left me for a part! She left me because she was an understudy in my company, and that wasn't good enough for her. She left me for someone who would let her play Juliet, and that someone just happens to be a woman. But she's no more lesbian than Mark.

MARK: Hey! I'm not a lesbian!

JOE: Chill. I'm making a point here.

BEN: You are going to look like the biggest sexist jerk...

JOE: Sexist? You want to know who's sexist? Women who can't figure out any better way to get an audience than to dress up like men, take a great classic play, and turn it into some kind of a joke. Why don't they do a woman's play? If they're so feminist, why don't they do that?

BEN: In the first place, there aren't any classic women's plays...

JOE: Exactly—

BEN: And in the second place, maybe because they want to fight.

JOE: (*Turning toward the stage door.*) Yeah, well, bring it on!

BEN: I mean on stage.

JOE: They want to play men, let them come out here and fight like men.

BEN: Dude, we're actors. We can't fight any better than they can.

JOE: We'll see about that!

BEN: Oh, come on! We've had two weeks of stagefighting lessons.

JOE: Wrong! Wrong! Did they ever grow up as guys? Did they ever get teased for backing down? Did they ever get humiliated for running away from a fight? Did anyone ever tell them they couldn't cry? Did they grow up knowing if there ever was going to be a draft, they'd have to go out and kill people? So maybe we don't have all that much time in with the fencing, but we've grown up fighting! They can't just strap on a sword—or anything else—and pretend to be us. No way! They want the privilege that comes with being men, then they're going to have to prove themselves, just like we have to every day of our lives! And I'll tell you something else—You want to talk “sexist?”—what about a director who casts her new girlfriend in the lead role? What about that? Isn't that sexual harassment, or something?

BEN: Maybe she thought Julie was a good actor.

JOE: Oh, come on, Ben.

BEN: I think you intimidated her...

JOE: Intimidated her? Oh, come on? How did I do that? (*Backing BEN into a wall.*) Tell me, man! How did I intimidate Julie?

BEN: Like this.

JOE: Oh, man... I can't argue with you. You want to go back, fine, but me and Mercutio" here, we're going to kick some feminist butt.

BEN: (*To MARK.*) You're not going to encourage him, are you? And what's with the mask?

MARK: I'm practicing. I have to fight with a mask in the play.

BEN: Oh, right... (*While BEN has been talking to MARK, JOE has gone up to the stage door. He is banging on it.*) No... man! Don't do that—!

JOE: (*Turning.*) Hey! You don't want to be here, you can leave— (*Just then, the door opens, slamming JOE in the face and knocking him off the stoop. JULIE stands in the doorway, framed in light. She is dressed as Juliet and looks*

as lovely as one would expect.)

JULIE: (*Looking at MARK.*) Who are you? What do you want?

JOE: (*Stepping out from behind the door.*) Well, if it isn't the East and Juliet the sun...

JULIE: Oh, God... (*JULIE slams the door.*)

BEN: I told you, man.

JOE: You didn't tell me anything! (*He begins to bang on the door. There is no response, and he bangs more aggressively.*)

BEN: Come on... (*JOE persists in banging. JULIE opens the door again.*)

JULIE: Go away!

JOE: No!

JULIE: I have a show!

JOE: So do I. (*She tries to close the door, but he sticks his sword in it.*) Hey! Don't break my sword!

JULIE: Then get it out of the door!

JOE: I just wanted to talk.

JULIE: It's over, Joe! Get it? Now, leave me alone... (*To BEN.*) Ben, tell him to leave me alone.

JOE: What makes you think I'm here to see you? (*She starts to close the door, sword notwithstanding.*) I want to see your girlfriend.

JULIE: She's busy.

JOE: Tell her I'm here.

JULIE: You're pathetic. (*Closing the door on his sword.*)

JOE: Hey! (*They struggle, and JULIE has almost closed the door when suddenly JO appears. JO is a large butch woman, dressed as Juliet's Nurse.*)

JO: What the hell is going on here? Julie, what's going on? (*She sees the three men.*) Who are these jokers?

JULIE: One of them is my ex. He's stalking me.

JOE: I am not!

JO: (*To JULIE.*) Why is he wearing tights?

JOE: I'm Romeo!

JO: Yeah, and I'm Juliet.

JOE: Send me your Romeo and I'll prove it!

BEN: Oh, man...

JOE: (*Yelling.*) Romeo! Oh, Romeo! Wherefore the hell art thou?

BEN: Hey, come on... (*Suddenly ROZ appears in the doorway, looking adorable in her Romeo costume.*)

ROZ: Julie, what is going on here—(*She sees the three men.*) Who are they?

JO: It's Romeo and his pals. They want to see whose sword is bigger.

JULIE: Roz, this is Joe. Joe, this is Roz.

ROZ: (*Studying him.*) You're not as tall as I imagined. (*To JULIE.*) Does he always wear tights?

JOE: (*To JULIE.*) Does she always wear men's clothes?

ROZ: When I have a show to do.

JOE: Funny, I've got one, too.

ROZ: Really? You're still running even after our review?

JOE: Hey! The only reason they reviewed your show instead of ours is because it's a freak show—bunch of dykes running around with socks in their pants—

ROZ: Jealous, are we?

JOE: No, I'm not jealous. Am I? (*He turns to BEN and MARK.*) We just thought you girls might like to do a little sparring before the show—a kind of preshow warm-up. How about it, “Romeo?”

ROZ: (*To JOE.*) You want to fight me?

JULIE: (*To JOE.*) You are such a jerk...

JOE: (*To ROZ.*)... unless you're afraid...?

JULIE: (*To JOE.*) Oh, I can't believe you—

ROZ: (*Stepping onto the stoop.*) I'm not afraid.

JULIE: (*To ROZ.*) You're not really going to fight him, are you?

ROZ: Why not?

JULIE: Because he's an idiot.

ROZ: It'll be good practice.

JOE: That's right. (*To JULIE.*) It's a “guy thing.”

ROZ: Bring it! (*They draw swords and fight. Their skills are evenly matched and evenly amateur, as they have both had two weeks of stagefighting classes. JOE wins, just barely.*)

JOE: (*Gloating.*) Want to go again?

ROZ: I'd love to, but I need to save my energy for the show. We're expecting a full house tonight. (*Turning back to him.*) It's amazing what a great review will do for your box office.

JOE: We don't really need it. You see, our audiences know what to expect from us.

ROZ: Apparently. I hear your houses are almost empty.

JOE: Better to have a small, but discriminating audience than a group of ignorant thrill-seekers looking for the nearest drag king bar.

ROZ: I think you forget Shakespeare wrote for a company that cross-dressed all the women's roles.

JOE: That was an Elizabethan convention.

ROZ: And ours is a post-modern convention.

JOE: Gimmick.

ROZ: Convention.

JOE: Gimmick.

ROZ: Convention. (*They draw swords and fight again, this time with a little more verve. ROZ trips, and JOE is moving in for the "kill," when JULIE intercepts him with a keychain can of pepperspray.*)

JULIE: (*Bracing herself.*) Back off!

JOE: (*Freezing in shock.*) What?

JULIE: I said, "Back off!"

JOE: Excuse me—We're fighting.

JULIE: So am I. And I just won.

JOE: No. No, you didn't.

JULIE: Yes, I did.

JOE: That's not fighting.

JULIE: Who says?

JOE: That's not fair! You can't use pepperspray!

JULIE: Try me.

JOE: (*To BEN.*) She can't use pepperspray!

BEN: I wouldn't bet on it.

JOE: But that's not fair!

JULIE: Why not? It's a weapon.

JOE: (*To BEN and MARK.*) See? This is feminism. Right here. This is feminism in action. This is her idea of a fair fight. The guy has to use a sword, but the girl gets to use a can of pepperspray that can nail him fifteen feet away. Yeah... Real equal.

JULIE: Works for me.

JOE: Come on, Ben. Tell her.

BEN: You started it, man.

JOE: You're telling me it's a fair fight when all she has to do is push a little button, and I'm choking and blind and vomiting all over the sidewalk?

BEN: That's how women fight, man. Good thing, too.

JOE: How can you say that?

BEN: They live in a different world from us, dude.

JOE: Oh, come on! It's just as dangerous for a guy. I've been mugged—twice!

JO: (*Interrupting.*) You want a real fight?

JOE: Yeah!

JO: Roz, give me your sword.

ROZ: No.

JO: What do you mean, "no?" Somebody's got to kick his skinny ass. You couldn't do it.

ROZ: I tripped. Come on, Jo. It's almost showtime.

JOE: "Joe?" Your name is Joe?

JO: Yeah. My name is Jo.

JOE: Man, you dykes have to copy everything, don't you? Can't even come up with your own names!

JO: I'll fight you for your name.

JOE: How's that work?

JO: Whoever wins gets to rename the loser.

JOE: Deal.

ROZ: No! No more fighting!

JO: (*Ignoring ROZ, she turns to BEN.*) Let me have your sword.

JOE: (*To BEN.*) Do it!

BEN: Aw, Joe...

JOE: (*Taking BEN's sword and handing it to JO.*) Let's go. (*The two begin to fence. JOE is no match for JO, who is obviously a skilled fighter. In no time, she has him on the ground, her sword pointed at his chest.*)

JO: Say, "Juliet." (*JOE resists.*) I said, "Say 'Juliet!'" That's your new name— (*Suddenly MARK steps forward, drawing his sword.*)

MARK: En garde!

JO: What's this? You want to fight? Who is this masked man?

MARK: "Mercutio" to you!

JO: Well, bite my thumb, "Mercutio"—Let's go! (*MARK and JO begin to fight. They are both highly skilled martial artists, and this is a prolonged fight. JO taunts him as they fight.*) Well... So the masked man can fight.

MARK: Don't patronize me.

JO: Who are you?

MARK: "A rose by any other name ..."

JO: ...would smell better than either one of us. Who are you?

MARK: You'll have to kill me first! (JO surprises MARK, disarming him and taking him down.)

JO: Unmask! (MARK refuses, and JO rips off his mask. After a moment of stunned silence, she begins to laugh.)

JOE: What's so funny? (JO ignores her and continues to laugh.) What's so funny?

JO: Your little "Mercutio" here... He's a girl!

MARK: (Getting up quickly.) No, I'm not!

JO: Yes, you are. I've seen you around the women's bars.

JOE: What?

MARK: (To JOE.) It's not true!

JO: Yeah? Then prove it!

MARK: (A long moment.) I'm transgender.

JO: Code for "homophobic lesbian."

MARK: No, I'm not!

JOE: Are you a man or are you a woman?

MARK: I'm a man.

JO: (Sarcastic.) "Trapped in a woman's body?"

JOE: (Disgusted.) Shit... (He turns to go, but MARK pursues him.)

MARK: It's a social construct! (To BEN.) Hey, tell him!

BEN: (Shaking his head.) I don't know, man. I don't go for that macho bullshit.

JOE: (To BEN.) It's cool, man. Don't argue with him... with her.

MARK: Him!

JO: Her!

MARK: (*Grabbing his sword and menacing JO.*) I'm not a lesbian!

JO: That's right! You don't have the balls—(*She rips off her skirt. She's got soccer shorts on underneath.*)

ROZ: Stop it! Stop it right now! Jo, if you don't put your costume back on and come into the theatre right now, you're fired!

JO: What's the matter, Roz? Afraid that Juliet's Nurse would make a better Romeo?

ROZ: No.

JO: I think you are.

JULIE: There's more to playing Romeo than fencing!

JO: Like what? Acting? As if you'd know anything about that.

JULIE: What do you mean?

JO: We all know how you got the part.

JULIE: I auditioned for it.

JO: Is that what you call it?

ROZ: Hey—

JO: (*Cutting her off.*) I've got a better resume than anybody here. I think I've got a better resume than all of you put together, so playing Romeo must not be about the acting. And we know it's not about the fighting... So is it about being a lover? (*Sizing up the two Romeos.*) Well, I've definitely gone to bed with more women than either of you... But that's not it, is it? It's really about looks, isn't it? Can't have a big old dyke playing Romeo, can you? Not even if I'm the strongest, and the handsomest, and the studiest, and the best fighter. No, you need a pretty-boy, don't you, to play Romeo? (*Looking at JOE.*) Or a little femme who looks adorable in her little tights. (*Looking at ROZ.*)

ROZ: You said you wanted to play the Nurse!

JO: It's better than Lady Capulet. Those were my choices, weren't they? (*A pause.*) Your all-women theatre company... Look at you! (*Turning to JULIE.*) And you! Nothing new here. Cute girls on stage. Doing Romeo and Juliet, the biggest het show in the canon. Yeah, so here's this radical women's theatre company out to prove we can tell this stupid story as well as the boys' theatres. Yeah. Great. Well, let me tell you this—you're never gonna change the world until you change the story. And that story's not going to change until you recognize that women like me out-Romeo any Romeo here. And we don't have to pretend we're men to do it!

MARK: I'm not pretending anything! I'm transgender!

JO: You just can't stand to think of yourself as female, can you? That's just about the worst thing in the world, isn't it?

MARK: Gender is a cultural construct.

JO: Don't make me laugh! Being a woman is a biological fact. Ask Julie here about her pepperspray.

MARK: You're just ignorant and transphobic.

JO: You're self-hating and lesbophobic. (*This is a fight to the death. The two draw swords and fight as if their lives depend on it. This should be the longest, most creative, and most dangerous fight of the evening. MARK is defeated and disarmed by JO. JO turns to the others for acknowledgement of her victory. ROZ and JOE, in a standard response to butch prowess, pretend to ignore it.*)

ROZ: Come on, Julie. (*Turning to JO.*) Jo, now that I know how much you hate the part, I'll have the stage manager read it. You're fired.

JOE: (*To MARK.*) Yeah, Mark... or whatever your name is... You're fired, too. I don't need drag kings to get an audience.

