

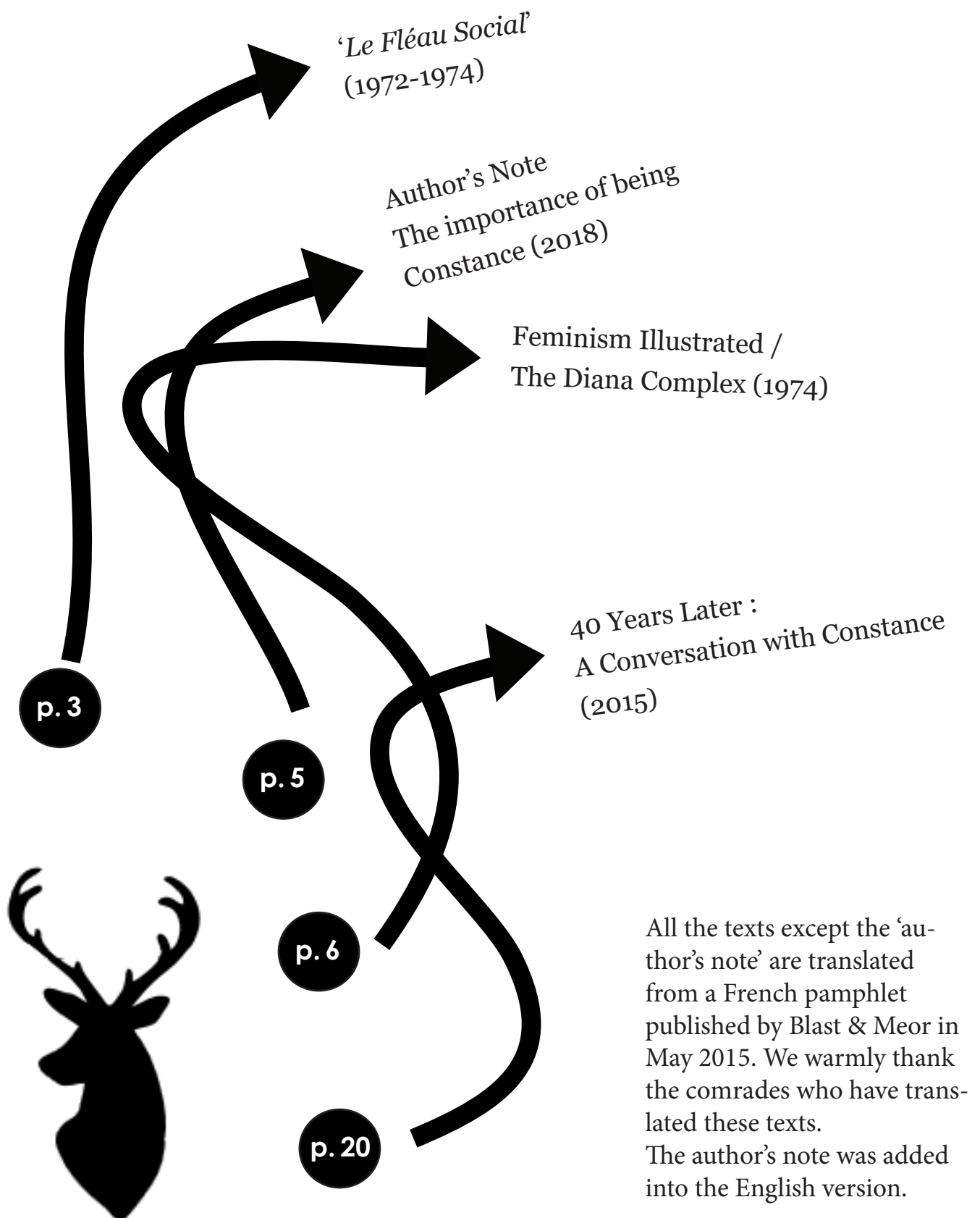
**Constance Chatterley / Gilles Dauvé**



# **Feminism Illustrated**

**2018**

# Contents...



All the texts except the 'author's note' are translated from a French pamphlet published by Blast & Meor in May 2015. We warmly thank the comrades who have translated these texts.

The author's note was added into the English version.

All notes are editor's notes.

# ‘Le Fléau Social’ (1972-1974)

*You say society must integrate homosexuals.  
I say homosexuals must disintegrate society.*

Françoise d'Eaubonne

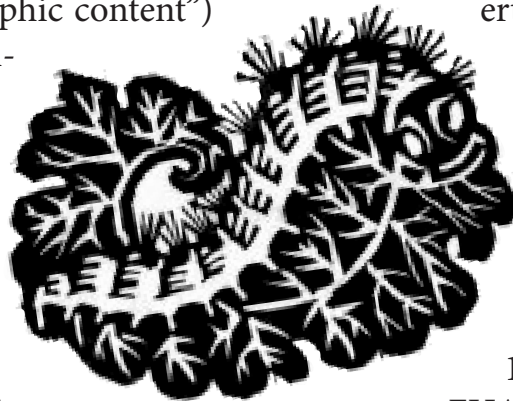
The Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire (FHAR) came out of a lull in activity of the Mouvement de Libération des Femmes (MLF)<sup>1</sup>.

Lesbians fleeing or excluded from the Arcadie club (a stuffy “Homophile” organization) joined the MLF and invited some of their fag friends along to the meetings. In what is generally considered the founding act, they disrupted Ménie Gregoire’s radio show<sup>2</sup> devoted to homosexuality on March 10 1971. The FHAR was formed out of this action, initiated by the MLF. An alliance of women and homosexuals against fusty, reactionary, phallocratic France seemed obvious.

In an article published in *Tout!* (the issue was banned for “pornographic content”)

they subverted the feminist Manifesto of the 343<sup>3</sup>: “*We are more than 343 sluts, we have been fucked up the ass by Arabs and we are proud*”. About fifty homos demonstrated in Paris on May

Day behind the MLF procession with banners reading “*DOWN WITH THE DICTATORSHIP OF NORMALS*” and “*MALE, FEMALE, FUCK THIS*”. Another of their slogans was “*HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS ARE CUTE*” acknowledging the High School Students Action Committee which was marching behind them. The same year they published the legendary pamphlet *Report Against Normality* through the publishing house Champ Libre.



The FHAR’s mode of operation was copied from that of the MLF - the only structure was informal general assemblies at the Beaux-Arts (fine art school) in Paris. But that meeting structure “*just gave the power to the stars. Warmth and enthusiasm at the beginning quickly gave way to aggression, which became the normal mode of operation*”<sup>4</sup>. The number of participants started out at about thirty (mostly women) and reached about six hundred at one point (mostly men). It should also be mentioned that it had a reputation as a venue for hookups and group sex.

Their program consisted of excess and provocation, such as at Pierre Overney’s<sup>5</sup> funeral rites in 1972 (perhaps the reason why libertarian Trotskyist Daniel Guerin left the group). In terms of theory, the FHAR was stuck between affirming and criticizing homosexual identity. Sociologically it was made up mainly of students, teachers and intellectuals, mostly from Trotskyist or Maoist groups.

1972 was a critical year for the young FHAR, already in crisis, “*just like all the left groupuscules*”<sup>6</sup> as its cutest figurehead, Guy Hocquenghem, acknowledged. “*We are imprisoned in the game of shame*”, he added, “*but we have turned it into a game of pride. This is nothing more than gilding the bars of our cage. We are not free and proud*”.

At the end of May, sick of the ambient misogyny, lesbians from the group left and started the Gouines Rouges (Red Dykes) and gradually distanced themselves from the FHAR. In June, the FHAR Group 5<sup>7</sup> published the



first issue of its journal *Le Fléau Social* (Social Plague) - against “the cesspit” of the family and political organizations. It was strongly influenced by the Situationists, although it could not be reduced to just that. It was signed by Francoise d'Eaubonne, Pierre Hahn and Alain Fleig; the latter was the main organizer. It denounced the homosexual (not yet “gay”) commercial ghetto that was beginning to develop and which was, for Fleig, “*the submission of the libido to the law of value*”.

*Le Fléau* also brought a radical critique of leftism and militantism. Dissenting members of Group 5 split to join Group 11<sup>8</sup> and started publishing their own journal *Antinorm*, which was closer to the Trotskyist Ligue Communiste (Communist League). The FHAR thus “*unleashed two currents, one hateful and the other submissive - Le Fléau and Antinorm, respectively*” (Jacques Girard).

From issue 3, *Le Fléau* started to take a critical distance from the FHAR and MLF and gradually abandoned the subject of homosexuality. The end came quickly, in 1974, with the last issue of *Le Fléau*. In February the police occupied the art school, long since been deserted by the FHAR.

It's not easy to fill the void left by a raging comet. Certain groups tried - the Groupes de Libération Homosexuels (GLH's)<sup>9</sup> started by former members of the Arcadie club and young members of FHAR. There were many schisms within the GLH's, but outside Paris the groups expanded. Their style was completely different - they abandoned revolutionary claims and made specific, reasonable demands (against discrimination), tried to speak to all homosexuals and developed a strategy of counter-culture communitarianism and recognition-seeking. The GLH's brought one fundamental new idea: “*homosexual political militancy transcends membership of any social class, ideology or party*” (Jacques Girard).

Its goal having been to destabilize society and abolish sexual normality, the FHAR remained

stuck between the apology of the homosexual subject and its critique. Reconstituting the ghetto it had denounced, it ended up leading to no more than another homosexual normality.

The following article “Feminism Illustrated, or The Diana Complex” was published in the last issue of *Le Fléau Social* in 1974.