BEN: (*Embarrassed by JOE's bigotry.*) Come on, Joe . . . Nobody's going to know.

JOE: That's not the point! It's about artistic integrity.

BEN: So, he's transgender.

JOE: Yeah, fine. And let him find a transgender theatre company.

JO: A plague on both your houses! (ROZ and JULIE exit back into the theatre, and BEN and JOE exit down the alley. JO returns MARK's sword.) Here.

MARK: What are we supposed to do now?

JO: We're supposed to kill each other over whether it's better to pass as Mercutio or settle* for ugly-women character roles. That's what we're supposed to do...

MARK: Yeah, well, I'd rather play Mercutio than wear that shit... (*Indicating the padding and long skirt that JO has discarded.*)

JO: Yeah, and I'll put on a tutu before I stuff a sock down my pants.

MARK: You don't get it.

JO: You don't get it. (MARK starts for his sword, but JO lays a restraining hand on his arm.) "C."

MARK: See what?

JO: "C," as in "none of the above."

MARK: What's that supposed to mean?

JO: It means when people tell you to pick "A" or "B," and you don't like either of the choices, you go for "C: None of the above."

MARK: Yeah, but what if there is no "C."

JO: Then you have to make one.

MARK: Yeah, but you're a lesbian. That's a woman. That's an "A" or a "B." (JO can't think of a response. MARK indicates his body.) This feels like a costume to me, you know? I look in the mirror, and it's always a shock. Like this can't be mine. And what are these doing here? (*Indicating the breasts.*) They're like a prosthesis or something. I mean, it's a mistake. That's what it feels like. I tried to walk like a girl, and I tried to talk like a girl... I mean I practiced. You think I wanted to be different when I was a kid? You think I liked being called names ever since I can remember? I had to fight every fucking day in fifth grade. The boys didn't want me because I was a girl, and the girls didn't want me because I wasn't a girl.

JO: I've got the same story. (*A pause.*) You know what I did when I was a kid?

MARK: What?

JO: I learned all the lines of Cyrano. Practiced for hours up in my room with a curtain rod for a sword. Yeah. (*She looks at MARK.*) I was going to be the greatest Cyrano there ever was, because I knew what it felt like... you know, having to fight all the time because of the way you look. Yeah... I was going to be Cyrano... Oh, yeah... (*She laughs bitterly.*)

MARK: But you never got to do it. (*JO is quiet.*) That sucks, man.

JO: I never got to do a lot of things. But that doesn't mean I'm going to cross over to the enemy.

MARK: Men aren't my enemy.

JO: Well, you be sure and tell them that.

MARK: Just because people don't understand trans, that's no reason for me not to live my life. I mean, the world is homophobic, and you're still a dyke, right?

JO: Yeah, but when I fight for my identity, at least I'm fighting with the women.

MARK: You be sure and tell them that.

JO: And I've got this body. It's the only one I'm going to get. Cutting it up and dosing it with steroids isn't going to change anything. It's still going to be a female body. Except it's going to be one that's mutilated and poisoned.

MARK: (*Shaking his head.*) You don't get it.

JO: All that money, all that pain, all that fucking dependence on the medical shit... the complications... You don't get it.

MARK: (*Smiling.*) You're jealous of me, aren't you?

JO: No... (*A pause. JO looks at MARK.*) Yeah... Yeah, I'm a little jealous. But it's not why you think.

MARK: What do you know about what I think?

JO: I'm jealous that you think it's that easy.

MARK: Easy? What about "the money, the pain..."

JO: Yeah, easy. I can get money and I can deal with pain. And I wish I believed that was all it would take. But what kind of a man would I be? (*She looks at MARK.*) A good one?

MARK: Depends on if you want to be.

JO: Yeah? And just what would it mean for me to be a "good man?" I know what it means to be a good dyke. I'm a great dyke. I love women. Lesbians trust me, because I'm one of them. I've got their back and they've got mine. But what kind of a straight man would I make? One that used to be a woman, and then chose not to be? Someone raised with all that hell that women are supposed to put up with their whole lives, and I'm going to get indemnity because I happen to be born with a face that could pass? How's a woman—a lesbian—whose been afraid of men all her life going to feel about me then?

MARK: That's her problem.

JO: See, that's where it's easy for you.

MARK: You think you're a woman, and that works for you, fine, but don't try to lay your trip on me, man. That's not who I am.

JO: Yeah. (*A long silence.*)

MARK: What are you doing?

JO: I was thinking.

MARK: (*Defensively.*) What?

JO: About Romeo and Juliet.

MARK: Shit... You know Mercutio was gay.

JO: And Juliet wore the pants. Who knows, if she'd lived long enough...

MARK: Yeah, but she's dead.

JO: So's Mercutio.

MARK: Only the good die young.

JO: What if the straight people all died in the play?

MARK: I'd like to see that.

JO: What if the women didn't have to be scared of men, and the men didn't have to treat women like shit to feel like they were men? Would you still want surgery?

MARK: Maybe... maybe not... but would you still want to call yourself a woman?

JO: Why don't we tell that story and find out?

MARK: Tell it?

JO: Write our own play. Write that world where all the straight people have to fit themselves into our model. Where they're the ones having to get the surgeries and having to learn how to move like a human being, because they're not as whole as we are. Where we call them "one-spirit" like they're freaks, because they don't know what it's like to be born in a body that feels like "other."

MARK: Man, I can't even imagine that play...

JO: Why not?

MARK: Just... hard to imagine.

JO: It could start with two actors who got kicked out of *Romeo and Juliet*.

MARK: No way. (*JO looks at him.*) You're serious.

JO: Why not?

MARK: Man, nobody would come to see a play about us.

JO: Yeah , but look—for two hours we could play ourselves. For two hours we could live in a world the way we want it to be. That's two hours more than we're ever going to get in this lifetime.

MARK: You got that right.

JO: Truce?

MARK: Truce. (JO rises and collects her sword. MARK is watching her. JO turns slowly and smiles. Gleeefully, MARK grabs his sword and the two begin to spar. Blackout.)

End of Play

Shawn S. Helmen

Differences

A soft twinkle in her eye
 lighting up when they see me
 And I gaze into her beauty
 And see the pattern specific to her DNA
 How pretty - How rare - How her own
 Her eyes are blue
 Mine are brown
 Her hair is blond with streaks of brown - straight -
 she blow dries it every day
 My hair is black with grey starting to appear.
 It is curly, tight curls.
 Her tone is light - a beautiful milky latte color, with a
 slight rich tan,
 she is beautiful.
 My tone is dark with a tint of red undertones.
 I am beautiful.
 she is white.
 I am black.
 And we are lovers meant to be - kismet.

We face Gender-ism
 We face Sex-ism
 We face Racism
 And we stand together in love -
 Facing it all.

Bev Jo

In Love with My Lesbian Community

Lesbians are my people. I was in love with other girls from my earliest memories and that was the most important thing in my life. I became lovers with my first love when I was 17, in 1968. I discovered the Daughters of Bilitis (an early Lesbian organization) and Lesbian bars in 1969, but it wasn't until I found the San Francisco Bay Area Lesbian Feminist community in 1970 that I felt I'd come home.

It was so exciting — so many Lesbians and so many Lesbian events — concerts, dances, parties, readings, etc. I joined collectives: A Woman's Place bookstore, the Lesbian Coffeehouse, the Lesbian Feminist Conference in Berkeley in 1972 (one of the first in the world), the San Francisco Dyke Separatist Gathering in 1983, and later Separatist Gatherings and events. I co-wrote "Dykes and Gorgons," one of the first Dyke Separatist newspapers in the world, wrote articles for Lesbian publications and books in the U.S. and other countries, and, in 1990, co-wrote and co-published (with Linda Strega and Ruston) *Dykes-Loving-Dykes: Dyke Separatist Politics for Lesbians Only*.

I was also part of the international Lesbian Separatist community, with friends in 13 countries, and lived for 3 months in Aotearoa (New Zealand), 6 months in England, and 3 months in Ireland.

But in the 1980's, I felt like my own community was disappearing. Female-only space had become rare, and, unlike in Aotearoa, Lesbian-only space had almost never existed. Many "women's" events began to be unaffordable, except for the most privileged. Instead of the inclusive, welcoming community we'd had, where no poor Lesbian was turned away, events were now advertised in a way to make it clear the organizers wanted a community segregated by class (and therefore often by race and disability and age, because the class-privileged are more likely to be privileged in other ways.) The irony was that many of us who had worked hard to make it possible for more Lesbians to come out, including the privileged, and for more Lesbians to be privileged (by fighting job discrimination), were now not welcome in the communities we created because we were poor. Even some Lesbian neighborhood potlucks in richer area advertised that they only wanted Lesbians from their neighborhood to come.

Even Lesbian publications changed from being full of exciting and radical ideas to being more boring and mainstream. Whereas once basic Lesbian

Feminism challenged academia, believing that you lose part of yourself when you join and value privileged patriarchal institutions (and I understood that because I had to unlearn what I'd been taught at universities in order to be able to think and write clearly) – newer Feminists would list only patriarchal academic credentials in publications instead of describing who they really were. As a result, a lot of wise and innovative, but not formally educated, Lesbians felt too intimidated to write and we lost some of our best thinkers, as well as the diversity we once had.

As the politics of strength of Lesbian Feminism was diluted, men claiming to be Lesbians were welcomed into our fading communities, endangering some of our few remaining female-only spaces, like the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. Imagine how it felt to have to see a man who had relentlessly pressured me to be het with him when I was 17 to now be accepted as a Lesbian. I had explained to him that I was in love with another girl and he just couldn't understand it. No matter how much he now says he always felt like a female growing up, I know it just isn't true because of what he'd told me about his life. He is a male who wants access to Lesbians. Some Lesbians seem surprised about this, but it's a common male pornographic theme. I think it's revealing that this man, like others claiming to be Lesbians, got into power positions right away, becoming vice-president of the Daughters of Bilitis (causing a split and then the end of the organization), writing a "Lesbian" column in a Gay and Lesbian newspaper, and writing a long article titled "Lesbian Sex" for *off our backs* (that was printed after he assured them that he was female born). Yet, considering that he's been published in a bisexual women's anthology, he's technically bisexual. He also wrote letters as a Lesbian to another Gay newspaper which were often offensive, including one that was anti-Mexican -- and it's upsetting that he implicates Lesbians with his racism. (I still try to remember that when I read something cruel or oppressive by a "Lesbian," the writer might not be a Lesbian or even female.)

Even my sub-community of Lesbian Separatists began to become more elitist and exclusionary, and there was the infighting, divisions, and ostracizing that happen with many radical organizations. I'd limited my friendships primarily to Separatists because I couldn't bear being around Lesbians who said how wonderful males were (including in pornographic ways). But even some Separatists I knew went back to being with men.

Finally, I just withdrew to be with my lover and friends, and, except for a few rare events, accepted that I'd never again have a Lesbian community like I did in the Seventies. Then, in the spring of 2007, everything changed.

I discovered in the Bay Area a Lesbian community even better than the one I'd lost — with music and poetry and comedy and parties and dances and hikes and many other social and political events. Not everything is exclusively female-only, but the atmosphere is Lesbian, with most everyone there Lesbian. There are so many things to go to that you sometimes have to choose between three events at a time. And there is a connection of events and individuals that seems to span at least eight counties. I can go miles away and recognize some of the Lesbians there. (That makes it sound small, but it's actually much larger than my other communities.)

One of the reasons that this community feels better to me is that it's older. Most of the Lesbians are in their forties, fifties, and sixties, with some older and younger. Few talk about even basic Feminist politics, but there's a warmth and understanding that feels very Lesbian-identified to me. Unlike my previous communities where many come out intellectually rather than through their hearts, the majority of these Lesbians came out because they fell in love with other females — and it shows in their love and kindness. There also seems to be more equality and less hierarchies, and less cruelty and snobbery than in my earlier communities. I believe that's because we've all had losses and therefore value each other more. It's interesting that occasionally I see someone I knew in my other, more "political" community and they seem to feel superior to these Lesbians, so they don't return. I can just imagine what they are thinking. (I feel so protective of my new friends and think that it's just such snobbery that was part of what destroyed what we used to have.) But it's their loss.

I know there are conflicts among these Lesbians, but, overall, I'm seeing such warmth, love, and compassion. I really have come home at last. And it's like the waves of an ocean that never stops moving — at every event or party I go to, I meet more Lesbians and make more friends, and then more, and more and more ...

Chris Sitka

HOPE IS AT HAND

As we stampede towards the climate change precipice, dragging all species along with us, it is time to ask; what caused this catastrophe and what is the solution?

Well, the solution is already in process. Mother Earth has it well in hand. As in previous extinctions there will be survivors and casualties.

Recently in the news we have been given clues as to who the casualties will be, and who will be carrying on in the rather overly warm world of our near future.

Newspapers have been reporting that human male births are declining in proportion to females. All over the world the trend is that about 17 fewer males per 1000 are now being born than in past decades. This is despite the fact that many extremely pro-male cultures are using sex selection techniques and female infanticide to murder millions of girls. For example in China there are tens of millions of excess males rampaging around at the moment. Same in India. Earth's two most populous countries. This imbalance will tip the other way soon.

Why are fewer males being born? For the same reason that their sperm count is going down, down, down. Patriarchy took very little time to create a self defeating ecological niche for itself. All the huffing and puffing of the peacock patriarchs has resulted in a fetid climate of carbon excess. The world is awash with pollutants. The surface of the world's oceans is covered in a minute layer of broken down plastics. The water we drink and the food most people eat is saturated in renegade hormones.

Infertility is therefore rampaging through the testicles of men. Their little sperms are becoming quite deformed and immobile and seriously depleted in numbers. Women are not quite so infertile because our eggs are all there when we are born. Men make theirs daily and the little mites are suffocating in the murky atmosphere of chemical concoctions.

As well as that the male Y chromosome is only a broken X with very little going for it apart from creating creatures with a very aggressive drive to survive. So aggressive that they have succeeded in putting in place a mechanism for their own demise. They colonized the double X people (wombon). But like all colonizers they gorged on their exploited wealth and are about to implode.

The adult Y chromosome is a kind of parasite. It depends on wombon

for birth, for nourishment, for nurture, for tying its shoelaces and washing its clothes. It is incapable of self creation or self care. The embryonic Y chromosome is also a parasite. When it enters the vagina it is instantly attacked by the woman's self defense (immune) system. Unfortunately it has devised ways to get through. Ways it also used during the First World War. Sending in huge numbers to be slaughtered and overwhelm the defenses.

Now that their numbers are seriously declining they have an inkling that the end is nigh. That is why reproductive technologies are almost a religion to them. They have figured out how to extract the one reasonably healthy surviving sperm specimen and inject it into a woman's ovum. They have even figured out how to clone themselves. They can extract the nucleus from a woman's ovum and insert their own DNA to be birthed by a female oven (known as a surrogate mother). They are hoping for a production line of robotic women who produce male clones.

Dream on boys. Recently there was quite a kerfuffle in the gutter press when it was realized that women could use these technologies to produce lesbian's children. Offspring with a mix of the two mother's genes. Now that they consider immoral and unendurable.

I'm not that in favor of it myself. For different reasons. These technologies are unnatural, dangerous and expensive. Not to mention male controlled.

Why not take the natural route to reproduction: parthenogenesis.

What is parthenogenesis? Another term for it is Virgin Birth. It occurs when a woman has a child without the interference of a male. After ovulation a woman's egg is triggered to begin reproductive division and forms a fetus. This fetus develops and is born as a daughter who has received all her genes from her mother only.

As the victim of patriarchal re-productive propaganda you might be surprised to realize that parthenogenesis is common. Over 1000 other species reproduce by parthenogenesis. It is not scientifically accepted that mammals reproduce in this way. However it is common knowledge that women's eggs do parthenogenesize quite often.

For example, when Dr. Edwards was engineering the first "test tube baby" he was trying to fertilise eggs in a test tube. He kept a number of eggs which he did not expose to sperm. (Using such a 'control population' is common scientific practise.) He found that 5% of these underwent parthenogenetic development.

Of course men are not interested in parthenogenesis because it is a female only form of reproduction which totally excludes them and can't be achieved by

them. So in the process of developing cloning and other forms of reproduction it has been almost totally ignored. Even though it would be much easier, for example, to produce clones and stem cells (which they so desire for medical research) from parthenogenic eggs which are quite plentiful.

Indeed in their frantic search for cloning they accidentally discovered parthenogenesis.

If parthenogenesis is so common why haven't we seen many such spontaneous births to women? After all if 5% of our ovulations result in parthenogenesis. That would mean, in theory, that we all should have become pregnant with a parthenogenetic daughter several times in our reproductive lives. At one ovulation a month that might mean once every 8 years or so.

Well, of course there has been a hitch. Yes it is true that very often our ovulated eggs begin to form an embryo quite spontaneously. However, we have been heterosexually colonized. In heterosexual (human) reproduction the gene for placenta formation in women has been switched off. This is caused by the genes we inherit from fathers. This means that, though a fetus begins to form, it can't implant itself in the uterus. Thus it is flushed out or forms a cyst.

Why has this gene been turned off? Because parthenogenesis is the natural form of reproduction. It is how women used to reproduce until they were colonized by the male virus. It is the male of the species who has imposed heterosex on us for his own reasons. Because he cannot survive without us he has tried to convince us we cannot survive without him. The truth is the exact opposite.

All mammalian males are in fact derived from an original female state. All warm blooded foetuses are female up until about 6 weeks of growth, at which point those bearing the Y chromosome receive infusions of male hormones and 'become' male.

This primary femaleness of the mammalian foetus occurs for biochemical reasons. The birth of live young requires a prolonged intramaternal growth time, and the early foetus would not be able to survive chemically within the womb if it weren't hormonally female, like the mother.

The female body is hostile to sperm. What's more, the male body, being derived from the female body, is also hostile to sperm! Amazingly sperm have to have special cells, called Sertoli cells, to protect them from normal human cells.

Now why should one human cell have to be protected from other human cells in order to survive in the human body? The reason is that it contains

a deadly virus. This virus has invaded us by mutating a viable fraction (approximately half) of females into carriers of the virus. Males are these carriers. This virus is a very efficient parasite.

By destroying the original form of reproduction, the parasite caused a form of cancer. Cancer is when a cell is damaged and begins to reproduce itself out of all proportion. The invasion of the sperm carried virus has caused a form of 'species cancer' on the body of the Mother earth.

This viral infection has propagated itself by turning off the maternal gene for placenta formation. The accidental discovery of parthenogenesis, whilst searching for ways to clone, was simply a discovery of how to overcome this disabling genetic switch.

When Dolly the Sheep was cloned, I wrote to Ian Wilmut the technological 'father' of Dolly and asked him how he had overcome that block. (As there was nothing about it in any of the publicity.) He wrote back and told me the good news. The gene for placenta formation is not turned off in the nuclei of our adult (non-reproductive) cells.

Once again this is conformation that parthenogenesis is the true natural form of reproduction.

Most people believe the widely propagated myth that heterosexual reproduction is essential for genetic diversity. Science has always told us. If we didn't have mixing up of genes from mother's and father's families we would all atrophy and be unable to adapt to environmental challenges and changes.

Guess what. This is not true. In more recent decades it has been revealed that even in parthenogenetic species there is variation and adaptation. They have also realized that mutations caused by the Y chromosome actually don't advance the species, but cause it to decline. Robust parthenogenetic species are in fact better survivors.

Pondering this in a scientific article published as long ago as 1987 the professor of biology at Boston University said:

"Why should so many organisms invest time and energy in finding mates and producing special sex cells with half the usual number of chromosomes? Theoretically, asexual organisms without the distraction of needing to look for a mate not only use less energy in reproducing but can also reproduce more quickly. We believe that organisms do not need to acquire genes from a second parent for health or variation....

... Sexuality in animals is a product of a history in which sex became

entangled with reproduction.... the origin of sex in our ancestors at first was not something necessary or highly adaptive. Rather sex was a historic accident that we continually relive because it became so intimately involved with our development ... But ridding ourselves of it would be as easy as purging a city of electricity or plumbing (p. 39- 40).

Well maybe they can't, but I can easily imagine purging a city of electricity and plumbing.

To understand the significance of all this we have to suspend our naïve acceptance of the mythology of history as it has been told to us. Men have not always been dominant and we were not dragged around caves by our hair and raped in the pre-historic times. We only have to look at the real evidence. The thousands of female figurines recovered from the pre-historic archaeological records.

There was a time many thousands of years ago when women lived freely and peaceably. These times have been called matriarchal. Let us now reclaim them, for, when the female form was worshiped, when life giving was revered, when women only cultures thrived, wombon could reproduce themselves parthenogenetically.

At some point we were colonized both reproductively and culturally. This co-incided with the introduction of metallurgy, warfare, hierarchies, armies, palaces and weapons of destruction.

We once thought that these weapons of destruction might reach their culmination in nuclear weaponry. In fact the ultimate weapon of the Y chromosome virus was heterosexual reproduction and the subjugation of women. If we had retained control of our own reproduction we would have gone on living in harmony with the earth. The population would not have exploded exponentially to a point where we are poisoning our planet.

Most of us are concerned about the future. So much so that it is even contributing to the baby boom. Rather paradoxically I might add. Young lesbians are rushing to have babies. Young heterosexual women in Western societies are also feeling the urge to reproduce and causing a shortage of space in maternity hospitals. Why is this?

The earth is grossly overpopulated. It is groaning under the weight, losing breath from the deforestation, thirsting from the lack of sufficient water, tumbling before the hurricane winds, dizzy from the tornadoes, sickening from imbibing chemical concoctions. Surely there are too many of us and we should scale back for survival.

Yet we are not the rational creatures that patriarchy has tried to mold us into. Like all creatures we have a survival instinct. Faced with obvious signs of annihilation many feel the urge to propagate. To create progeny, to reproduce and ensure the survival of the species. Women have babies. Men make clones. Quite the wrong response – but individuals are driven by forces they don't perceive in their rational minds.

There is a race for survival here. But it is a little bit different to what most people expect.

The choice between patriarchal laboratory reproduction and parthenogenesis is upon us. Pollution will soon eliminate heterosexual intercourse in the form it has taken since the demise of pre-historical parthenogenesis. The choice between the two remaining reproductive options is every bit as pressing as the choice between the continuation of patriarchal economic/political structures which are destroying the planet and the resurgence of a matriarchal goddess focused earth revering spirituality as a path to natural survival on this planet.

Once again, I do not believe that these highly artificial technologically dependent methods of reproduction will ultimately prevail. It is my belief that parthenogenesis will spontaneously reassert itself in response to the phenomenon of the disappearing male and as an instinctive response to the danger of extinction.

Since news of these new developments have come out I have already seen women's consciousness shifting in response. One day I overheard two very conservative straight women in a country supermarket joke about the decline in sperm counts. They were laughing about the threatened decline of the male of the species.

Another time in a post office I witnessed the two women at the counter silence a male co-worker who was harassing them. One said to him "Anyway we don't need men any more. Cloning makes you irrelevant." The man slunk away out the back door and all the women in the post office joined in the collective laughter and glee that his superiority had been smashed. It was a telling moment.

For a long time women have tolerated the abuses of patriarchy not only because they were forced to - but also because they believed men were necessary for the survival of the species. It is beginning to sink in that this is not true. Of course reproductive technologies are so thoroughly patriarchal in construction and so thoroughly controlled by men that it is unlikely that women could, or would be allowed to, utilize these artificial methods for their own benefit.

Male reproductive scientists are happily predicting that all human (and most mammal) reproduction will be artificial in the near future. Ian Wilmut has written a book on cloning called "The Second Creation". Revealing that they do indeed see themselves as Gods.

Just as the planet is in crisis with its ecological survival in the balance, so is man in crisis. Will he survive? Heterosexual reproduction will most likely soon come to mean a technical procedure in a laboratory rather than a sexual act.

It is not inconceivable that viable human sperm will become extinct outside the laboratory within the next few decades. Scientists hope to defeat a dire destiny by perfecting techniques such as the removal of the sperm nuclei by pipette and later implantation in the ova.

There are startling implications. We don't know yet if these technologies will work as a mass form of reproduction. Scientists were very excited about Dolly the cloned sheep, but now they realize cloning from adult cells means the lamb is already as old as the adult sheep she was cloned from. If the rate of pollution continues apace the next generation of young men will not even have enough viable sperm to freeze for latter pipetting into women's ova.

Will the danger to their survival inspire men to end pollution? Somehow I doubt it, because ending pollution in the end would mean giving up the whole patriarchal, capitalist, power system. They will prefer to profit and store sperm. Once their sperm are stored the presence of men will no longer be necessary for reproduction. Patriarchy may be facing its own karma very soon. A world without men is a real possibility in the near future.

I have been writing about this for the last 20 years or so. And each year that passes more evidence comes out to prove me true.

There is only one more question to be answered. What is the trigger that will re-activate the genes for placenta formation – thus allowing spontaneous re-appearance of parthenogenesis? Science speaks of many triggers that work in various species. It is not so hard. Look at cloning. Cloning is really a bastardized adaption of parthenogenesis to enable male only reproduction. The guy who claimed to have produced the first human clone was debunked as a charlatan. It turned out he hadn't cloned but performed parthenogenesis!

Perhaps parthenogenesis may come about as a result of climatic changes caused by the greenhouse effect and ozone layer depletion. This is pure speculation. But environmental changes have biological effects. It is not

impossible that our time will simply come as a spontaneous result of the cataclysmic destruction hetero-patriarchy is inflicting on Nature. Survival is a strong instinct of Nature. A resurgence of wombonly culture over the seminal is certainly in the interests of planetary survival.

On the continent where I live tribal Australian Aboriginal women do not think of pregnancy as necessarily a result of copulation with men. The ancestral Djanggawul sisters of the Dreaming carried the totems of creation in their dilly bags and traveled about the land peopling the countryside with tribes from their bodies, until the men stole their dilly bags and forbade women ever to look upon the totems again.

Similar truths are embodied in the mythology of many cultures.

The following evidence, about the Matriarchal Neolithic culture of Old Europe, I have found primarily in the work of Marija Gimbutas¹.

Look at the diagrams taken from artifacts of the 4th millennium B.C. (from Gimbutas). See the reoccurrence of the Egg and the egg splitting motifs. Note the similarity of the egg splitting motifs to the diagrammatic representations of eggs splitting depicted in modern biology texts.

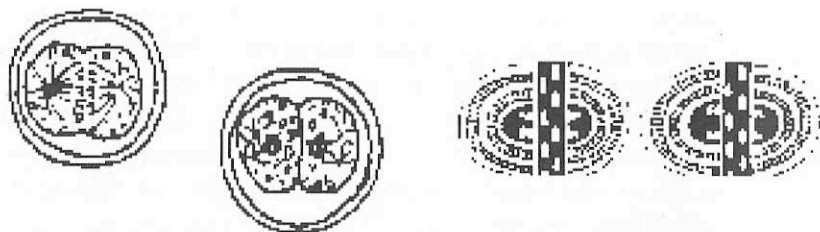


Fig.1 from Marija Gimbutas, *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe*, p.168.

Figure 1: Diagrammatic representations of eggs splitting. On left is a ruptured egg motif on the hem of a skirt worn by the goddess. Late Minoan. On Right; egg splitting motif on a vase from the Royal Tomb of Isopata at Knossos.

Eggs are decorated in these patterns to this day in Ukraine by women at Easter (the festival of the Goddess Oester). It was not only the egg, but double egg motifs that were immortalized in their art. There was a proliferation of double egg shaped bowls and vases.