B. & M.

1 Mouvement de Libération des Femmes - Women's Liberation Movement, a composite group formed in 1970 out of feminist groups formed after 1967, including women-only groups born after 1968, influenced by American feminism.

2 French radio personality who did popular shows about psychoanalysis and sexuality.

3 “Manifeste des 343” - the Manifesto signed by 343 women who admitted having had an abortion when it was still illegal, feminist petition for the right to abortion and contraception produced in 1971.

4 Jacques Girard, *Le Mouvement homosexuel en France, 1945-1980*, Syros, 1981.

5 Militant worker from the “maoïste-spontanéiste” tendency of the Maoist “Gauche Proletarienne” (Proletarian Left), killed by a Renault security guard at a demonstration outside a Renault factory in Billancourt in the suburbs of Paris. During the demonstration at Overney's funeral procession (maybe 200,000 people) members of the Gazolines group in the FHAR cortege, done up as mourning women in black veils, wailed, moaned and wept ostentatiously while chanting “*Liz Taylor, Pierre Overney, One Struggle!*” The leftists were outraged. It was a scandal.

6 “groupuscules”: pejorative term designating extreme-left (Trotskyist or Maoist) organizations that were very numerous at the time. The most widely known were La Ligue Communiste (the Trotskyist Communist League) and La Gauche Proletarienne (the Maoist Proletarian Left).

7 Group 5 was the group based in the 5th arrondissement of Paris.

8 Group based in the 11th arrondissement of Paris.

9 GLH's - Homosexual Liberation Groups.

# The importance of being Constance

As explained in the introduction to this pamphlet, sex, man/woman relations or what is now known as gender were a major concern for *Le Fléau Social*. As this is a subject for which I have always had a special interest, soon after I met Alain Fleig, it became obvious I would write in the magazine on feminism, or rather on sexual identities. Nearly all articles were signed under fanciful aliases, and I chose “Constance Chatterley”. In those carefree days, no man or woman in the small circle of friends around the magazine had any objection to a male impersonating a female, even for a critique of feminism. (Times have changed, I know...)

I have kept an interest in the matter ever since 1974, but had never used that alias any more. Until 2015. When a friend wished to republish the 1974 article with an interview with the writer, we both thought the texts would have more impact if they came out of the past and out of the blue, so only “Constance Chatterley” was named as the author, and a hitherto unknown publishing house was created for the event. We wished our 2015 pamphlet to first appear unrelated to anything (except of course the connection to the usually forgotten *Fléau Social*), and be judged on its merits, not on what the reader could know about the author's other writings. The idea was not to mystify and play games as the Situationists sometimes did in the 70's, so we did not wait long before making public the fact that I was “Constance”. The pamphlet came out in May, the author came out early August.

Gilles Dauvé, October 2018

Here is a short list of texts where I have dealt with the sex/gender issue, all readable on the troploin website:

In 1983, I contributed to “For a World without Moral Order” (an article in *La Banquise* magazine). Accessible here: <https://troploin.fr/node/77>

“Alice in Monsterland”, 2001 <https://troploin.fr/node/4>

“Moral Disorder & Sexual Identity”, 2003. <https://troploin.fr/node/36>

“Federici versus Marx”, 2015: <https://troploin.fr/node/85>

“On “the women question””, 2016: <https://troploin.fr/node/88> .....

*From Crisis to Communisation*, to be published by PM Press in 2018, chap. 6 and 10.

For those who read French, the DDT21 blog (<https://ddt21.noblogs.org/>) contains a series of articles on the critique of (homo)sexuality. An English version will be soon available on the troploin site.

# Feminism Illustrated or The Diana Complex

*"We support you fully", the Marxist revolutionaries assure the women. "The oppression of woman is very real, indeed one of the worst of all oppressions. But nevertheless, it is just one part of a larger reality. Women must join the revolutionary proletarian movement!"*

*"We support the revolutionaries", the Women's Liberation Movement affirms. "Proletarian oppression is very real, and indeed one of the worst. But it is only one part of a greater reality. The women must recognise their difference and organize separately."*

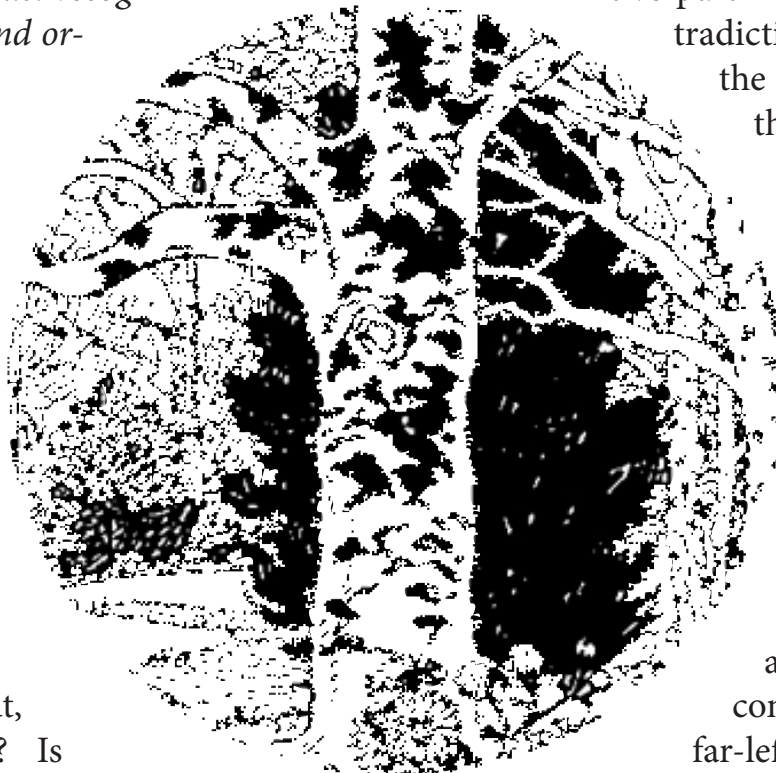
In this debate everyone is right - providing the presuppositions go unquestioned. None of the protagonists ask themselves what their initial positions really amounted to: what is this "Proletariat" they're talking about, and this "Woman"? Is there also a "Man"? There's something in it for everyone. But much harder than criticizing the adversary's ideas would be to explain its *social function* - because if either side did that, they would also be forced to question their own. The "rev-

olutionary" organizations' version of "Marxism" is theoretical communism turned ideology. Their "proletariat" is not the collective movement to negate commodity society, but the movement for workers' democracy, represented, as you would expect, by the self-proclaimed workers' organizations. This "Marxism" (already rejected by Marx) is now an integral part of dominant ideology, and this dominant ideology cuts radical thought into pieces, retains Marx's purely descriptive part - the analysis of contradictions - and discards

the other: the vision of the movement towards human community, i.e. the only thing that gives the whole any meaning. It is no coincidence that "revolutionaries" identify with this kind of Marxism.

I'm not talking about the official communist parties - no far-left activist even gives them the time of day. But do the activists ever try to understand

the counter-revolutionary role of the "revolutionary organisations", and that the revolution will have to destroy them? Generally they are seen as *mere deviations*. But "revolutionary"



organizations (large or small, bureaucratic or informal) are the same thing as the Communist Party, just a lot or a little further to the left. They help block aspirations for a new world, and constrain their movements into limited measures.

**For example, the workers at LIP<sup>10</sup> were not revolutionary (cf. *Le Fléau*, n° 4). They employed radical means only to defend their place within capital. In *certain cases* precisely this kind of action could break capital, if it had no place left to grant them... Leftist activism is on hand to explain to these workers why the real solution to their problem is not the abolition of wage-labour, but protecting their jobs.**

## Ignoring Communism is Bliss

It is striking how partial the women's liberation movement's (WLM) critique of so-called revolutionary organisations is - it criticises them for not doing anything about women. That is to say it rejects leftism because it has not yet found its place within it. But quick as it is to denounce anti-woman tendencies in "Marxist" positions, in the end take it takes this same Marxism at face value, unable to differentiate it from true theoretical communism. The WLM renounces the traditional revolutionary movement, but cannot see any other. It criticizes Marxism without seeing

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<sup>10</sup> In 1973 the workers at the LIP watch-making factory in Besançon, France, kidnapped their bosses, appropriated large numbers of watches from the factory and started an experiment in self-managing the factory in defense against planned job cuts. One slogan was "we produce, we sell, we get paid". Meditisation, police repression, mass protests and further experiments in self-management and workers cooperatives followed until the company dissolved in 1980. See *Radical America* vol.7 no.6 1973, and *LIP and the self-managed counter-revolution*, Négation, 1973.

that Marxism's decline as revolutionary theory was counteracted by authentically subversive positions, like the communist left after 1917 (including among others Bordiga, Pannekoek, Gorter, and Sylvia Pankhurst, who came to communism from feminism, and is also victim to the WLM's silence and falsifications along with other "Marxists").

The WLM needs to *not* see the communist social movement that has appeared, and reappears, throughout history. The WLM is to women what "revolutionary" politics is to the proletariat: an organization (i.e. an array of organizations) that only takes charge of certain demands to channel struggles in order to lim-

**The modernist strand of the bourgeoisie seeks to release the forces of desire (Deleuze-Guattari) and creativity (the end of Taylorism); to harness the tendency towards community, as Nazism did, but now in a more flexible and diversified way, against an old bourgeoisie growing anxious about its weakened repressive apparatus and the Pandora's box it seems to have opened. Repression and "permissive" society go hand in hand; they mutually reinforce one another. We sink into the dictatorship of repressive tolerance. Most of those who demand change on some issue that concerns their interests can find a relative satisfaction (albeit a mystified one) at least as long as capital is not in serious economic crisis. After all, they don't want to be left out in the cold any more. Capital stopped treating workers as mere savages after 1871, and in the realm of everyday life it continues in this "humane" way today. All categories are integrated, their differences admitted. The WLM is therefore coherent with the capitalist perspective.**



it them. Initially rejected by political groups (including those of the far left), the WLM formed externally to them. But, just the same as the left, its logic is to amass supporters and become a power within this society.