¹ Marija Gimbutas, *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974).

See also "The Language of the Goddess" (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989).

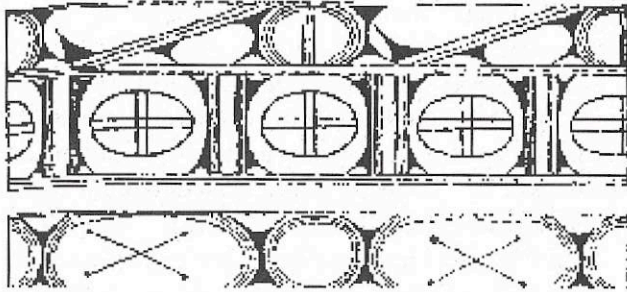


Fig.2

Ibid, p.103

Figure 2: Bands of eggs, from the shoulders of Cucuteni B vases. W.Ukraine, 3900-3700 b.c. According to Gimbutas the cross or X indicates inherent energy.

All the goddess figures of the paleolithic and neolithic eras have protruding bums. There are no pregnant bellies. It was the egg, the potential within woman, that was worshiped.

... The symbols of becoming eggs, crescents, horns, and crosses within circles and concentric circles were engraved and painted over the female bodies or on votive vases. Both an egg split into two halves and twins were concepts emphasized throughout Her many representations. Around 4000 BC a layered and split egg became the emblem of the goddess and continued in evidence throughout the Minoan and Mycenaean period. The constant portrayal of twin crescents, or two does with opposed bodies reflects the magical potency of a splitting pair.

A supreme Creator who creates from her own substance is the primary goddess of the Old European pantheon. In this she contrasts with the (later) Indo European Earth Mother, who is the impalpable sacred earth spirit and is not in herself a creative principle, only through the interaction of the male sky god does she become pregnant.

It was in the patriarchally corrupted Indo European era that the pregnant bellied goddess figurines began to dominate. In those earlier times it was the posterior, the pelvis, the twin ovaries, that were eulogized.

The double egg symbol found on the back or the front of the East Balkan and Cucuteni figurines is one of the most frequently encountered.... if such a ceramic figurine is sectioned one actually finds a double egg inside. They stand here for a universal life source. Countless anthropomorphic vases carry the twin egg symbol.

The parthenogenetic Great Goddess continued on into Greek and Roman times.

“The Lady of free and untamed nature and the Mother, protectress of

weaklings, a divinity in whom the contrasting principles of virginity and motherhood are fused into the concept of a single goddess, was venerated in Greece, Lydia Crete and Italy. She appears as Artemis and under many local names . . . and Diana in Rome” [my emphasis] (pp. 189-90).

This egg worship, was not simply some pagan mystification and adoration of eggs as symbols of life. There was a clear depiction of the two eggs within the pelvic region of a woman’s body. Surely this is a reference to the ovaries, as the source of woman’s life giving eggs. The constant re occurrence of egg splitting motifs indicates an awareness of the egg dividing to multiply itself. We may wonder how women were aware of this biological process 6000 years ago. They obviously had anatomical knowledge. And we cannot discount deeper forms of Knowing.

The Ancient Great Mother of All Living gave birth parthenogenetically, without a male, to Herself and the entire Cosmos. She was the World Egg, containing the two halves.²

Upon the cosmic egg spirals the snake, the spiraling universes, the whorl of the waters, the in and out breath of the cosmos. This is the real form of creation. This was how the universe was seen before the big bang theory of the linear minded male.

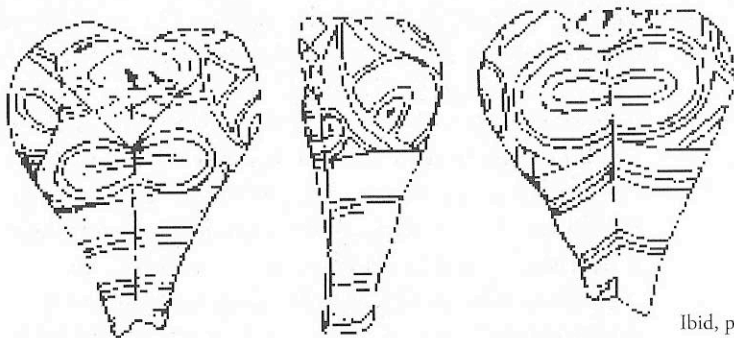


Fig.3

Ibid, p.167

Figure 3: Figurines with double-eggs inside and double-eggs carved on buttocks and thighs. Classical Cucuteni, Soviet Moldavia, c. 4,500 b.c.

It is time for us to re create an archetypal way of life in which womb can reproduce ourselves with integrity. Through reaching back to what we have known and forward to what we can know, we can re create our future.

2 Monica Sjoo *The Great Cosmic Mother* (Norway: Rainbow Press, 1981), p. 15.

A greatly expanded version, written with Barbara Mor, has been published in the U.S. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).

Susan Hawthorne

Do Lesbians have Human Rights?

Paper given at *Rainbow Conversations*
Asia-Pacific Human Rights Conference
Outgames, Melbourne Town Hall
31 January 2008*

This talk comes out of more than thirty years of activism as a feminist and as a lesbian. It also arises from concentrated writing about lesbians over the last five years. My decision to be a lesbian almost thirty-five years ago changed my life irrevocably – and for the better. Without that decision, I believe that I would not have – and could not have – done half the things I have. Nor would I have been able to participate so actively in a community of equals, a community of lesbians with whom I share so much – sexuality, politics, intellectual pursuits, physical challenges, cultural and emotional connections, as well as the ability to have fun! I say this, because in the world of heteronormativity, finding these like-minded spirits was the exception rather than the norm. Within the heteronormative world, I found a world of ingrained patterning that was hard to escape or diverge from, and an intellectual laziness that meant just sailing along with the rest of the world. By deciding to be a lesbian, I gave that up and entered a world many elements of which are starkly visible to the lesbian, and invisible or at best greyly receding to the non-lesbian. What follows is what I see through my lesbian lens: the lack of respect for lesbians, distortions of lesbian existence, human rights abuses of lesbians (are lesbians human?) and extreme violence and murder perpetrated against lesbians as individuals and as a group.

Lack of respect for equality of lesbians.

These are minor human rights infringements; nevertheless, they count and are part of the system that excludes lesbians as citizens with human rights. In Australia there remain 58 laws that discriminate against lesbians and gays.

- Unequal tax regimes. NZ economist, Prue Hyman, has shown that

* Thanks to readers for their feedback on the development of this essay. To Lavender for points of law; to Carolyn Gage for forwarding me information about lesbians in Iraq; to Renate Klein for her critical eye, careful editing and loving support.

lesbians do less well than heterosexual men, heterosexual women and gay men when compared within social class and culture (Hyman 2001; Badgett 1996, Hawthorne 2006c).

- Inability to access the Health Safety Net. When I filled in the form with my partner we were refused (HREOC 2007: 253-8).

- Legal discrimination against lesbians in areas such as adoption and marriage.¹ (HREOC 2007).

- Some remaining inequalities in access to IVF along with single women – although this is not an area I'd go into battle for because of the health risks of IVF to both children and women, I nevertheless note it as an issue of discrimination (Klein 2004: 3). I argue elsewhere that the biotechnology industry promotes the potential to eliminate people on the basis of sexual orientation, specifically the elimination of lesbians and gay men and people with disabilities (Hawthorne 2008). And further, that the search for the gay gene will do nothing to end discrimination against those whose sexual orientation is not hetero (Rogers 1994: 33). I argue that this project of heterosexualising is every bit as violent as the colonising project is on Indigenous people (Atkinson 2002), or as the normalisation of people with disabilities. Cultural hegemony is alive and well and used against lesbians. Indeed, in the context of biotechnology, some lesbians are offered “access”, but at the cost of taking on the wardrobe of heterosexuality. An irony to say the least, having just left the comfort of the closet!

Lack of respect for lesbians' cultural and social rights.

- Lack of respect for lesbian culture, including the assumption that lesbians have no culture(s) and no distinct cultural rituals or norms. This includes the “symbolic annihilation” (Hopkins 2008: 276) of lesbians in misrepresentations of lesbians on TV, in theatre, literature and other areas of arts and culture.

- Lack of respect for lesbians to frame their culture in their own ways, e.g. the creation of lesbian-only spaces; of women-born spaces such as LesFest in Melbourne (Hawthorne 2003a). There have been many challenges to lesbians to create and control those spaces: the Lesbian Space in Sydney, the legal challenges to LesFest in Melbourne and against Sappho's Party

¹ These also apply to gay men, but bisexual and transgender people could access them should their relationship have the appearance of heterosexuality.

in Adelaide. Spiderlily Redgold makes a call for lesbians activists to find a “positive way forward as allies of transpeople ... without relinquishing lesbian gender identity rights” (Redgold 2007: 1). Similar challenges to lesbians by transpeople however have also occurred internationally e.g. when I tried to run a lesbian-only session at the 2004 World Social Forum in Mumbai to discuss the issue of the torture of lesbians (Hawthorne 2007a). All these spaces have been entered or legally challenged by male to constructed female (M2CF) transgendered peoples. At the same Social Forum, a women-only session on Muslim Women’s Sexuality was not gatecrashed by men or transgendered people. I support the Muslim Women to close the doors to anyone to keep such a discussion safe. I would like the same respect accorded to the human rights of lesbians. Internationally there are protections for the right to free association contained in, for example, the United States Constitution, the European Convention on Human Rights, and Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Interestingly, in 2007, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal granted a pub an exemption to the Equal Opportunity Act 1995 in order to restrict entry to gay men. I have no issue with gay men wanting their own spaces (Schembri 2007: 7), but the same VCAT had not previously supported applications for separate spaces for either heterosexual women or lesbians. In the first instance, the Women’s Circus was not permitted to exclude transsexuals – this in spite of the fact that in the Women’s Circus (as in any circus) physical closeness and trust is critical, and furthermore that a priority group for intake is survivors of sexual assault (2000); in the second case LesFest was not permitted to keep it a women-born lesbian only festival (2003).

- Lack of respect for lesbian identity. Other identities such as class, ethnicity, religion and the like usually get precedence. Disability and lesbian identity tend to fight it out for the bottom rung. But disability has the dubious “advantage”, politically speaking of being unchosen.² Many lesbians resist the idea that there is a gene (that some gay men go for) or that we were born into the wrong body (the claim of most transgender peoples), or were assigned the wrong body (a trauma that intersex people have to contend with). These political positions are in stark contrast to the position taken by many lesbians that we actively chose to be lesbians. The issue of identity is well put by a Peruvian lesbian (name undisclosed):

² For further discussion of the intent to eliminate people with disabilities and non-heterosexual individuals, see Hawthorne 2008.

When I speak of my right to my own culture and language as an indigenous woman, everyone agrees to my self-determination. But when I speak of my other identity, my lesbian identity, my right to love, to determine my own sexuality, no one wants to listen (*ILIS Newsletter* 1994,13).

- Lack of respect for lesbian history and the problem of negative space. Indian writer Giti Thadani (1996 and 2004) documents the way in which ancient (5000 years old) archaeological sites sacred to women's bodies and likely to represent lesbian history are being systematically desecrated. We know of many desecrations of Indigenous sacred sites, of sites such as Bamiyan in Afghanistan and there are public outcries (even if too late).³ Where are the outcries and protests to protect lesbian sites? Is it the problem of negative space – of lacunae⁴ – as Monique Wittig (1970) put it, in the circles she uses in *The Guérillères*?

- Or, to go a step further, that the lesbian is considered a nonsense. This represents the strong patriarchal position held by very conservative men, most of whom back it up with religion. Some right-wing women also hold this position. It is based on the notion that heterosexuality is not only natural, but ordained by a higher order and that therefore lesbian sexuality is logically inconceivable. As Iranian lesbian, Shagayegh says,

... sexual attraction to another woman is *haram* and blasphemy; if it is revealed, you are killed (Parsi 2007: 3).

In recent years, Iran has moved to approve transgender operations as a way of eliminating homosexuality and lesbianism. The question has to be raised whether the creation of a medical disorder is simply the latest way of manufacturing social oblivion around lesbians? The outcome is that the former same-sex relationship is transformed into a relationship with a heterosexual appearance (Mangez 2005). Lesbian existence is further removed into the realm of impossibility.

Lack of respect for lesbians' civil and political rights including verbal and physical abuse.

³ Also see Hawthorne 2007b.

⁴ In *The Guérillères*, Wittig refers to lacunae, spaces, gaps, and she includes three pages of the text that include a single circle; p.3, p.51 and p.105. I read these as a reference to the invisible spaces that lesbians inhabit but are not seen to inhabit.

- Unchallenged hate speech. In the 2004 Federal Election, a Family First campaign worker said that lesbians should be burnt at the stake. Almost any other group facing such hate-filled sentiments would be supported by an outcry. There was barely a whisper (Hawthorne 2004a; Hawthorne 2004b).

- When lesbians speak up on behalf of lesbians or even to celebrate lesbians, we are belittled and accused of dividing women. In 2005 in Korea at the World Women's Conference, there was a final celebration that all attendees were invited to perform at. Bronwyn Winter from Sydney and I offered to perform a poem each. During the conference, we had discovered that young Korean lesbians needed all the support they could get and some had made badges which said, *Lesbian is Good*. I read my poem, "Oil and Water" (Hawthorne 2005b: 220-1), written to express my solidarity with Iraqi lesbians, and Bronwyn read her brand new poem, "Lesbian is Good". Following the conference, we were castigated by an unknown person for apparently speaking *for* Iraqi and Korean lesbians and for dividing the audience. Our performance was labelled an inappropriate cultural practice. But Korean lesbians told us they were thrilled to have their existence validated.⁵ Indian lesbians face the same problem, as is indicated in the Caleri Report (Campaign for Lesbian Rights):

The word 'lesbian' is "...so loaded with fear and embarrassment and prejudice, a word shrouded in silence, a whisper that spoke of an identity that must be hidden from others, that frightening word that dare not cross the threshold" (Caleri Report 1999:17).