Since the minimal demands on which it is based have long (or always) been neglected by traditional politics, it takes the form of a pressure group (still in the form of various organizations). But if it were just another reformism, we would have no *particular* problem with it. The revolutionary position, as opposed to “infantile” radicalism, is to support any struggle that aims to improve the conditions of existence. But there’s more to it than that; the neo-trade unionism or lobbyism of the WLM, like the old ones, plays a perfectly conservative role, helping to improve certain living conditions only at the price of reinforcing material and ideological integration. As the article on sexuality in this issue<sup>11</sup> illustrates, sexual “emancipation” coexists with total alienation. Emancipation is achieved within a field strictly segregated from the others and that therefore has no direction or universality. In the USA the exchange of women (“wife swapping”) creates a limited sexual pseudo-community where “*woman becomes an item of common, and communal property*” (Marx, 1844 *Manuscripts*).

Reformism will always say that “*we wanted to do more*”, that “*we should demand something else*”, that “*we need to go further next time*”, etc, etc. But insofar as it fails to pose, and even obscures, real emancipation, these can only be viewed as so many excuses. Promising the world (*free lunch for all... tomorrow*) lets them out of clarifying the fundamental questions and preparing to solve them. Like all other

organized reformisms, the WLM is a part of the old world. And like them, it will have no choice but to oppose the revolution.

## Society of Ghettos

Under the pretext of placing the female problem within the whole social structure, the “revolutionary” movement flattens it onto the level of politics - the hunt for power. The question of women is reduced to that of *waged women*, so they can fit it into the category “wage labourers”, who, once united, will put an end to their oppression in a democratic self-managed society. According to what used to be the Communist League<sup>12</sup>, socialism is “automation + workers councils”. This way of liquidating the problem and absorbing anything subversive about it is applied not only to the female problem, but to all other problems as well, although this seems to escape the WLM’s notice. The workers’ movements, whether trade-unionist, social-democratic or far-left, take up each individual’s issue and claim to pose it in general terms. But these generalisations are *political*, not human (cf. Marx’s article *The King of Prussia and Social Reform*). They pose a society abstracted from all real relations, one which could be “overthrown” by no more than a new organization of power. The totality becomes an abstraction which it is claimed could be changed by a different form of management. Wage-labourers, women, etc. find themselves in the same isolation as before. By constantly insisting on women’s specificity, the WLM unknowingly perpetuates the same segregation that the traditional workers’ movements used to main-

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<sup>11</sup> Abel Bonard, “La danse de mort du sexe autour des couteaux glacés de l’ennui” [“Death Dance of Sex Around the Cold Knives of Boredom”], p. 15-19.

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<sup>12</sup> La Ligue Communiste, The Communist League, a Trotskyist organization banned in June 1973 and reformed a few months later as La Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, Revolutionary Communist League (which dissolved itself in in 2009 to give rise to the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste, New Anti-capitalist Party).



tain, which was also founded on the illusion of the “general”. Staking everything on their particularity, the WLM can only stay trapped within it.

This is the society of ghettos: worker, intellectual, mad, young, underground, revolutionary, man, woman, homosexual, cultural, high-school, etc, all tend towards being recognised by capital as distinct categories. Capital accepts different behaviours and value systems within it as long as they stay within safe limits. To assert one’s difference is *to want to be what one is and to remain it*, to remain in a ghetto, and to choose a restricted community over the human community. Capital grants you your difference on condition that you stay inside it. As capital has colonized everything, a new type of reformism becomes possible, and new reformisms spring up everywhere: not just “worker”, but now concerning different aspects of “daily life”.

The trade unions brought the workers together *to improve their conditions by dividing them*; first into trades and then into industries, which meant into individual enterprises, reflecting capital’s own structure. In the same way the current movements gather women, blacks, homosexuals, etc., together by segregating them from the others. One finds a community by cutting oneself off further from the potential human community. This goes together with the transformation of the human community into ideology. We do not judge the WLM on their universalist declarations of faith, any more than we judge the pre-1914 socialists on their official internationalist resolutions.

## Liberation?

A radical upheaval of life is not “liberation”. Liberation is more than being released from a constraint that weighs on you: a prisoner

can be liberated without destroying the prison system. A profound revolution does much more than release us from our chains - it does not just remove these chains, it breaks them. Revolution changes everything, including ourselves. Even the concepts of “national” or “women’s” liberation aim to do away with one constrictive aspect of society, while leaving intact all the rest - which finally fall back down with all their weight upon the “liberated”.

It’s a man’s world, so we are told. But what is a “man”, and have you ever met one? **“Man” exists no more than does human nature. The man-woman relation is a double, non-univocal relation, like the labour-capital relation, but on a different plane. Clarissa Harlowe, Richardson’s heroine, already described it in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: “one half of mankind tormenting the other, and being tormented themselves in tormenting!” So did Déjacque in 1857: “Is it that humanity is singular and not plural, masculine and not feminine ! Is it that the difference in the sexes is a difference in the nature of humanity. (..) To avoid quibbling and equivocation we must demand the emancipation of the human being. In such terms the question is complete. (..) the man and the woman will advance with the same step (..) toward their natural destiny, the community of anarchy. But man and woman enter thus arm in arm, the face of one shedding its radiance on the face of the other, until they reach the garden of Social Harmony. (..) woman is the mover of man, as man is the mover of woman.”<sup>13</sup> Germaine Greer explains how family oppression of women also oppresses men.**

To believe that everything is the fault of “male society” is a kind of magical thinking, no more illuminating than the left’s endless denunciations of “capitalists” or even “capitalism”. The

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<sup>13</sup> *On the Human Being, Male & Female*, accessible on [theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)

question is this: is a society based on its *relations of domination*, or on *how it produces the conditions of life*? Everything shows that domination and forms of domination derive from how society is materially reproduced. There is not enough space here to go back to the historical emergence of patriarchy and private property, which mark the beginning of the enslavement of women, but Morgan and Malinowski's studies, and Engels' and Reich's commentaries (among others) show the link between female enslavement and the emergence of commodity society.

It is not men who oppress women - ultimately, it is capital. Men are merely the means. Parents do not "oppress" their children - they are a relay in the capitalist structure. Couldn't we say that women oppress their children? If it worked like that, we would have to imagine a juxtaposition of many varied "liberation" movements, each for some different group of people. But locking each person into their own particular status is exactly what this society wants (cf. the "status seekers" studied by Vance Packard). What about deprived old people, whose condition is often as dreadful as that of women? In Great Britain it is estimated that 500,000 elderly people each year suffer from insufficient body temperature, which is the main cause of death of 50,000, because they don't have adequate heating. If we follow the logic of "domination", everybody oppresses somebody else. I oppress unemployed people by taking their jobs. The revolutionary perspective is to show these as the effects of competition and isolation imposed by wage-labour and commodity exchange, not to stand up for one group against the others. **Granted, one cannot be revolutionary by accepting and interiorizing the roles imposed by capital : this is quite true, but truth turns to absurdity if we demand that each individual liberates himself or herself first,**

**in the hope that afterwards (or perhaps at the same time) the "whole of society will be transformed."** This is the apology of segregation.

## Nostalgia for the Family

The bourgeois revolution liberated labour. Liberating women as such would mean only their commodification. What is "non-modern" from a capitalist point of view is that the female does not yet fully appear as an "immense accumulation of commodities", although she becomes more so each day. Fourier described bourgeois love as mercantile exchange (cf. passages quoted in the *Holy Family*, VIII, 6). Now sexuality in general, and women in particular, are also treated as commodities. When capital dominated society but had not yet totally submitted it, the petty bourgeois family remained one of its essential ideological supports, which, as Reich demonstrates, it diffused amongst the workers, or at least a privileged section of them (in the 19th century many lived on the margins of marriage without a proper family life.) So the total domination of society by capital, through the generalization of commodity consumption, is also the collapse of the petty bourgeoisie and the replacement of the extended family that still exists in some of the "backwards" zones of Europe (cf. Germaine Greer on Italy), by the nuclear family (father + mother + children). This modern type of family is saturated by exchange *from within*. When someone pays their child for some household chore, the family takes it as a little game. But it is clear to everyone that this is how the child learns that everything has a price. The demand, put forward by a section of the WLM, that housework be waged, aims at getting housework recognised as a type of production, which should be paid like any other. Contrary to what people say, the current "crisis" of the family is not

because it has become more oppressive, or is experienced as such, but because it is disintegrating as a protective community. This is also one of the reasons that a WLM exists - purely economic and political demands cannot fully explain its emergence. The nuclear family, an organisation of life that modern exchange and wage-labour are destabilizing, no longer offers enough refuge or adequate compensation for social atomisation. The same goes for the couple.

In anti-family discourse we can detect a nostalgia for the “real” family. People struggle to find substitute families in the various ghettos

mentioned above, for example in “youth” milieus that unite different social strata through shared commodity consumption habits. Women, just as constrained by the need for relations with other people, are drawn to the community of women. We seek new communities because the old ones are going bankrupt - all those except the ones tolerated (i.e. organized) by capital.