Using the word 'lesbian' provokes what Indian writer Maya Sharma calls a "discourse of catastrophe" (Sharma 2006: 38). This is a softer form of the lack of respect for lesbian civil and political rights, but no less damaging than the idea that lesbian existence is a nonsense.

Part of that brittle silence is one's own self-censoring behaviour which is particularly evident in cultural settings that are not one's own. The silence shifts between "personalised silence" within a social, political and cultural context as well as the self-silencing of the person coming in from outside that context.

⁵ For more on the situation of lesbians in Korea see Park (2005).

The problem of linguistic silence and lesbian invisibility

- In many places and situations silence and invisibility are expected. The problem of invisibility of lesbians in India is indicated by the omission of the word lesbian from the glossary of an otherwise useful handbook, *A Guide to Your Rights: Legal Handbook for Sexual Minorities in India*. The glossary does include bisexual, homosexual and transgender. I point out, however, that this is not exclusive to Indian organisations, since the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) in the USA in 2005 had precisely the same kind of omission from its list of keywords for conference presentations. The keyword list included Sexuality, the Body, Identity, Homosexuality and Transgender, but not Lesbian. Many Australian women's and gay organisations habitually leave out lesbians.

What is the relationship between the social and cultural development of women and men and the bodily experiences of women and men? Lesbians are not only marginalised physically and politically, but also because of a kind of inclusivity that continues to screen out lesbian existence. I am referring here to the invisibilising that happens under the rubric of terms such as queer, sexual minorities, LGBTI, transgender, same sex, homosexual, diverse sexualities and non-conforming sexualities. There is a need to be able to speak about sexuality in broad fora, as suggested by these terms, but there remains the continuing need to highlight the ways in which different sexualities defy the hegemonic ideology. Lesbians resist the dominant hegemonic position in multiple ways – some of which are specific to lesbians and not LGBTIs who will each have their own specific forms of resistance. I suggest that marginalisation occurs whenever an all-encompassing term is used (Hawthorne 2007a).

- Silencing can also result in the defamation of a lesbian, as in the case when an Iranian newspaper, *Sharq*, interviewed expatriate Soghi Ghahraman about her poetry. Two days later, the newspaper published the following statement:

...we publish this announcement to declare that *Sharq* newspaper is against this person and the movement she represents (Hossein 2007).

- Lesbians are canaries in the mine. In 1995, Tsitsi Tiripano, a lesbian activist and member of GALZ (Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe) was attacked at the Zimbabwe Book Fair. These days, almost everyone in

Zimbabwe is attacked. But who protested for Tsitsi Tiripano in 1995? One woman said:

How can we expect our black lesbian sisters to find their voice in our society when they cannot even speak for themselves within their own families (Amnesty International 1998: E43).

Lack of respect for lesbians' bodily integrity

- Attacks on bodily integrity by family. In Zimbabwe in the mid-1980s Tina Machida was violated at the instigation of her parents in an effort to "cure" her of her lesbian existence. She writes:

They locked me in a room and brought him every day to rape me so I would fall pregnant and be forced to marry him. They did this to me until I was pregnant (Machida 1996, 123).

This, and the forced marriage of Tsitsi Tiripano are violations of lesbians' human rights, including the right over their own bodies, to be free from violence or forced pregnancy.⁶

- Attacks on bodily integrity by the LGBT community. San Francisco LGBT International Film Festival, Frameline, pulled a short 15 minute science fiction film, *The Gendercator*, by lesbian filmmaker Catherine Crouch from its film festival program in June 2007 because of the film's purported "transphobic" content and because the transgender audience said they would boycott the festival if it was shown. In a petition to the organisers, Lenn Keller, Max Dashu, Joey Brite and Martha Shelley, wrote:

A lesbian voice is being silenced here. In the current climate of fear, we find it necessary to state that critiquing or asking questions about issues affecting our communities should not be confused with judgment or condemnation or, in this case, 'transphobia'.

⁶ For more on Tsitsi Tiripano's story see Smith (2000). Tsitsi Tiripano [pseudonym] was fifteen when she was forced into marriage to a man 40 years her elder. She was his second wife and the marriage was arranged by her christian father. After being married for only one year and nine months and pregnant with her second son, Tiripano ran away from her rural hometown to the city and moved in with her lesbian lover. Her family and husband looked for her but never found her in the city. In 1992, Tsitsi joined an organization called Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) and has been an activist fighting for the rights and recognition of gays and lesbians in Zimbabwe ever since (Smith 2000: 6). She died in 2001.

Many have complained about the lack of lesbian content in the festival, and Frameline has chosen to silence one of the few voices. We think the LGBT community has been done a disservice. We, the undersigned stand for human dignity, rights, and freedom of expression for all (Keller, Dashu, Brite and Shelley 2007).

The Gendercator is a science fiction film that tells a satirical futuristic story of the forced gender realignment surgery on butch lesbians. In this world “gender variants are allowed to choose their gender, but they must choose one and follow its rigid constraints” (Crouch 2007). Some among the transgender audience read this as a positive story, but lesbians who do not wish to inhabit any body other than the one they have, feel the violence of such a story. It resembles the forced marriage of young heterosexual girls in India (Moschetti 2006), the forced pregnancy of lesbians in contemporary Zimbabwe (1996), and transgender operations in Iran (Mangez 2005). Crouch continues,

Our distorted cultural norms are making women feel compelled to use medical advances to change themselves, instead of working to change the world. This is one story, showing one possible scary future. I am hopeful that this story will foster discussion about female body modification and medical ethics (Crouch 2007).

The withdrawal of *The Gendercator* is a violation of lesbians’ right to create images of lesbians that reflect our own experience - not as they are presented by individuals, groups or companies outside the lesbian community.

Torture and murder of lesbians

- Attacks on lesbians by secular authorities, including governments. In 1976 in Chile, Consuelo Rivera-Fuentes was tortured by the Pinochet regime. In writing of her experience in an article jointly authored with her partner she writes,

... all wave after wave of electricity, no control ... I am losing control of myself ... I can't stop the shit, the piss, the tears, the jerks, the yells (Rivera-Fuentes and Birke 2001, 655; italics and ellipses in original).

But also, the torturers imply that her torture is all her fault (not unusual

in situations of torture). If only she would do what is best for her, she would not have to suffer. In fact, he, the torturer, will help her by raping her, by showing her what a real man can do for her, how what she needs is “a good fuck, from real men” (Rivera-Fuentes and Birke 2001, 656).

- Attacks on lesbians by religious authorities. Nazanin, an Iranian lesbian says,

The punishment for lesbians is most definitely execution. Before execution they are raped, which is a mental torment worse than death (Nazanin in Parsi 2007: 4).

She goes on to explain why the families are silent about the rape and execution of their daughters. It is, “to save face for the families involved ... it is a cause for disgrace” (Nazanin in Parsi 2007: 4).⁷ Rape, torture, silence, shame and hatred all combine so that no one ever hears of the violations of lesbians’ human rights. It’s invisible; it’s like it doesn’t exist. Like lesbians don’t exist.

- Attacks on lesbians by individuals. On September 29, 2004, FannyAnn Eddy a lesbian activist from Sierra Leone was found dead.⁸ She had been working in the offices of the Sierra Leone Lesbian and Gay Association (Human Rights Watch, 4 October 2004, cited in Morgan and Wieringa 2005, 20). A few months before her death she made the following plea to the UN Commission on Human Rights⁹:

Silence creates vulnerability. You, members of the Commission on Human Rights, can break the silence. You can acknowledge that we exist, throughout Africa and on every continent, and that human rights violations based on sexual orientation or gender identity are committed every day. You can help us combat those violations and achieve our full rights and freedoms, in every society, including my beloved Sierra Leone (Eddy 2004).

⁷ Saving face for families is not limited to Iran. In many countries, litigation, as well as religious and social shame can prevent revelation of the sexual orientation of victims of crime, of suicide – even double suicides.

⁸ Early reports of her death said that she has been repeatedly raped, and her neck broken. In June 2005 one man was charged with her murder (Mathope 2005).

⁹ Eddy was on a delegation of activists sponsored by the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) and Human Rights Watch. She attended the annual session of the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva in April 2004.

- Attacks on lesbians despite constitutional protections. In South Africa, there is constitutional protection against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. In spite of this, lesbians experience the same kind of invisibilisation and marginalisation (see Morgan and Wieringa 2005).

On 8 July 2007 two South African lesbian activists, Sizakele Sigasa and Salome Masooa, were murdered (Pers.Comm. 2007). To the question, Is law the answer? I say it is not enough.

Fear of the word lesbian as bad for humanitarian campaigns

- Lesbians invisible in campaigns for refugees. In 2007, when Iranian lesbian, Pegah Emambakhsh was about to be deported from Britain there was an email campaign that stayed her deportation, but on the whole lesbian refugees have not even hit the radar of refugee activists.¹⁰

An unnamed lesbian refugee from Iran says of her experience:

In Kashan they tied me to a car and pulled me across the ground. What should I say, who should I say it to? ... Why doesn't anyone listen to us? Where is this 'human rights'? (Darya and Baran 2007: 2).¹¹

- Lesbians disregarded as needing help. In 2007, when gay congressman Jared Polis visited Iraq and Jordan to see for himself the situation of gays, lesbians and transgenders he had this conversation with a Jordanian woman.

The otherwise personable and even liberal Iraqis and Jordanians with whom I talked, found homosexuality extremely unpleasant to even talk about. Faiza, an Iraqi refugee who is helping to organize empowerment programs for women in Jordan and Iraq, was dismayed when I told her I was looking to work with a relief agency to help gays and lesbians. 'Why they help lesbians? Widows and orphans need help, and they help lesbian???' she said in broken English (Polis: 2007).

- Lesbians at risk from other oppressed individuals. In many places (documented in Uganda, Russia, Romania and USA), when lesbians are imprisoned or incarcerated in mental institutions they run the risk of being raped. They are raped (a) by the guards, and (b) by their fellow inmates

¹⁰ There are rare exceptions including the case of Pegah Emambakhsh. In 2001, Canada admitted its first lesbian refugees who were a couple from Mexico (Godfrey 2001). An interesting aside, this article on lesbian refugees is indexed under gay men!

¹¹ For more on lesbian refugees, see Hawthorne 2005a.

in mixed prisons or institutions (there is a similar threat to heterosexual women, but the rape of lesbians is punishment for not wanting sex with men).¹²

Where are the campaigns for lesbians' human rights? I recently wrote to Amnesty International protesting their use in a campaign against child execution of a photograph of two teenage boys executed in Iraq. I protested the fact that there was no acknowledgement that the boys were executed for their sexual orientation. I also asked what Amnesty was doing for the human rights of lesbians. Although they are one of the few organisations that carry out research on the torture of lesbians, I am concerned at the ongoing invisibility of lesbians. In the Amnesty campaign against violence against women, the assumption is that all women are heterosexual. In the Amnesty publication about human rights of gays, lesbians and transgenders, the research is heavily reliant on information about gay men and transgenders. Lesbians remain a sideline. I am still waiting for an answer to my questions.

In a recent conversation with two well-educated adults when I mentioned I was giving this paper, they said "but aren't lesbians' human rights the same as the human rights of all people and of women". I said "yes, lesbians suffer torture, rape, and murder but there are no campaigns for lesbians' human rights."

When a group of people is so systematically excluded, even by those who hold progressive views, one has to wonder what is going on. What is at the root of this silence, of this invisibility, of this negative space?

A lesbian life, whether lived in silence or in outspoken rebelliousness, remains a challenge to the male-dominated, male-defined political and social system. Lesbians are like escapees. Even those who present as business women or mothers of growing children or as Unitarian ministers or some other acceptable face of the straight capitalist white-dominated, patriarchal society, create a ripple, a whisper: *these women can do it on their own. They don't need men.*

The problem is just as the Jordanian woman and the critic of our Korean performance suggest, lesbians give humanitarianism a bad name.

In April 2006, speaking about violence perpetrated against lesbians and unhusbanded heterosexual women at a conference in South Africa (Hawthorne 2006b) I was asked by a man in the audience why I was such a man hater. At another conference in the USA, when I protested that sadomasochism was an appropriation of the suffering of the victims of

¹² For a detailed discussion of the torture of lesbians, see Hawthorne 2006a.

torture, I was ostracised.¹³ To name perpetrators of violence, to challenge those who imitate violence and call it exciting is apparently not on. When sadistic imitations of lynching are carried out, do they deserve to be reprimanded, charged and punished? Most people in this society think they do. When soldiers dressed in Ku Klux Klan hoods were photographed behind Aboriginal soldiers in 2004, this was recognised as a clear case of racism and those involved were reprimanded (AAP 2004). Put women in place of the black soldiers and it is regarded as simply a sexual buzz? (Hawthorne 2006a; Clarke 2004, Jeffreys 1993; 2003).

Are there any answers?

Consider the question: *Who is the human in human rights?*

When the phrase 'human rights' is used, what image comes to your mind? For each of us it is probably different, but think of the campaigns you have seen. In my lifetime I have seen photographs used in many campaigns including images of Tibetan monks, men tortured in prisons from South America to the Middle East, Asian girls, young African men, refugee mothers with children in the Sudan and the Balkans – and others. On rare occasions, I have seen a gay man. I have never seen a lesbian, and very rarely a campaign for lesbians' human rights. Indeed at times human rights appear so male focussed that many have asked, "Are women's rights human rights?" Lesbians face at least double, and frequently multiple, barriers to their rights being considered human rights, as I have made clear in this paper.

Here are some suggestions as to what can be done:

- *Use the word lesbian often.* Nowhere in this paper have I suggested that other groups be denied their rights, but I call for the rights of lesbians to be recognised as well. It is clear that violations of lesbians' human rights intersect with violations against people on the basis of ethnicity, sex, cultural background, ability/disability, religion, class, caste and poverty, as well as sexuality. But when the issue of torture is raised, who speaks of the violations of lesbians? Who speaks of the intra-family violence meted out to lesbians? In Beijing in 1995, the demands about lesbians were removed so as not to offend the Vatican and Saudi Arabia. Whose rights count? Does anyone care for the rights of lesbians?
- *Do not silence lesbians even if you disagree. Argue rather than boycotting.* Silencing is insidious. It works wonders in keeping the abused

¹³ See my discussion in Hawthorne 2006a.

away from public view, away from public consciousness. If you ignore the plight of lesbians, just as in Zimbabwe, who will be next? As filmmaker Catherine Crouch writes:

I hope *The Gendercator* can lead to further discussion between transgender people and lesbians. Even if this discussion causes us to feel uncomfortable, we must talk about the rift and the reasons for the rift in our community. I believe that we in the alphabet community are all a part of the same family, and we must find a way for constructive dialogue. I think that we can find a way to respect our differences and understand our commonalities (Crouch 2007).

- *Accord lesbians the same human rights as others.* When an Indigenous or Muslim woman asks for women-only space, with rare exceptions (that are then considered violations), these wishes are rightly respected. When gay men call for their own space, their right (is rightly) defended.

- *Do not put lesbians in the too hard basket to wait until after the revolution.* The revolution will never come. It is an ongoing struggle and lesbians must be a part of it. For years lesbians have been active in many campaigns for social justice everywhere in the world, but how many activists in those campaigns give support to campaigns for social justice for lesbians?

- *Do not contribute to the atmosphere of fear or bad publicity.* As Indian researcher Maya Sharma says, there are "... many silences that fall in between the uttered and the unutterable" (Sharma. 2006:104).

- *Be proud of the lesbians in your life.* Support them, celebrate with them. Cry with them when necessary. Protest with them when lesbians' rights are violated.

These are not calls to change the attitudes of the distant past. To repeat: in 2007 in South Africa, lesbians are murdered, in spite of constitutional protection on the basis of sexual orientation. In 2005 in Seoul, two Australian lesbians are criticised for "dividing the audience" by reading lesbian poems. In the 2004 Australian election campaign, a Family First campaign worker joked about burning lesbians at the stake. Over the last

decade in Australia, lesbian-only space is challenged by M2CF transsexuals and gay men's space is defended.

Who among the non-lesbian community will stand up and voice their horror at the human rights abuses of lesbians? Will it be gay men and transgender people who share so much, but from whom support is so conditional? Will it be the bisexual and queer community who claim an openness to sexual orientation, but so often let down lesbians? Will it be the heterosexual women, or are lesbians just too dicey to risk making an alliance with? Or will it be left to the heterosexual men who have nothing to fear except themselves? As Gillian Hanscombe says:

No one is proud of dykes (not families not neighbours not friends not workmates not bosses not teachers not mentors not universities not literature societies not any nation not any ruler not any benefactor not any priest not any healer not any advocate). Only other dykes are proud of dykes (Hanscombe 1992: 7).

Next time you hear of a lesbian sidelined, ignored, silenced, punished, assaulted, killed for her sexuality, don't wonder why, do something. When lesbian spaces are created, respect those places as centres for women born to women's bodies and cultures, and for women who love other women and want to be with them. When a lesbian speaks, don't shout her down, don't assume her world has no relevance for you. Listen. You could learn something profound. When a lesbian's human rights are violated, turn around and see who will be next.

For the future, I am guardedly hopeful. The information available on the Internet is much deeper than it was when I began my research in 2002. But as I have made clear in this paper, there is a lot more to be done. In 2008, there are moves in Australia to bring in a national Human Rights Charter. *Now is the time to lobby your federal and state politicians and make them aware of the importance of lesbians' human rights.* Write to the papers, talk on radio, let others know that lesbian issues are human issues.

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Margo Solod

Mineral/Animal

We were damaged just before the glaze,
before the firing, clay still wet –
look close, you can see hairline cracks;
and stains, the slow slow seeping out
of something – until now unnamed.

Their lies were coiled tight
around our lips our tongues were tied
before they'd fully formed.

Both our bodies molded
by those hands forced on us
suddenly –
marked, distorted, capable
of holding only silence. Until now –
the seeping's started,

We're together now and chewing through
our bonds like feral animals,
teeth sharp as shards of fear,
your bloody lips held out for me to kiss

We tell each other's stories,
the endings fuse together in our heat –
cracks widen, and our memories trickle out,
I cup yours in my hands, you gather
scraps of mine,
we feast.

Dianne Post

What's in a Name?

She was named all wrong at the beginning and it never got straightened out. Her name was to be Genevieve Elisabeth to have the same initials as her two older sisters but the drugs and a persnickety nurse wobbled her mother's mind and she could not spell the two long names. So she said "Rhonda Jean" and so she remained in the family and the world – the odd one out.

1947 was an unusually cold winter. In a few weeks Genevieve caught a bout of pneumonia and died. Well, the doctor and nurses said she would die. Even her father ordered the itty bitty casket. But the next morning, there she was, Rhonda Jean. Genevieve had gone back to try again. The doctor expressed complete shock at what an alert, active, and strong baby she was especially given her condition the night before.

There are no baby pictures and no baby book. By the fourth child, the mother said she was too tired and sick of licking on corners and sticking them on shredding black paper to bother. The first professional photo shows a big 6-year-old scowling into the camera as she awkwardly holds her hands on her crossed knee draped in a pleated skirt. Her long brown ringlets are real enough but clearly not destined to last.

She was scolded in kindergarten when she said she wished she had never been born. The maiden school marm chastised her to recall all her mother had been through for her. The girl's response, "I didn't ask to be born." Today the child protective agency would be called in. Maybe they should have been – or maybe not.

When asked what she was going to be when she grew up, she said "President of the United States."

The teacher responded, "You can't be. Only boys can be President."

"Well then, I'll be a doctor."

"You can't be, only boys can be doctors. You can be a nurse."

"I don't want to be a nurse. Okay then," she thought a bit, "I'll be a race car driver."

"You can't be, only boys can be race car drivers."

You can see where this is going. Her highly ignitable and ever present temper made not its first appearance. "Well I'm going to be a boy then."

A group picture taken on the merry go round some years later shows her alone standing on the rungs while all the other girls are seated. Her ringlets

are now a bristling bush of curly hair partly covering her face but she has exactly the same scowl.

The library in that tiny town was in a room of an L shaped house inhabited by the ancient librarian. As soon as Rhonda could read, and that was very soon indeed, she spent hours among the books. The rule was that a child could only take three books at a time. She protested because she would read that many overnight and have to return every day – which she did. After some time, the librarian relented and Rhonda staggered home under armfuls of books that she could barely see over. Years later in another tinier town, whose only library was a monthly visit from the mobile van, she again had to beg to bend the rules and allow her to take out 4-5 books – thick ones – to last a month. Even later in a big city abroad, the librarian remarked, “You are not like any of our other readers,” and let her take home 3-4 books rather than two officially permitted.

She never fit a niche in school anymore than she did in the family. Was it the name? Was it the change of name? Was it being the odd one out? She was the smartest in the class but let the others copy from her papers. She was the wildest but just short of a delinquent. She was a leader but did not have or need a fan club. She cared nothing about what people thought and was the first to stand up for another kid no matter how unpopular her actions might make her.

She never became the President of the United States though she did become a juris doctor and drive a race car – and jump out of a plane and off a cliff. The law was the perfect foil for her temper. She represented the vulnerable and abused and beat heck out of the abusers – legally of course. In constant conflict with authority, others counseled her to try softer and more feminine ways. This she did not accept.

Her curly hair turned silver. She got bigger. Age came as it does. Eventually both parents were dead. Cleaning out the family home for sale, she was going through old dusty boxes from the attic and found her parents tax returns beginning from the first year of their marriage. In 1947, 1948, and 1949, the forms list four children – boy, girl, girl, boy and call her Ron. From 1950 on, the forms say four children – boy, girl, girl, girl and call her Rhonda. Though no baby book was found, there was a small paper sack with her name on it. Inside was a baby bonnet and rattle – both blue.

Reality dawning, she phoned her mother’s lifelong best friend, “Mary, I am looking at ma’s taxes from 1947-1950 when I was 1-3 years old. They all say that she has four children – 2 boys and 2 girls. Mary, was I born a boy?”

Too long a silence passed to conceal her lie. "I don't know what you are talking about."

It answered so much. The years spent being told by her mother – can't you walk softer, can't you speak quieter, can't you take care of your clothes, can't you be more like a girl! She was pressured to wear high heels and nylons, put on make up and paint her nails – none of which she ever did. The fights over her choice of clothing and jobs were legendary. Never did she baby-sit or waitress like her two sisters. No, she worked in the fields and factories making more money but doing more strenuous work. Now it all came clear. Now she understood why when she told her mother she was a lesbian, her mother didn't seem very surprised. The hospital records had all been destroyed so she never found out if it was actual surgery (clitorectomies were common in the 1950's) or just that the doctor thought she was a boy with undescended testicles because she was so big and strong. She would have been treated very differently those first three years as Ron rather than Rhonda. But what's in a name?

Donna M. Giancola & Undine C. Pawlowski

Excerpt from *Her Underground*

Description of *Her Underground*:

The city of Boston and its infamous Big Dig highway project provide the backdrop for this upcoming novel, *Her Underground*. Each morning that Law professor, Alexandra Martin, takes Boston's underground subway, the "T," to work, she feels the digging and banging of the city's Big Dig project tunneling highways under the city. But today the tremor is different. Alex tries to ignore it, until she learns that an ancient stone chamber was unearthed that very morning and that she herself will be asked to consult for the city. Struggling between her rational mind and the unfamiliar territory of her intuitive feelings, Alex seeks the advice of her artsy, childhood friend, Diana Wolfe, who is convinced that the Big Dig has ruptured one of the Earth's sacred energy centers. At first, Alex dismisses Diana's claim but strange environmental and electromagnetic anomalies progressively disrupt the city's, and her own, normal flow and rhythm. All signs start to indicate that the chamber is somehow connected to the city's state of chaos and might even have plans for her. The earth's violation becomes clear to our main characters and culminates in the subterranean struggles modern women face in reconciling traditional values of science and rationality with ancient wisdom, ecological interconnection, and notions of magic. The secrets of an ancient goddess myth contained within the chamber have the potential for bringing about an enlightened and evolved state of consciousness on the earth and can even heal the planet, but is there still enough time? Read more at www.herunderground.com.

Yana extends her arm from behind the mahogany bar and Diana's lifts in response. The two women shake hands without either of their eyes breaking connection.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Diana! Alex has told me a lot about you. Don't worry; she spoke only of wonderful things." The angular lines of Yana's face curves with a smile. She smiles as if she has nothing to hide, as if she is free. Alex recognizes an immediate connection bouncing between them.

Yana casually continues, "I hear you think the Big-Dig is cursed? I happen to agree with you, in a way, but I was telling your friend that it is more likely that a curse would come from the earth and the city itself; karma and all."

Diana's lips don't move because she isn't sure how to respond. The personal connection she feels to Yana could have vast implications, not to mention her comment about the Big Dig. But Diana has to speak privately about the chamber with Alex right now. Otherwise, Yana would be an enticing distraction.

Before she has a chance to respond Yana continues, "What can I pour for you?"

"Thank you, umm..." Diana considers her options, "I'll have whatever Alex is drinking. Thank you, very much! It's nice to meet you as well."

"Alright," Yana says as she fills a wide rimmed goblet and passes it to her. "Aah! ...excuse me, ladies! It looks like the boss has finally arrived to straighten things out." Yana smiles again, specifically to Diana, then heads away to talk with the owner.

Diana senses that the dining room is filling up quickly. "I do think we should get a table, it's more comfortable for dining."

Both women gather their things and walk to the back booth in the corner, under a diamond paned window. The low ceilings, heavy wooden beams and gas fireplace give the little dining room the realistic revolutionary feel of an eighteenth-century New England pub. The building might in fact be historic and one can almost still hear the British coming. As the women sit down, a waitress delivers menus.

Diana takes hers, then pushes it aside and says firmly, "You look tired, Alex. Are you alright?"

"No not really, but let us order first and then we can talk." Alex sounds more severe and solemn than she had intended. Both women order the house specialty, the baked potato soup, which by the way is really very delicious.

"Already cultivating that new bartender, Alex?" Diana asks, teasing and hoping to learn something more about the Bulgarian beauty.

"Sorry ladies," the waitress spins around and returns to the table saying, "but I almost forgot. The kitchen has already eighty-sixed the baked potato soup today."

Remembering her days as a waitress, Diana translates the meaning: they are out of the soup Alex has been craving all day long!

"Uh!" Diana squeaks and moans sympathetically, "I am so disappointed!"

Alex reluctantly takes back the menu and they both try to adjust their taste buds. Diana can adapt, but Alex looks positively devastated. Diana orders a filet of sole and Alex, the pasta special. With the culinary decisions

are out the way, both women are content to return concentration to the conversation they both came here to have.

“Are you ok?” Diana asks becoming concerned as her friend’s face grows more and more forlorn. “I just wanted some of that soup!” Alex says quietly and tensely, emanating more anger than soup should normally inspire in a person.

“Ok Alex, I know you are upset about something and I am sorry that my asking to see the chamber is probably a hassle, especially if Richard is involved but . . .”

“No,” Alex interrupts, “it is not about you, or Richard... I just do not know that I want to see the chamber... I have a *foreboding*.”

“What do you mean?” Diana represses her urge to comment on the fine line between a foreboding and a psychic intuition.