No movement, no matter how horrible the oppression it struggles against, can be revolutionary as long as it thinks and acts from the perspective of a limited community. Jews cannot be emancipated as Jews, even if they claim their movement is part of a larger general movement. And even less if they claim to be the driving force of the general movement. Communism is not messianism.

The first step in the search for an identity is contact with those who resemble oneself. But if one stops at this stage one finds *only oneself*, one's own reflection. It is no accident that the practice of women-only discussions has taken on a disproportionate importance for the WLM. What was a means of going beyond oneself and breaking down the mechanisms of self-repression becomes a way of treading water. Each individual mirrors the other, sending them back to their own problem, without ever getting to the root: the social movement is not just intersubjectivity. But it is not only women who fall back on communication; it is even more common amongst the underground, disintegrated, or revolutionary milieus. When you're isolated, all you can do is talk. The WLM does many other things besides, but “consciousness raising” still weighs heavily on its practice. “Expressing yourself”, “body discourse” etc. These formulas, which express a part of reality, and a process necessary to the revolution, also express their own imprisonment in language. Representation takes the place of transformation.

**Marx's idea that capitalism itself destroys the family, and therefore bourgeois morality, could only be fulfilled in so far as capital really did “produce society in its own image” (Capital Vol. I, XV). In The German Ideology, Marx also shows how the family persists under capitalism (I, § III, H), while disappearing as the “internal bond” at its centre. Reich's failure was to never really understand the movement of capital (and therefore of the proletariat). He thought the family was essential to capital because he was unaware where capital's real power resides. Capital does need repressive structures, but more importantly it defends itself by its own dynamism, by the commodification of all social life. Its flexibility permits it a relative accommodation to the family. It is not capital's development that prevents the total liquidation of the family (however unimaginable this may seem now) but the insufficiency of this development. Capital integrated the revolutionary movement after 1917 through institutions, but also through the development of mass production that allowed the commodity to permeate all aspects of life.**



This generation cares so much about language because it has such difficulty doing what it says. Identity is only possible in the human community. For example, the oppression of certain regions and nationalities is real, and communism is not “universal” in the sense of “uniformity”, but these oppressions can only be put to an end by a movement that surpasses regionality and nationality, not by the coexistence of autonomous “liberated” areas. We cannot place end-to-end a series of movements that together will make up “the revolution”. The communist movement is something altogether different.

Revolutionaries do indeed demonstrate their “male chauvinism” when they criticise women for self-organising and holding non-mixed meetings. Because of the contempt in which women are held, women’s desire to be between themselves is necessary, and a precondition for action, as a first step. Given how some subjects are repressed within the “revolutionary” groups themselves, it is obvious that women may initially wish to get organized separately, and the same for blacks. The problem is whether this separation is organizational, and thus provisional, or if it is a principle, envisaging a women’s solution to the woman question. In the second case, women’s isolation, organized by capital, and duplicated by the WLM, will only be perpetuated.

## Proletarian and Woman

Communist theory is not the theory of alienation or of workers’ exploitation, but of the movement which will do away with alienation and exploitation. **The positive possibility of human emancipation is the formation of a class that “embodies the total loss of humanity and that can therefore redeem itself only through the total re-winning of humanity.”** (Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s*

*Philosophy of Right*). **Marx insisted on the “workers” (today we have to widen this concept to the new productive sectors) because only associated, collective labour - the creation of capital - give us the means to liberate ourselves from it. Communism cannot be a matter of industrialization, though it requires a certain threshold to be reached after which labour is “common” enough for the “separated economy” (Marx) to be eliminated. The revolution is only a “workers’” problem (we employ the word with the above reservations) because the workers occupy a functional position that makes them the central means of accomplishing it, not because the workers as such are “more alienated”, or represent some kind of ideal social figure.**

The worker is no more “alienated” than (for instance) the mother of a family. If the worker’s activity estranges them from him/herself, so does the mother’s. The concept of labour, in capitalist, commodity terms, means any activity through which one transforms one’s environment and oneself. Having a child is, in this sense, “labour”. In communism, love, children, cooking, etc, will be some of the most important “labours”. Currently, having and raising a child is a commercial operation: calculating what the outgoings and returns will be if I stay home or if I go to work. Commercial concerns enter into childrearing and one chooses the most profitable options. Parents raise their children with a view to their own social advancement. They create a labour-power in the hope that it will sell for a good price, and that the parents will profit from the image of this successful speculation. Like the worker, the mother does not work for her own activity, but for something else. And in turn her son will do the same. *Doing something for something else; this is alienation.* You can see what the “rights” acquired under

capitalism amount to. Birth control makes it possible to have children when you want. But what is “wanting”? Mostly being free to choose between capitalist alternatives, under the yoke of the market in one form or other.

All we have acquired is the freedom to adapt better to commodity life, which has itself grown more flexible, hence with a stronger hold on us.

People used to invest in children so as to have someone to care for them in their old age. Now they invest in the hope that their children will conform to a certain image of social success. Theoretical communism does not make women and workers somehow equivalent, or claim that women should support worker's struggles. It just believes that the workers are the centre of gravity of both women's and workers' emancipation. Not because they are workers, but simply because their function gives them access to an essential weapon that women, *as women*, do not have.

The power of theoretical communism is not in describing the horror of the world, which is clear to everyone (even Francis of Assisi), but in showing the mechanism of emancipation. The emancipation of women will be the task of the proletariat; which is both more and less than the famous “workers”. *More*, because the proletarians are not defined sociologically, but dynamically; because they are nothing, they are condemned to overthrow everything to exist. In this sense, proletarians are not just “the workers”. But only male and female productive proletarians have access to the decisive tools of struggle. And *less*, because some workers will oppose the revolution. The problem can only be posed in this way, not by looking around for who is “the most oppressed”. It is true that all women are oppressed. Also all children, all non-whites, etc. Capital produces inequality. But bourgeois women will not escape this oppression by struggling against

women's oppression in particular; only by a communist revolution which will resolve their situation as bourgeois women by liquidating the bourgeoisie. This liquidation will not *automatically* make the oppression of bourgeois women *as women* disappear. Only vulgar Marxism thinks that changing “the economy” will fix the rest. In fact the economy must be destroyed precisely *as economy*. The liquidation of the commodity and wage relation is the essential precondition without which the rest cannot follow. In any case, very few bourgeois women are, or will be, revolutionaries. As for the “proletariat”, it is not only a question of understanding what proletarian women suffer, but *how* they suffer it, and the preconditions of the struggle to do away with it.

## Neo-Leninism

If you claim that “*the domination of woman is the most complex and the most fundamental link*” of the chains of slavery (Sheila Rowbotham, *The Body Politic*), you are giving in to a kind of emotional blackmail. Whose condition is the most horrible? Feminist demagoguery has become as sickening as all the rest (except workerist demagoguery, which still beats all records). Making some new excuses, feminist leftism goes to join up with regular leftism. Rowbotham's text, which is little known but provides a theoretical basis for parts of the WLM that consider themselves radical, says that “*movements develop through communication*” and that “*forms of communication thus considerably define movements' forms and directions*”. But she should have first asked what the relation is between the nature of the movement and its form of expression. To go back to the beginning: what is this society we live in?

**The question of expression becomes paramount precisely when the movement is weak or in decline, whether after 1871 when**

**the revolutionary movement was absorbed, or in today's confused and confusing movements of "all the people". Language becomes a problem just when communication has stopped because individuals are isolated. The problem will not be solved by finding a better means of communication, but by removing the root of this isolation. Those who prioritize the question of expression fall into the trap this society sets for them as it seeks to substitute expression for real transformation. On the contrary, the communist movement is that which abolishes the conditions of existence, and in the present moment attacks them.**

To make expression the number one problem was the goal of the Second International. Taking after Kautsky, Lenin wanted to replace bourgeois ideology with socialist workers' ideology. This is how they justified an organization external to the proletariat. Paradoxically, leftists supposedly liberated from Leninism but who still think in terms of "consciousness" end up doing the same thing the socialist bureaucrats did. And so does feminist leftism, when it supports a separate WLM for the sake of a specific consciousness-raising and liberation of expression. For traditional Leninists, the external organization supplies the consciousness. For the new kinds, it does not interfere with the proletariat (or in this case women), it leaves them their space and autonomy and lets them have their say. Speak for them or let them speak - two sides of the same thing. But whether speech is delivered top-down or bottom-up, one thing goes unchallenged; the supposedly essential character of words and expression. Whether the intellectuals ("collective" i.e. Party intellectual, or "independent" individual intellectual) impose themselves, or refrain from acting as "mediators", they justify their own role, an essential role of course: for them, *words* are what any

social movement is about. The movement is thus reduced to a movement of consciousness, whether it imports consciousness from outside or whether its reason for existing is simply to *express* its consciousness.

**Discovering what was "*hidden from history*" (the title of a book by Rowbotham) is only relevant if that knowledge is more than just knowledge, if it contributes to action. Ignorance is no more oppressive than when knowledge is debased to ideology; educationism is as reactionary as obscurantism. We are submitted to the "*dictatorship of enlightenment*". Saying that everything has to first pass through "knowledge", or that decision-making is the most important moment (i.e. the democratic position), both make the same mistake - those for whom education or self-education is fundamental always speak in terms of *taking power*.**

The intellectual is back to make himself useful again; he used to serve the working class, now he serves the women. Leninism is reinvented, albeit democratized. Everybody expresses themselves - the majority speak as equals, and the conscious minority run the movement's journals and write the books. The real social relation is turned on its head. In the end it is no longer the class (or the women) who expresses themselves through these mediators, but the mediators who make them express themselves. It is a teacher's vision. And when the theorists of expression do "express" something, they never say what is essential. When the radicals within the English women's movement speak about left communism in England (for instance about Sylvia Pankhurst), they have but little to say about it (cf. Rowbotham, *Women, Resistance and Revolution*). Wanting to be the voice of the silenced, they have nothing to say. There is indeed a "*Feminist School of Falsification*"...



## Rights and Duties

Nothing could be more wrong than to think the women's or the workers' movement *as such* could be agents of human emancipation. In England in 1917-1924 one of the best expressions of the English communist movement, Sylvia Pankhurst, came from feminism. But out of feminism's other wing, also former Suffragists, came a powerful anti-revolutionary force, which in 1914 enlisted the workers into nationalism and denounced the revolutionaries. Suffragism was a platform for the democratic ideology which we are now starting to realize was the grave-digger of revolutionary aspirations after 1917 (and especially at their centre in Germany). To call the WLM an essentially radical movement is completely anti-historical. It can only become radical when it comes out of its own ghetto, out of itself.

Fighting for women's "rights" is not subversive in itself. The very concept of rights and duties presupposes a society which goes unquestioned. The acquisition of rights is no more revolutionary than imposing "duties" on the bourgeoisie, as the old labour movement tried to do before 1914. Indeed if those duties apply to the bourgeoisie, they must surely apply to the workers too, and if society is supportive and treats the workers better, the workers had better support society. The same goes for rights. Equality between men and women, like solidarity between bourgeoisie and workers, implies reciprocal rights and duties within an unchanged society. The state imposes sacrifices on both bourgeoisie and workers, on men and women, and thereby maintains an even deeper oppression.

When capital dominates everything, demanding women's liberation from (i.e. social management of) domestic work looks much like settling for a shorter working day. Capital has conquered all areas of life; work and leisure, "free" and "non-free" time. With the

prolongation of life and the reduction of the number of children, women devote less than 10% of their lives to child-birth and rearing, instead of 1/3 previously. That is why people demand the "liberation" of their newly available time. But time is not "liberated" in the world of capital. The human being will only be emancipated from the dictatorship of fragmented and quantified time by emancipating themselves from capital.

## Reformism and Tragedy

The emotionality, and pathetic, even tragic tone (tragic in the sense of a contradiction with no resolution, i.e. no *immediately* possible resolution) of the WLM's journals betray a certain lucidity about these realities, as does their repeated assertion that we need more than words, that we must act. Without trying to predict the future, when the WLM's evolution will be determined by other factors than itself, one cannot help but think of women like Sylvia Pankhurst, or others further back in time, at moments when all revolution was precluded, but who blazed with a passion that burnt itself up, was unable to reach its object, devoured its subject, and finally pushed these women out to the fringe of politics. The WLM organizations (the French Mouvement de Libération des Femmes for example) get out of this predicament by gradually moderating and ideologising themselves. They end up with the same mystified and mystifying relationship to "revolution" as the far left, which they were initially born in opposition to. Sometimes they become kinds of traditional reformism (NOW in the USA and Choisir in France, for example), sometimes they integrate into leftism (MLF). The organised and informal WLM react aggressively, but their aggression is just a front, a trick to reassure themselves and avoid having to change, to deepen, and to change *themselves*.

Conflicts, no matter how violent, that do not attack capital's foundations only reinforce it. They show which contradictions have to be smoothed out, and win over to the side of capital some people who are granted privileges (which was even the case for most of the pre-1914 "militant" labour movement). The Suffragettes are proof that one can be violent without being revolutionary. The energy of their actions testifies to something more than their stated objectives; a profound dissatisfaction, an aspiration to something else. But the social function of their activism and militancy was to use this energy up, to expend it without threatening the established order.

## The Reorganization of Capital

**Capital has not entered into decomposition, but massive reorganization. And it holds considerable assets to help it come out victorious once again.**

Revolutionary movements might flare up next week, but the best way of preparing is by not counting on it happening that soon. A fundamental critique of the WLM is as necessary as the fight against the latent contempt for women that exists even within the subversive movement. Like any social movement, the WLM starts out from legitimate specific demands. Nobody comes out fighting for the universal. But it has already got to the stage where the WLM organizations are transformed into pressure groups preoccupied with their own problems, acting as competitors against one another. It still has some vitality, and perhaps it will for a long time. But though its activities are more positive than those of the far left in general, it plays no less of a pacifying role. The radical and active elements within it do not prove its revolutionary nature any more than Rosa Luxemburg's presence in the SPD<sup>14</sup> before 1914 was enough to

make that party revolutionary. What counts is the function of the whole.

In the absence of a revolutionary impetus in society at large, it was inevitable that the great majority of the WLM would move in this direction. Those people who refuse reformism cannot do so unless they quit the official WLM organizations, and then try to achieve what they can in the here and now. For the WLM, the specific is opposed to the whole. For the revolutionary movement, the whole is not opposed to the specific. We cannot fight "capitalism" in general; communism is not an extremism. It makes no profession of radicality. But if their only enemy is "capital" in general, these women will fall into false generality through abstraction, whether political or theoretical. All "life" around us and all institutions are determined by capitalism. It is only *as experience* that the fight for reforms has any revolutionary significance, not for the ephemeral concessions it claws back.

**After two world wars, a multitude of others and totalitarianism on the rise, we know that revolution is the only realism. Throwing ourselves into the quest for reforms increasingly planned by capital, we only reinforce the state and its structures (trade unions, parties, etc).** We can gauge the efficacy of reformist "realism" by comparing the programs of the Women's Liberation Workshop in 1970 and Women's Emancipation Union in... 1892. After 80 years of reformism, we are still waiting for basic demands to be satisfied. Capital can permit anything - i.e. anything that reinforces its control over society.

And what about immediate needs? There are oppressed women struggling everywhere;

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<sup>14</sup>The German Social Democratic Party of which Rosa Luxemburg led the left wing, which became the Communist Party in 1919.

what do we do together with them, and for them? We cannot postpone everything until “the day after the revolution”, to quote the subtitle of a 1902 book by Kautsky. But the gap between real emancipation (including personal emancipation) and what one is able to do today is not a question only for women, but for all of us. A new militancy (where women fight for the true cause, for the revolution - but *the right one* this time), that dissociates action from our immediate problems, would be as reactionary as the old. Activity now requires a break with specialized activism as much as with the complaisant passivity that hides real distress under a facade of aggressiveness and/or theory.

To those who might say, “That is all very nice, but what do you propose to do?”, all we can say is that their reaction shows that for them the WLM was a refuge, as other movements have been for other people, a new family from which they expected everything. The question of “revolutionary” activity is quite simple if you approach it adequately. How could one expect everything from a collective movement without being oneself an active, transforming element of it? In the absence of revolution, there is no solution to social contradictions, including the existence of those strange creatures called “revolutionaries”. The solution is the revolution itself. There is no high road. Those who need confirmation of success here and now can forget it. In any case, if the proletariat failed to fight against the “*encroachments of capital*” (Marx) here and now, we might be skeptical about its capacity to carry out a revolution.

It is not a question of women abandoning themselves as women and giving up their problems and requirements to take part in the revolutionary movement. And anyway, why should they be afraid of being “tricked”?

Simone de Beauvoir was only “tricked” (as she wrote in her memoirs) because she got into politics, and sometimes of the most contemptible kind. Being obsessed with the movement’s “recuperation” is also a proof of weakness. Women were not betrayed by previous movements any more than “men” lost out by being integrated into capital. Having begun with the struggle against their own conditions of existence, proletarians have come merely to try and alleviate those conditions, which has finally led to support the state and capital.

**The male revolutionary movement didn’t absorb the female movement - capitalist society absorbed them both. Previous movements did not fail because they neglected women. They neglected women, and all the rest, because they failed. It wasn’t just women who were “misled”. They were mobilized for something other than their own emancipation, as was the proletariat as a whole. This is what will happen again if proletarians do not attack the foundations of society in the next movements. By helping to obscure the perspective of communism the WLM does women a grave disservice.**

## **Masculine and Feminine**

The fact that the woman question was undervalued played a part in preceding failures, but it was not the cause of the defeats. Let’s put things back in perspective. Instead of distinguishing (like Proudhon trying to separate the capitalist wheat from the chaff) the “good” and “bad” aspects of the female condition in contemporary China, it would be better to understand what China is: a capitalist country like many others, albeit in a special way, like others.

Certain constraints on women are lesser in China than elsewhere, others are well worse.



It is interesting, but not surprising, to see that the feminist far-left finds positive aspects in the Chinese female way of life, a way of life that pro-Maoist feminists would denounce as “fascistic” if a politician dared to advocate it in the West.

It was almost inevitable that Feminism fall into every leftist trap. It falls into raptures about model day-care centres, direct democracy, and workers’ assemblies in the “workers’ states”, but what is worse is that in the end the far-leftist WLM does not even support these so-called “socialist” countries. If it did, at least it could be attacked for that. Instead it *accepts* them, no more. It accepts them *as experiments*; just like other people accept other things.

This movement that set out to clarify how things really stand, at least on the question of women, makes no decisive judgments. It settles for “making things better”. It accepts “the revolution”, and “socialism”, and even goes along with them (without bothering much about what these mean), on condition that it be left to struggle alongside, in parallel with the “proletariat”. Of course we know where parallels converge... “*Everybody struggle for themselves, unity will follow.*” As if the revolutionary movement were the sum of a series of different struggles that sit end-to-end, without interlinking or supporting each other.