Alex resumes by saying in a matter of fact way: “Look Diana, I’ve thought a lot about what you said. And I don’t agree with all of it. On the one hand when you talk about it, it makes sense that places have... what is it you call it, a karmic history? And Boston has violated it? ...Ok, so even if I accept that, it does not necessarily mean the chamber has anything to do with what you are talking about, karma or otherwise. Still... I did speak with the Mayor’s office and you can come with me to view the site but what do you hope to discover? I guess I just do not really understand what this is about!”

“You do understand what this is about Alex!” Diana says not in self-defense but as an assertion of Alex’s higher understanding.

“What I am saying is that the environment has an effect on people’s psyches but it works both ways: peoples’ psyches also have an effect on the environment. That chamber means something about our environment and might explain part of what is going on with it lately. Try looking at our city as a living entity. Did you know that ancient alchemists and healers of India and China taught that there are both energy centers and energy pathways in the body? In the holistic tradition of Ayurvedic medicine, they are viewed as deep seated patterns of energy connecting life force to life force, matter to spirit, and history to nature. They identified seven chakras or energy points in the body and when those energy centers are violated or blocked an imbalance occurs in the system and becomes manifest. The same too must be true with places and also might be true of the earth itself. Do you know what I mean? Am I making any sense to you?”

Alex is nearing the end of her patience and reason. “Listen,” she says, taking a short sip of wine to swallow her irritation, “I just do not understand this, and I know that you want me to. And yes, I work with arguably arbitrary laws but they are never the less firmly established and more or

less objectively agreed upon. What you are saying goes beyond reasonable parameters of the real world.”

Diana continues her appeal adding, “This is absolutely about what you study and work and know! It is about the connections between land and people. The chamber is important not just because of its history or what it represents, but it is sacred space. We do not live on the land we live with it and the land has a right not to be violated. I do not know why that chamber is important but I do know that it is there for a reason. Twentieth century technology has come up against an ancient cave! Don’t you see Alex, it is there. It has just been sitting there, and that is all it is doing, but potentially it could change everything. I was thinking last night, what if they cannot continue with the Big Dig project because of it? I mean what are they going to do? Re-route the tunnel, change course? The problem is Boston has never paid its respect to nature, to its environment. And now the multi-billion dollar project is at a standstill because of some unforeseen cave. It makes sense that the city comes face to face with its own unconsciousness. My fear, and perhaps yours as well, for the last few years has been that the city will turn back on itself and implode from its own negativity and destruction. We are not different from our environment. The cause and effect is reciprocal. This area is suffering the effects of spiritual anorexia, and our land here, the earth our roots burrow into for nutrition and protection, is densely packed full of holes dug in the name of progress. Now amongst all that empty space we find this chamber, and it is not just a hole or a cave, it is a source, of sorts, a vortex.

“The weather, the accidents, the birds, the traffic, Night-Night, the chamber, all of these disruptions and changes in our environmental behavior are signs, manifestations of the imbalance cultivated by the glamour and illusion of society’s mono-focused, linear notion of progress. In your legal work, you have helped people to hold on to their sacred spaces, why? It’s not just about property rights or money to you ...or is it?”

“Listen,” Alex puts her elbows on the table and pulls herself a little closer to Diana saying, “I feel what you are talking about and I hear the passion in your voice. I know this means a lot to you. But honestly, I can’t digest it. I don’t know how to understand what you are saying, but that’s okay. You can’t convince me this is all some divine plan or karmic puzzle that needs your interpretation. It is a historic site and that comes with a lot of mystery, but it is just a site. Regardless, I want to take you with me to see it. Tomorrow, I think we can go. I have an afternoon meeting, but we can go afterwards. What’s your day like tomorrow?”

"I'll be free, just let me know when." Diana says as she sees Yana returning with the bottle. Yana steps up to the table and sets the wine down between their two glasses. Alex feels her head throbbing and realizes she has a distinct ringing in her ears. Yana reaches for their empty glasses and is about to pour them more wine when she notices that the bottle is shaking ever so slightly. Diana notices too and feels that the table is vibrating subtly.

"Do you see that?" Yana asks, "This is not San Francisco. We do not have earthquakes here."

Diana places both of her hands, palms and fingertips spread flat, on the table so that she can feel the full force of the vibration's pulse. Yana feels it through the balls of her feet upon the old wooden floor boards.

"That's not just the Big-Dig, is it?" Diana rhetorically replies, "...it pounds, this is more like a buzz or humming."

Nevertheless the rumbling continues as if it is a comment in response from the earth herself.

"It feels like a galloping herd," Alex murmurs. She is still adjusting to the ringing in her ears but glances around the room to see if others are aware of the current. Most of the customers are absorbed in their own conversations and seem to be unmoved. Those that might have been able to sense the shaking dismiss it immediately as peripheral.

The patrons continue eating and drinking as these three women, intuitively awakened, stare back at each other in wonder and concern, texturized by their earlier discussions of the chamber and a curse.

"There is nothing to fear, you know," Yana speaks and both Diana and Alex's hearts beat faster from the simplicity of her statement and the conviction in her heavily accented tonation, "in my country curses are not the same as they are understood here. A curse is simply a challenge between forces. If the earth is going to open up, then you can either let it swallow you whole, or you can plant a seed. Any cause put into motion can be offset by another force. We have the power to travel another course. Do you see what I mean?"

Neither answer and the rumbling slowly subsides, but only to a vibration faint enough to lead each of the people on the surface of the city who did perceive its tremors to believe it is over. Yana returns to her work, desiring not to intrude further into the private, shielded conversation that Diana and Alex are having. And the two old friends avoid discussion of Yana's implied knowledge and strangely familiar calm.

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Book Reviews

Lesbian Poet Laureates, Officially and Otherwise

By Julie R. Enszer

The new poet laureate of the United States is a Lesbian. Kay Ryan was appointed by the Library of Congress to be poet laureate on July 17, 2008. This is the first time an open Lesbian has served as poet laureate. (Elizabeth Bishop served in this position from 1949-1950, but she was not, in any stretch of the imagination, open about her Lesbianism.) I have admired Kay Ryan's work for some time and earlier this year enjoyed hearing her read at the Washington, DC Folger Shakespeare Library. Ryan reads her small, compact poems with great vigor and verve; in addition, she is completely open about being a Lesbian; she talks during her readings – and in all of her interviews about the new position as poet laureate – about her partner of many years. There is something exciting for me about having the official emissary of poetry, appointed by the Library of Congress, be an open Lesbian. It feels both subversive and validating all at the same time.

Ryan, however, is hardly a poet “of the Lesbian community.” Let me explain. First, I do not want to belittle Ryan's work in any way. She is an important poet and worth reading for her playfulness with language and for her insights about the human condition, which always startle me with their profundity amid her otherwise jocular demeanor. Ryan's work, however, has not emanated from Lesbian coffeehouses, Lesbian journals, or Lesbian spaces. Her work, as she would tell you, is her own; while it has gathered a greater readership and band of admirers lately, to wit the laureate appointment, it has by and large been work that she has done in the solitude of her home and the quiet isolation of her own mind. There is another body of poetry by Lesbians that comes from community experiences. I think of Minnie Bruce Pratt, Eloise Klein Healy, Cheryl Clark, more recently Alix Olson, but first and foremost I think of Adrienne Rich. If Ryan is the first U.S. poet laureate who is openly a Lesbian, Adrienne Rich, is the poet laureate of the Lesbian community.

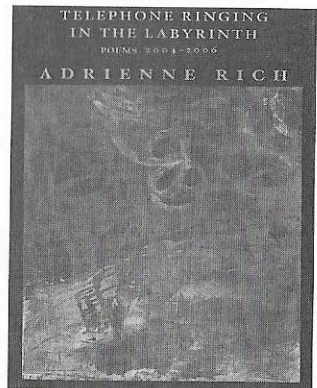
Adrienne Rich's first book of poetry won the Yale Series of Younger Poets Prize in 1951; she was among the first women to win this prestigious prize. *After A Change of World*, her first, prize-winning book, Rich went

on to publish dozens of others, and, in the course of her writing, she came out as a Lesbian, became involved in Lesbian-feminism, and wrote some of the most beloved poems for the Lesbian community. Three volumes from the 1970s *Diving Into the Wreck*, *The Dream of a Common Language*, and *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far* continue to be powerful books of poetry that expose what beauty can be wrought from the truth of our lives.

Rich's pen is also mighty when writing essays. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Experience" and "It is the Lesbian in Us" are essays that I still cherish and to which I return again and again. I cannot imagine a world without Rich's poems, "Twenty-one Love Poems" or "Transcendental Etudes." This is what beloved poetry is about: bringing pleasure to readers over and over again. One of the joys of poetry is finding a poem that captures an experience and expresses an emotion in the way that only poetry can. We return to these poems. Repeatedly. For the poet, however, the poem is written only once. Yes, it is written over a period of time and through numerous revisions—and in fact many poets continue revising poems through multiple publications, journals, books, selected, and collected—but in the end, the poem is written, it is published, then it is over. The poet continues on through a lifetime of thinking and writing and working with words.

Seeing a poet develop over a long life is a blessing for readers. With Adrienne Rich's newest book of poetry, *Telephone Ringing in the Labyrinth: Poems 2004-2006*, we see a new chapter of her body of work. The thirty poems of this collection demonstrate the roots of her work as a writer, most notably as a voice for Lesbians and feminists as well as the new directions in which she moves as a writer and as a politically-engaged human.

I read *Telephone Ringing in the Labyrinth* in conjunction with Rich's previous collection *The School among the Ruins*. Together these two collections provide Rich's thoughtful response to life in the United States in the past eight years. In the poems of these two collections, Rich grapples with the issue of cruelty and war. She ponders our contemporary wars and international conflicts within a lens of history. In the way of poets, Rich considers violence and war



from all angles – among nations, but also between people, individuals – in ways that are careful and humane. This is not to say that Rich doesn't hold accountable those who are. Her poems include allusions to the words of Donald Rumsfeld, and she uses language and the form of reportage to use her poems to question and delve into modern problems. Overall, the poems of these collections are poems of profound grief and pain from someone carefully observing and potently engaged in the world.



There are moments of tenderness and great beauty in the collection. Rich's translation from the French of extracts from a poem by Élise Turcotte titled "Melancholy Piano" is notable. Early in the poem, Rich translates,

*That I write you from the swamp
to tell you about the mangroves
the most mysterious
presences I've ever seen.*

In these lines she takes us to a location like none other in her poems, inhabiting the imagination and words of another. By the conclusion of the poem, Rich's desire to translate it becomes evident. Turcotte writes about these and ideas close to Rich, particularly touch, survival, and healing. The poem concludes,

*I touch you with the help
of the void.
An ode to survival.
A dictionary of wild grasses.
We'll do anything
for a cure.*

The love poems of both collections will also delight Lesbian readers for their care, tenderness, and attention to Lesbian lives. In *Telephone Ringing*, read in particular "Bubble Photographs: After Sappho" and

"Calibrations;" in *The School Among the Ruins*, "Ritual Actions" and "Memorize This" particularly inspired and satisfied me.

There are two laureates of importance to add to your reading list: Kay Ryan for her official role as U.S. poet laureate and Adrienne Rich in her unofficial, but still beloved, role as poet laureate of the Lesbian community. Rich's two new books demonstrate that she still carries important messages for us and among us.

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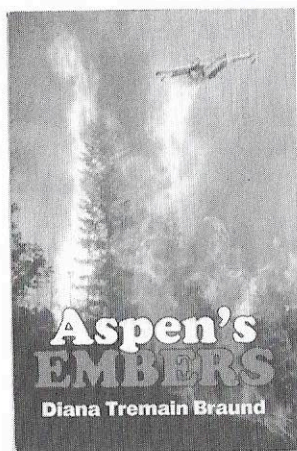
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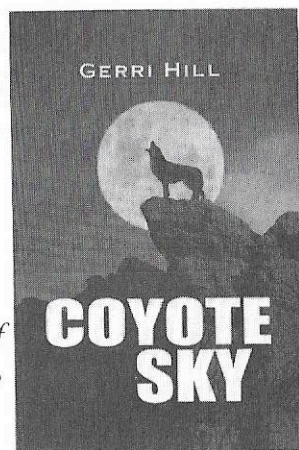
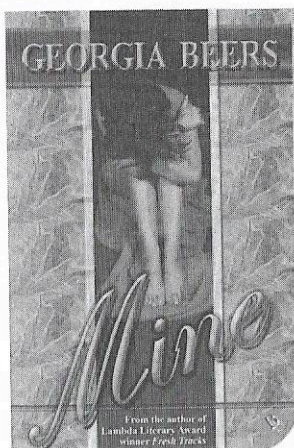
Georgia Beers. *Mine*. Bold Strokes Books, 2007.

Diana Tremain Braund. *Aspen's Embers*, Bella Books, 2007.