**Wallowing in the female condition or wallowing in the workers’ condition; each is as reactionary as the other. Neither equality nor regulation over our present lives are revolutionary: they too are conditions to be overthrown.**

We are seeing a whole host of emerging one-issue perspectives and groups: homosexual, female, youth, third-worldist, etc. Similarly, after 1871 the socialist movement

reinterpreted history from the perspective of the worker, who had up until that point been looked down upon by bourgeois society. The socialist movement was not aiming to get to the bottom of things and to clear the way for total emancipation, and neither is the WLM. They are trying to give workers, women, colonial subjects, etc. a bigger portion than they were and are allotted, within the same society, the same world. In doing so, workers, women, colonial subjects, etc. are only chained to this world all the more tightly.

Theoretical communism focuses on those with access to the means of production, not because in themselves they have a special right or virtue, nor because communism is generalized labour. We cannot succumb to the emotional blackmail of the desperate condition of workers, females, homosexuals, the Third World, or anybody else. We do not need a lesson in suffering from anybody. Misery is not a quantifiable datum to measure, determining who is the most oppressed and therefore the most potentially revolutionary. We are not the sociologists of misery. If we need to make distinctions, it is only to show the “how” of the future revolution. Those who give in to the demagogues’ emotional blackmail-by-maximum--exploitation only demonstrate their need for excuses and reassurances. How feeble their need for revolution must be... Glorifying the worker as worker, the woman as woman, or the homosexual as homosexual are just more ways of breaking the desire for the human community.

**Constancy Chatterley**

Article originally published in  
*Le Fléau social*, n° 5-6, 1974



# 40 Years Later

## A conversation with Constance

**Blast & Meor :** In 1974 you wrote “The Diana Complex” published in the last issue of *Le Fléau Social*<sup>15</sup>. Did you participate regularly in the journal and FHAR Group 5<sup>16</sup> that produced it ?

**Constance:** I wasn't a member of FHAR, but I knew Alain Fleig who organized *Le Fléau Social*. He was in the FHAR and came to encounter what we can call, for want of a better word, the ultra-left. *Le Fléau Social* dealt with sexuality and homosexuality, but in its own way. Its aim was to be scandalous, at which it never failed. Some issues sold more than ten thousand copies, but that didn't last long. Alain Fleig was a maverick: after leaving the FHAR, he gradually became isolated. What *Le Fléau* was saying was too complex for anyone to understand.

**What made the FHAR stand out in the ferment of groups and ideas at the time ?**

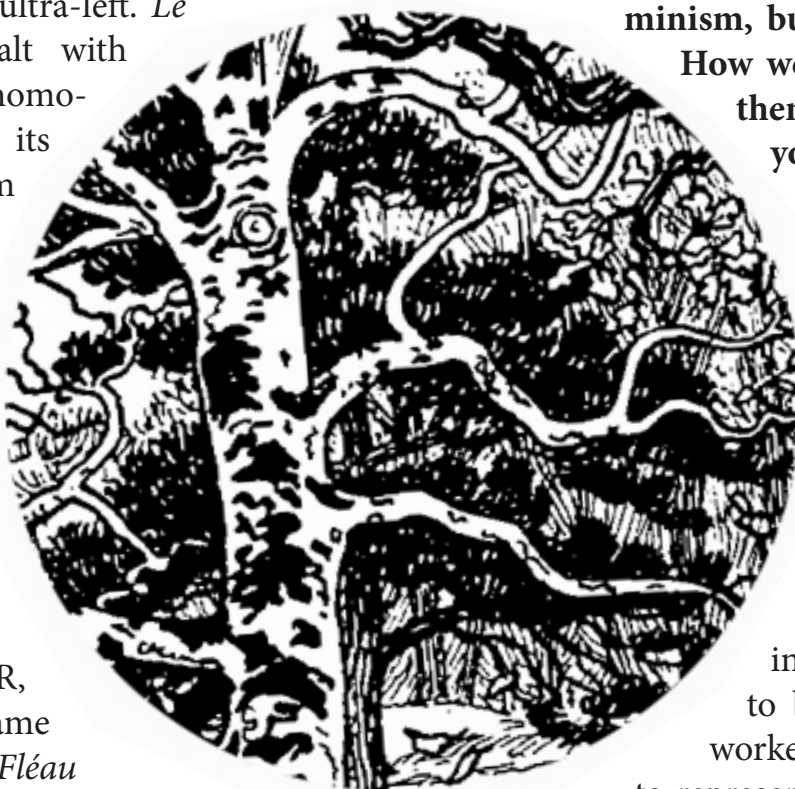
It was trying to connect sexual revolution and social revolution. In the 1920's and 30's other people, particularly Reich, had undertaken a similar work, with some merit but without success. The bankruptcy of the social revolution made the failure of that project inevitable, in 1970 just as pre-WW2.

***Le Fléau Social* was gleefully aggressive and provocative. Your article takes aim at feminism, but also at the far left.**

**How were you distinct from them, and what allowed you to make those critiques ?**

At the time I, and others like me, opposed two deeply rooted - and indeed competing - currents: leftism and “bourgeois” feminism - especially North American feminism. The first wanted to be spokesman for the workers, the second wanted to represent women, and both of them wanted to build their organizations and power on top of that.

A vague leftism was current amongst radical *groupuscules* at the time and fairly well represented in the media and the universities and colleges. Intellectuals, journalists and teachers



<sup>15</sup> See introduction “*Le Fléau Social*” in this brochure.

<sup>16</sup> See footnote 7, p. 4.



used to quote Marx and talk about the working class, socialism, and an alternative to capitalist society.

In 1970 most feminists only knew either the ossified Marxism of the French Communist Party, which still opposed abortion, or the equally myopic Marxism of the far left, who either straightforwardly rejected the question of women or dissolved it “dialectically” into “class”. So whether out of choice or reaction, the women’s movement was estranged from Marx and Marxism. Let’s face it, the ultra-left of the time hardly shed much light on the matter: the majority of its groups were indifferent or hostile not only to organized feminism but even to the “woman question”. I don’t remember the Situationists dealing with these questions, but anyway they came before that era of the women’s liberation movement, or the French Mouvement de Libération des Femmes (MLF)<sup>17</sup>.

**People say that what differentiated *Le Fléau Social* from journals like *Antinorm*<sup>18</sup> for example, was precisely the influence of the ultra-left on its analyses. Nothing was off-limits to *Le Fléau Social*, even the struggles at Lip<sup>19</sup>.**

I don’t regret what I said about Lip, which today is taken as almost sacrosanct. If I rewrote that article today I wouldn’t change very much about women, but I would speak differently about work. It’s a question of words, but of more than just that. By using work to mean generic activity, as the young Marx does, and by speaking as if it were necessary to give work a “communist” meaning, I perpetuated a confusion. Work is an alienated activity. We do not need to “liberate” work, but to liberate ourselves from it.

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<sup>17</sup> See footnote 1, p. 4

<sup>18</sup> *Antinorm* : journal of FHAR Group 11, which was close to the Trotskyist Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire.

<sup>19</sup> See footnote 10, p. 7.

**Your article was published in a journal founded by the FHAR, but is very critical of the MLF - today that seems surprising.**

Yes, without the MLF there would certainly have been no FHAR, and without the FHAR there would have been no *Fléau Social*. *Le Fléau* split from the homosexual movement, which Alain Fleig felt was too focused on the sexual (or homosexual) question. *Le Fléau* refused to consider “homosexuals” as a specific community whose members might all supposedly have common interests or political demands, which in fact boils down to separating them from the rest of the revolutionary program. For Alain Fleig (and for me too, in fact) that program remained to be elaborated.

**I can’t imagine a text like yours being written nowadays. The author would be accused of defending patriarchy !**

In those days we were not afraid to criticize anything, including the MLF. Perhaps it was easier to choose sides back then, at least on sexual questions. Around 1970 people’s beliefs and behaviours were governed by a conservative or plainly reactionary morality, although that was being increasingly disputed. Forty years later, in a country like France, male-female inequality has diminished and it’s more possible to live a “minority” sexuality. Gay marriage was eventually permitted when society understood that homosexuality didn’t pose a threat to marriage, or to anything else besides. The only values that homosexuality threatens are expendable to modern democratic capitalism. Of course this is not the case in all countries. Of course it is still very hard to be homosexual in a small town, or in certain milieus - bourgeois or working-class. But despite that, official and government discourse, and the majority of the media, celebrate equality, the opening-up of social norms, and respect for difference. So now it’s the “reactionaries”, not the same as those of 1970,

but influential nevertheless, who can play at being “nonconformists”. People like me find ourselves stuck between, on the one hand, compulsory respect for the politically correct, which has become the dominant ideology, and on the other, the anti-politically correctness of those who defend the “mum and dad” traditional family. I have no desire to choose between them. If all I get for that is incomprehension and slander, so be it. Today, since homosexuals can get artificial insemination and surrogate pregnancy, if you don’t demand the right to artificial insemination and surrogate pregnancy, you’re a homophobe. As Marie-Jo Bonnet said, “mariage pour tous”<sup>20</sup> has made marriage an emblem of the left<sup>21</sup>. Thanks, but no thanks - I’ll do without.

**The critique of militantism (or in this case feminist militantism) was widespread in the most radical milieus at the time. But the tone you employed was very different from the rest of the ultra-left. What distinguished you from them ?**

Just that I was interested in the man-woman relation as a fundamental problem. Most ultra-left groups criticized the women’s liberation movement or the MLF, without bothering to take feminist issues seriously. Under the pretext of placing the woman problem within a more general problem, of situating the part within the whole, they dissolved the part. But without this part, the whole has no reality, no meaning. It’s the eternal tendency to reduce woman to wage-labourer. They refused to admit that the oppression of women is not a consequence of class struggle. In fact, the oppres-

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<sup>20</sup> French social movements and eventual legislation in 2013 legalising same-sex marriage.

<sup>21</sup> Reference to Marie-Joseph Bonnet’s book *Adieu les rebelles!* (Good-bye Rebels!) (published by Flammarion, 2014). The author, a former member of the MLF, FHAR and Gouines Rouges (Red Dykes), was attacked by LGBT activists for her positions on gay marriage and surrogate maternity.

sion of women is much older than the class struggle! But in the *capitalist* world we live in, capitalism sustains the oppression of women. The difficulty is grasping both aspects at once.

**You nevertheless give priority to the class struggle.**

No! The class struggle is just a means. It is the ground upon which we have no choice but to exist and to act. My aim is not to identify or describe class struggle. It is not to stir up class struggle. It is that communist revolution put an end to class struggle. I should add this goal is also our problem, actually. It is only the professionals of class negotiation who need an eternal class struggle. The NPA<sup>22</sup> and the CNT<sup>23</sup> need class struggle - they live off it. Not me.

**It is reducing the question of women to that of wage labour, as Marxists generally do...**

It’s true that anarchists do it less, because anarchy is closer to the immediate, to specific lived conditions and oppressions, and therefore to those of women. But that being said, there are more similarities between Marxism and anarchism than we sometimes think: “Everything will be fine when we get rid of the wage” (Marxists) or “Everything will be fine when we get rid of authority” (anarchists). No more domination or oppression. Harmony. Amongst other things, between man and woman.

Marxist and anarchist revolutionaries alike shared a common attitude of contempt mixed with blindness. This only started to fade in the 70’s, when the question of communism began to be posed socially - by minorities, I hasten to say - and with it the question of masculine domination.

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<sup>22</sup> Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste - New Anticapitalist Party, French far left party formed in 2009 by former leader and members of the dissolved Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, itself a reformation of the Trotskyist Ligue Communiste. See footnote 12, p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> French anarcho-syndicalist organization.

## From the 70's, and not before ?

Nobody is more intelligent than their time. Engels wrote things about homosexuality that no communist would write today. The worst part of Marx's adultery with his maid Helen Demuth was undoubtedly that their son Frederick was never raised in the family with Karl Marx's other children. Certain Surrealists made no secret of visiting brothels. For people with even a minimal claim to being radical, behaviour like that has become unthinkable a century later. But we should not think we are better than them. It is absurd to judge the practices of one epoch according to the values that became consensus in the next. If our views of sexuality, the family, and prostitution have changed, it has not so much to do with struggles or the development of our consciousness as with the family's own decline in respectability, which is itself due to the way the family and society have developed. That doesn't mean that socialists, communists and anarchists in the past were unaware of these questions. But only a small, generally libertarian, fringe understood their importance.

## Today

**That's no longer the case today. You can't deny that things have improved.**

But that "improvement" is often no more than discourse - especially for those people who live on discourse. It's now obligatory for every far left group to have an anti-sexist paragraph in its program, as well as an anti-racist one, an anti-homophobic one, an anti-Islamophobia one, and one about the environment. Even the French Socialist Party's election propaganda doesn't leave out women, disabled people or the endangered Amazon rainforest. The women's cause is now a government theme.

**Not everything is just discourse. Inequality between men and women has genuinely declined...**

Are you talking about wages? If you believe the statistics, French men now earn "only" 16% more than French women, working full-time. 31% if you take full-time and part-time together, because women work part-time much more than men. 31% is a lot, but it's less than it was forty years ago. Those are the figures for 2013. We could bet that in 2050, if wage-labour still exists, the gap will be down to 15%. Great victory !

**But the wage differential is mainly due to the kind of jobs women do, which are often less qualified and lower paid. Today, for a man and a women in the same position, the difference is much smaller. So the struggle pays ! That reminds me of *We Want Sex Equality*, a film you must know. It shows a successful strike by female Ford workers demanding wages equal to the men. That was in 1969<sup>24</sup>.**

Yes, it's based on real events. What they don't show is that in exchange for that wage increase, the female workers had to accept increased production rates, work on Sundays, etc. The female workers win the right to suffer like the men! In France, half the "working" population is female. Honestly, I am ready to fight for equality, but it will never be a step forward for women to be as badly treated as men. In 1974 I attacked the feminism whose goal was to "catch up" the wage differential and win for women all the worst aspects of the male condition. The feminism that dominates in 2015 does almost nothing but that.

**Wouldn't wage equality at least be something ?**

"Equal work, equal pay"... Perhaps for you. I want the abolition of the wage.

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<sup>24</sup> *We Want Sex Equality*, a 2010 film by Nigel Sticks.



**In any case the persistence of wage inequality doesn't mean that nothing has changed. There is more than just the world of work. Sex or sexuated roles seem to be in crisis - don't you find some hope in that ?**

Yes they are in crisis, but what will emerge from the crisis? Western society takes pride in blowing away the gender barriers that stand before it. But we are very far from the situation where people born with either a penis or a vagina circulate freely between activities and behaviours that are not assigned to them without their asking. We are still trapped in roles that define us, despite ourselves, some as men, others as women.

Sometimes I wonder what world I'm living in. If I listen to the radio or look at magazines, everything seems set out to persuade me that I'm lucky to live in an enlightened and emancipated era, in a country on the way to liberating itself from sexual differentiation. Even school teachers are saying we need to get rid of it. I read in a school textbook published by the big education publisher Belin: *"Each person learns to become a man or woman from their environment and education. But there is another even more personal aspect of sexuality - sexual orientation. You can be a man and be attracted to women, but you can also feel 100 % masculine and be attracted to men."*

And yet looking around, "traditional" sex differentiation is glaringly obvious. On the way out of a politically correct gender studies course, a college student can look at naked girls on his iPhone. In the street he walks past posters of barely clad models, and at home he has an infinity of virtual female bodies at his disposal. On the other hand, the vast majority of images of men he sees are bodies fighting (war footage, violent films, video games) or in competitive sports. The stereotypes are not dead. Although public and official discourse denies it, the sex hierarchy is permanently reinforced. The 21st century denounces paedophilia

while making a display (and a competition) of hyper-sexualised young girls. We are living a schizophrenia.

**Schizophrenia? Isn't that a sign of conflict? A decisive trend that provokes reactions and resistance? As in the case of gay marriage: we all remember how enormous the "Manif Pour Tous"<sup>25</sup> was, but we seem to forget that homosexual marriage was actually voted through, and that a majority of French people accept it.**

Those depressing mobilizations are testament to a deep movement, comparable to the power of right-wing conservative morality in the USA. They articulate and exploit an exaggerated but real anxiety: the family is all that remains after the commodity takes everything over. Or anyway, that's what they want to believe. In reality, money has always permeated and governed family life. Theatrical stagings of our fears still draw the crowds. It's a kind of resistance, nothing more - it won't reverse what you correctly call a decisive long-term trend. More than half the population of the USA already has access to gay marriage<sup>26</sup>. The 'Manif Pour Tous' in France opposed a law that got passed anyway, and which the re-election of a right-wing government won't call into question. The "reactionaries" don't necessarily win, even where they seem to be at their strongest. In 2014, on the same day, Swiss voters voted to limit immigration and refused to make the access to abortion more difficult. You'd have to be a leftist to think that "the

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<sup>25</sup> Manif Pour Tous - "demonstration for everyone" [a play on mariage pour tous, "marriage for everyone"], national social movement and organisations after 2012 against legalisation of same-sex marriage, linked with right parties and the Catholic church, but with a large social base. Some demonstrations in Paris in 2013 gathered hundreds of thousands of people.

<sup>26</sup> Since June 2015, same-sex marriage is now legal in all US states, though some local authorities are doing their best to block its implementation.

moral order” is making a comeback in Europe or the USA. In the recent New York mayoral elections the candidates were an out lesbian and a man married to a black woman who is proud of her lesbian past. More and more politicians and chiefs of industry are coming out, and will carry on coming out. What used to be character defamation is becoming a badge of tolerance, a democratic gold star. Obviously this is still unthinkable in Russia, black Africa or Muslim countries. It will still be a long time before it's as easy to organize Gay Pride in Sarajevo as it is in Berlin. But the strength of the reaction shows how deep the change is.

**And in Spain the government had to retreat on its project to criminalise abortion in the face of mobilizations by women.**

I would say that abortion is now the only thing that unites the women's cause. Because feminism was mainly a movement for equality, once women got the vote and became business chiefs and heads of state, it is only threats to abortion that still mobilize big crowds of women (and men), as in Spain recently. But I noticed that not many people came out for the solidarity demonstrations in France. The women's liberation movement only becomes active when women's rights get trampled on, and then only on condition that it can actually put up a fight, which in many countries is next to impossible. There were mobilizations of women in the “Arab spring”, for example. But where women's rights have been - or seem to have been - won, like in France or the United States, a specific women's movement seems pointless, as if it was exhausted by feminism's apparent success. Its own victories, its assets (as one says nowadays), enfeeble it. By having its demands satisfied it has been robbed of its dynamic. That is why the movement has become depoliticized.