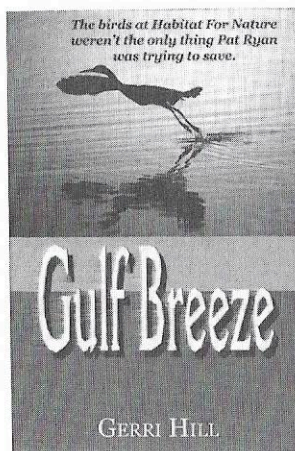


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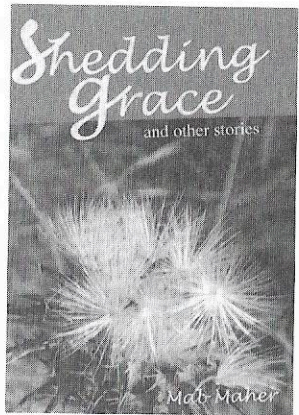


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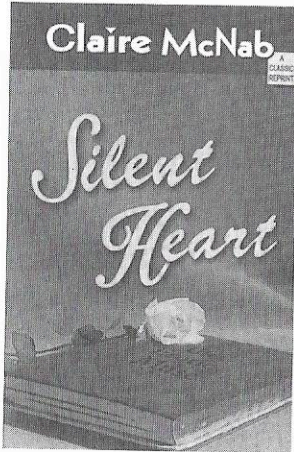


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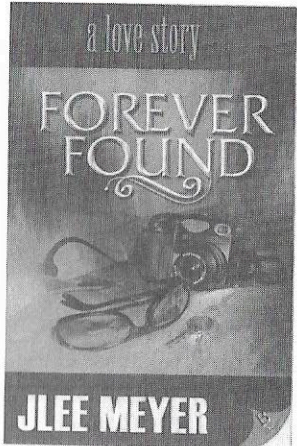


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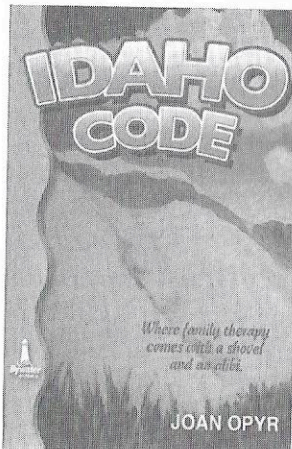


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JLee Meyer. *Rising Storm*. Bold Strokes Books, 2007.

Joan Opyr. *Idaho Code*. Bywater Books, 2006.

Contributor's Notes

The multi-artist **Aline Albuquerque** was born in September 7th, 1981 in Londrina in the state of Paraná, Brazil. Aline found out she was an artist since she was a teenager. At that time she started playing guitar and writing some songs. When she was nineteen she felt the necessity of looking for other forms to express herself and communicate with people through art. She started acting in an amateur theater group until she became a professional theater actress. Nowadays she studies sculpture and plastic arts at the university. She never stopped singing and acting. For her, an artist has to communicate in different forms and should be open to learn more and more ways to touch people's hearts and minds. She made a painting exhibition in 2007 named LESBIANIDADES (lesbianities) in a GLBT NGO (Grupo Dignidade) in Curitiba city. The photo we are showing is about one of these paintings named DYKES. It's about how charming and brave Aline thinks Lesbian "dykes" are. It's a tribute to Lesbians girls that can't hide themselves in a closet and have to be in the front line against a homophobic society. Aline says, "Dykes live and die for the right to be the way they are, they are fantastic!"

Bev Jo was born October 30, 1950 to poverty-class parents, and grew up working-class in Cincinnati, Ohio. Her family, from what she can tell, is European-descent (Scottish, Irish, German, English, Swiss) and Native American. (She has been finding out more since her mom died — She has traced part of her family back to 1614 Scotland, and she'd had no idea anyone was Scottish in her family.) She was raised catholic, but now being atheist (like her mom) actually makes her more spiritual. She has taught self-defense classes for women and girls for the past ten years. She is a lifelong Lesbian and was never het.

Catherine Crouch is a long-time feminist and Lesbian writer and director of movies and screenplays. She has directed numerous short films with feminist/Lesbian themes including *Vanilla Lament* (1997), *One Small Step* (1999), *A Christmas Sacrifice* (1999), *Stray Dogs* (2001), and *Pretty Ladies: a super8explosion!* (2002), many of which have won awards at a variety of Lesbian and gay film festivals. Crouch is currently editing an education documentary about Afro-Brazilian spirit healing in Rio de Janeiro with Kelly Hayes. You can read more about her at www.catherinecrouch.com.

Beginning as a passionate folk singer in the 1960's, **Alix Dobkin** grew up in the heart of American folk and ethnic as well as jazz and Broadway musical traditions. In 1970, Alix became a feminist, fell in love with a woman and began to sing and write songs about the forbidden love of women for women.

For over thirty years she's been bringing blatant Lesbianism into the lives of Lesbians and anyone else who wants to know why Lavender Jane REALLY loves women. Producer of the groundbreaking 1973 "Lavender Jane Loves Women," Alix has six additional highly praised albums and a songbook to her credit.

Her memoir, *MYRED BLOOD: Radical Girl Takes on 20th Century USA*, will be published by Alyson Books and should be out sometime in 2009.

Julie R. Enszer is a poet and writer living in University Park, MD. You can read more of her work at www.JulieREnszer.com.

Robyn Epstein is an anti-censorship Jewish woman, queer, writer, scholar, activist, artist, and hopeful. She is also a doctoral candidate in the Women's Studies Department of the University of Maryland at College Park, MD.

Carolyn Gage is a lesbian-feminist playwright, performer and activist. This play is included in a new anthology of her work, *Nine Short Plays*, which is available from her website. She has also reissued *The Second Coming of Joan of Arc* as both a CD and in a second new anthology of her play titled *The Second Coming of Joan of Arc and Selected Plays*. She tours in performances of her own work and offers lectures and workshops on lesbian theatre. Booking information and her touring calendar are online at www.carolyngage.com. *Bite My Thumb* has been optioned by Catherine Crouch, who is currently raising funds for the film. Her website is <http://catherinecrouch.com/>

Dr. Donna M. Giancola is an Associate Professor of Philosophy and Director of Religious Studies at Suffolk University in Boston. She has published a text book on World Ethics with Wadsworth Publishing (2003), as well as numerous articles in academic journals. She lectures internationally on issues pertaining to ancient goddess traditions, feminist philosophy and ancient philosophy. **Undine C. Pawlowski** is a freelance artist, lawyer and civic leader with extensive writing, editing and speaking experience. Both authors recently fled Boston to reside in St. Augustine Beach, Florida.

Dr. Susan Hawthorne is a Research Associate at Victoria University. She is a novelist, poet, academic, publisher and aerialist. She has been involved in the Women's Liberation and Lesbian Movements for more than thirty years and is a member of the Coalition of Activist Lesbians (COAL). In 1996, she was a Winner of the Hall of Fame Award in the Rainbow Awards for contribution to the Gay and Lesbian Community. Among her books are *The Butterfly Effect* (poetry, 2005), *The Falling Woman* (novel, 1992), *Wild Politics* (non-fiction, 2002) and eleven anthologies. She is currently working on two collections of essays.

Shawn S. Helmen is an inspired poet who wants to have a voice in the community, eventually becoming a part of the future's history. She is currently working on my 'hard Knox life' degree from the Texas Department of Corrections. She has also earned a Bachelors of Science in Electrical Engineering from Texas A&M University. She is an Aggie and an inmate trying to make her way in the world.

Andrea Nicki lives in Vancouver, BC, in a large family of Chinese immigrants whom she teaches, assists in cultural adaptation, and makes merry with. She has some wonderful crystalline girls under her tutelage and care: Tingting and Tsing Wan. Her first poetry book, *Welcoming*, will be published next spring by Inanna Press.

Dianne Post is an attorney who has spent her entire career fighting for women's rights and currently is in Vladivostok, Russia working on violence against women and sex trafficking. Normally she lives in Arizona.

Chris Sitka has been a lesbian community activist for the last 30 years. She is also a writer, researcher, and creative thinker. She has been widely published in Australia and internationally in lesbian and feminist publications. Much of her research and writing has been about reinventing history to include a lesbian concepts and understandings about the past. Most especially in pre-historic times. She distributes her writings and gives workshops to groups on request. She can be contacted at: csitka@jeack.com.au.

Margo Solod was born queer in a small town in East Tennessee, although she didn't realize it until she fell in love with Susan Dey on *The Partridge Family*. After college she spent 10 years traveling around the country playing electrician for small theater companies before settling down to cook

for 15 years on a tiny New England island. Six years ago she escaped and settled in the middle of 72 acres in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. She has published poems in more than 70 magazines and journals, as well as 6 anthologies. Her 4 chapbooks were published in 1995, 1996, 1999 and 2003 by Tortilla Press, Nightshade Press, Talent House Press and Flying Turtle Press and her full-length book *Some Very Soft Days* in 2006 by mayapple press. She is the 2002 recipient of the Astraea Foundation emerging lesbian writers award.

Jean Taylor lives and works as a non-Aboriginal Celtic-Australian and radical lesbian feminist activist and writer on the land of the Wurundjeri-willam people of the Woiwurrung language group of the Kulin Nation.

Melissa Wilson has a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology and a Master of Science in Social Work. She lives in Tennessee.

Sinister Wisdom

A Multicultural Journal by and for Lesbians

www.sinisterwisdom.org

Editor: Fran Day fran@sonic.net

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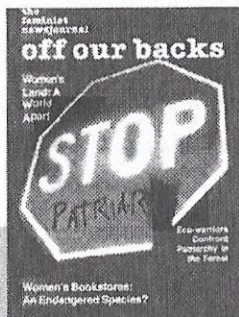
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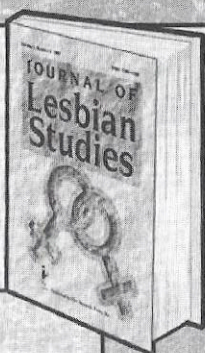
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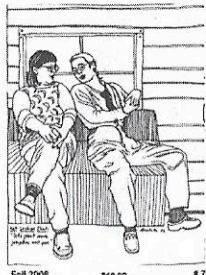
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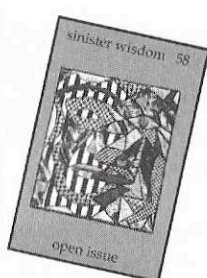
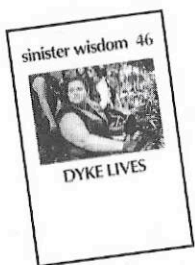
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Please read the submission guidelines on the inside back cover before sending material. Please check our website: www.sinisterwisdom.org for updates and details.

Two Spirit Women of First Nations

This issue will be printed when we receive enough material.

Guest Editors: Chrystos (Menominee) and Sunny Birdstone (Ktunaxa)
3250 S 77th #8 Tacoma, WA 98409. Email: creep toes@yahoo.com.

#76 Open Issue

Editor: Fran Day

Forthcoming

#77 Environmental Issues/Lesbian Concerns

Due December 1, 2008

Guest Editor: Diane Foster

Mother Earth is at risk! Her soul cries for love, nurturing and protection. The veins of her ecosystem are weakening, the air she provides is choked with pollutants, her nutrients providing sustenance for life are poisoned by those with no regard or respect for life itself. Her travails giving life to this planet has found her weeping polluted, agony stained tears. As Mother Earth Lesbians, the 77th issue of *Sinister Wisdom* relates to what Lesbians around the world feel concerning Environmental Issues. Topics included, but not limited to are: lesbian and/or lesbian groups working in the realm of saving/protecting the environment, what efforts are being done, who and where are Earth-Conscious Lesbians. Does your heart cry out, are you angry? Do you feel there is a correlation between patriarchal dominance and the state of our environment? Do Lesbians and/or Lesbian groups face unique challenges and/or oppositions in their quest to protect and save Mother Earth from environmental devastation? This issue welcomes prose, short story, poetry, essays; from the serious to the lighthearted, but they all must deliver a succinct message.

Send material for #77 only to Diane Foster email: dianefoster683@hotmail.com, or mail to: Diane Foster, 5400 Montgomery Blvd. NE, #401 B, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 87109. Emails preferred.

#78 Old Dykes/Lesbians II

Due March 1, 2009

Editor: Fran Day. fran@sonic.net. P. O. Box 1180, Sebastopol, CA 95473-1180.

Open issue written by Lesbians born in 1949 or earlier. Interviews and photographs taken by Lesbians are encouraged. Please read the guidelines **very** carefully before sending material.

#79 Call for Guest Editor(s)

Due July 1, 2009

Contact Fran Day. fran@sonic.net

Submissions Guidelines

Submissions: See page 112 for themes. Check our website at www.sinisterwisdom.org for updates on upcoming issues. Please read the guidelines below before sending material.

Material should be sent to the editor or guest editor of the issue. Everything else should be sent to Sinister Wisdom, POB 3252, Berkeley, CA 94703.

Writing and Art Guidelines: Please read very carefully.

Material may be in any style or form, or combination of forms. Maximum: five poems, two short stories or essays, or one longer piece of up to 2500 words. We prefer that you send your work by email in Word. If sent by mail, material must be mailed flat (not folded) with your name and address on each page. We prefer you type your work but short legible handwritten pieces will be considered; tapes accepted from print-impaired women. All work must be on white paper. Please proofread your work carefully; do not send changes after the deadline. A self-addressed stamped business-sized envelope must be enclosed. If you want acknowledgement of receipt, enclose a separate self-addressed stamped postcard. GRAPHIC ARTISTS should send B&W photos or drawings (duplicates) of their work (no slides). Images sent electronically must have a resolution of 300dpi for photos and 600dpi for line drawings. TIFFs are preferred; JPEG's must be maximum quality. Please do not send large files electronically – send each photo separately. Include a 3-5 sentence autobiographical sketch written exactly as you want it printed.

We publish only Lesbians' work. We are particularly interested in work that reflects the diversity of our experiences: as Lesbians of color, ethnic Lesbians, Jewish, Arab, old, young, working class, poverty class, disabled, and fat Lesbians. We welcome experimental work. We will not print anything that is oppressive or demeaning to Lesbians or women, or that perpetuates stereotypes. Because many of our readers are in prison, we cannot include erotica, explicit sex, obscenities, or art with frontal nudity. No sado-masochism.

Please contact us if you have a new theme you would like to see explored. We are looking for guest editors for future issues.

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“When a lesbian speaks, don’t shout her down, don’t assume her world has no relevance to you. Listen. You could learn something profound.”

Susan Hawthorne, p. 78

“I know there are conflicts among these Lesbians, but, overall, I’m seeing such warmth, love, and compassion. I really have come home at last. And it’s like the waves of an ocean that never stop moving.”

Bev Jo, p. 54