**But it is not only about rights or formal equality. You can't deny the enormous difference**

**between women's lives today and in the 1950's, for example.**

That comparison isn't much more meaningful than asking whether a French worker lives “better” in 2015 than they did in 1950. Better health, increased life expectancy, contraception and the right to abortion contribute to improved living conditions, but also to the increased productivity of “better kept” proletarians. If the French working man (or woman) produces more wealth in 2014 than they did in 1950 (if you believe hourly productivity metrics) it is due to increased efficiency of the machines, but also to the fact that the workers are treated better. Women are relatively liberated from the constraints of maternity - which is great - but for them this means the freedom to go to work outside the house. Can we really be liberated by work?

**You're going too far. I know you said you want a society without work - we'll speak about that later. But women in France in 2015 are nevertheless less trapped in their role than they were in 1950.**

It depends what we're talking about exactly. It was a (relative) victory for feminism in the 60's and 70's to no longer define women as mothers, - or at least to do so less - at the same time as women were winning an undeniable freedom thanks to contraception. Now, fifty years later, dominant opinion thinks that a woman who doesn't have a child is missing something. But current thinking denies this and pretends women are free to choose to have children or not. Changes in the family, the decline of the paternal figure and the formal equality of the sexes have not touched the persistent centrality of motherhood, which has taken on perhaps even greater importance symbolically. Having ceased to be obligatory, maternity is now experienced as a “choice”. The child becomes all the more precious; the centre of attention that gives meaning to the whole family. Which, by

the way, was the objective of both the official promoters of free contraception and Family Planning centres, and of enlightened Gaullists like Lucien Neuwirth<sup>27</sup>. Artificial insemination, surrogate maternity, and many lesbians' (or at least organizations that speak in their name) desire to have children, signal a return to "woman" being defined by motherhood. In the 70's, it went without saying that feminist lesbians were against the imposition of motherhood on women (particularly through the prohibition of abortion up until 1975, but not only that). Militant lesbians opposed the fact that women were considered (even often by themselves) only to be real women if they raise children. Wherever the child comes from - "traditional" conception and birth, in vitro fertilization, artificial insemination, surrogate maternity or adoption - it has now become self-evident that one wants to have children, and that one has the right to satisfy that desire. If you find that astonishing you get called a reactionary. Politically, this is a regression.

**In fact, "marriage for everybody" initially meant gay male marriage.**

Everything will always be easier for men. The female homosexual will never be the "equal" of the male. The social acceptance of a woman living in a couple with another woman is conditional on her birthing or adopting a child. If not, she is "not like other women".

I know open, tolerant, leftist parents who have no problem with their children's homosexuality, except that they want grandchildren, especially from the daughter. The family exerts an implicit but strong pressure on the lesbian daughter. The mother no longer tells her daughter that it is her destiny to find a husband; instead she makes her regret not having a child. The guilt is still there, but its object has changed. With the end of patriarchy, sexual constraint becomes indirect and insidious. The real question was never who you make love with. It is the question of the family.

**Is the family in as bad a shape as you described it in 1974 ?**

It's true that the family has made a comeback, but had it ever really gone away? Living in cohabitation or getting a divorce does not abolish the "dad + mum + two children" model. You can bet that a good proportion of the people marching in the "Manif Pour Tous" will get divorced some day. But that doesn't stop them from going out on the streets in mass. They may be old-fashioned, but there are a lot of them. In 1974 the idea of "work, family, nation" made us laugh. Looking around today at the state of the world and the increase of religions and nationalisms, I might find it a bit less amusing.

The dominant tendency amongst progressives is not to erase the family, but to live it differently, flexibly: the "Zen" family. There is no real disagreement between mainstream and radical, conformist and alternative positions about the family. If they think back to the 60's and 70's, those people are now thinking: "We won! the hetero-normal, patriarchal, oppressive family got what was coming to it. Long live the reconfigured, homosexual, open family!"

**The critique of the family has almost completely disappeared from radical milieus. Certain thinkers even see it as one of the last bastions against the commodification of the world. I think of people like Jean-Claude Michéa<sup>28</sup> and Christopher Lasch<sup>29</sup>, very in fashion with the far left... and the far right.**

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<sup>27</sup> French politician who proposed what became the 'Neuwirth Law' legalizing contraceptive pills in France in 1967.

<sup>28</sup> French socialist philosopher and critic of leftism, liberalism, and progressivism, theorist and specialist on George Orwell.

<sup>29</sup> American sociologist who criticized contemporary individualism and the "culture industry".



Michéa and Lasch's form of recuperation relies on their ambiguity about the relationship between past and present: the trope of "anyway, things were better before", or at least "not as bad". I am not nostalgic about pre-capitalist communities, if only because they were, and still are, patriarchal.

One of the reasons for the difficulty of radical critique of the world is that it must attack conservative and reactionary positions, but also the most progressive and modernizing positions at the same time, because these tendencies, through opposing one another, synthesize. For example, our critique is only meaningful if it takes into account as much the rise or resurgence of identity and ethnic divisions as the fact that anti-racism is becoming a dominant ideology with its own official discourse of tolerance and diversity.

In matters of morality and sexuality, a very powerful neo-conservatism in the United States and resurgences of religion almost everywhere are pitted against "total freedom" and everybody's right to construct themselves as they want. The 70's utopia of sexual liberation was frequently ridiculous and sometimes idiotic, but it carried a collective aspiration (if rarely followed through by the first practical steps). What dominates now is the mirage of the sovereign individual free to live out his own fantasies, at least on screen, if not with technological prostheses. What he dreams of producing must be smooth, inoffensive, and ultimately must put nothing at stake. With no nostalgia for the constraints of yesteryear (they never disappeared - far from it!), I personally do not adhere to the capitalist illusion of the self-created individual: "Nothing is natural, everything is culture, everything is possible, anything that corrodes tradition is subversive..." For example, acting on one's own body with surgery or chemistry presupposes cutting-edge technology. How do you reconcile that with the critique of the

medical establishment and power? I simply pose the question.

**The answer unfortunately is that each person, isolated, devotes themselves to a particular critique. They become specialists in the denunciation of technology and science, or questions of sexuality, or migrant defense, etc.**

And you can't take a "middle of the road" way between the defenders of trans-humanism and the followers of tradition. One does not surpass two wrong positions by taking the best bits of each.

**On the commodification of the family - the *Communist Manifesto* described the family progressing towards "simple money relations". In 1848 !**

In those terms, it was wrong. The family is much more than that. It is a place, and a bond. Even more so in crisis periods, when it provides the individual with protection; a refuge that they have difficulty finding anywhere else. It is an unavoidable paradox.

The more we ask of the family, the more contradictions we push it into. And yet the family marches on.

In 1897, when André Gide wrote "*Families, I hate you*", there was something shocking about it. You couldn't take that seriously in 2015.

I observe a regression.

In 1970 Barbara Loden directed *Wanda*, her only film, where she plays a mother married to a miner, who neglects her children, goes on the road and meets men. We know nothing about her past, her motivations, or how she got there, and her husband seems a decent if somewhat helpless man. She just leaves, and what happens to her is neither happy nor sad. A film like that would not go down well these days. The public loves a struggling woman, as long as she has an instantly recognizable "just cause": an odious husband, incestuous father, exploitative boss, etc. Either that or she makes

the audience laugh. But Wanda is neither tragic nor funny. It is still one of the hardest things to admit that a mother, without explicit reasons, would want to up and leave, quit her duties and just go.

In 2015, it would be difficult to make a film like Louis Malle's *Murmur of the Heart* (1971), where a teenager makes love with his mother, without them feeling either confused or miserable.

On Gay Pride day, a same-sex couple can walk around Paris in bondage gear and then go and get married afterwards... but there are still some films it is better not to make, and some ideas it would be better not to think....

**Do you think that capitalism and patriarchy are compatible? And do you use the terms “patriarchy” and “masculine domination” as synonyms ?**

Capitalism undermines patriarchy but maintains masculine domination.

Capitalism relies on the equivalence of commodities, and therefore also on the equivalence of human beings, whose labour it turns into commodities. It tends to transform everything - human beings and things - into exchangeable and interchangeable components. As long as the equality of equivalents is respected, capitalism is theoretically indifferent should the bearers be white, black, man, woman, Christian, Muslim, atheist, virtuous or libertine. When every product must be produced to be exchangeable for any other product (object or service - blowjob or haircut), any male or female buyer must be able to exchange freely with any male or female seller. If capitalism were just that, it could have already allowed itself to completely erase the distinction between male and female wage-labourers, or between bourgeois men and women.

But capitalism is not a pure model, it functions as a whole society, within a world which it constantly transforms, but never totally re-

duces to simple commodity exchange, or even to the elementary wage-labour/capital relation. It profits from difference. Certain bosses decide to take on female HR managers, not because they can pay them less, but to capitalise on women's supposed “natural qualities”. Companies buy into the “gay community” as a market and as a marketing tool.

Capitalism presupposes that all of society is reproduced through private property, primarily that of the means of production. Some possess the means of production. Others don't. The former put the latter to work for their own profit. Some of your readers will say “that's just old-school Marxism”. But it is as true and fundamental in 2015 as it was in 1848. That is why the family plays the role it does. Family is synonymous with the appropriation of women because of women's role in social reproduction: the reproduction of children, and the transmission of hereditary property. Private ownership of the factories has given way to public companies and “collective capitalism”. We aren't in the 19th century anymore. One aspect of the end of patriarchy is that the boss of the company no longer transmits his mill or steel-works to his (preferably eldest) son. The inheritance bequeathed is no longer a factory, or even a company, but mobile, transnational, financial capital, no longer tied to a particular production site.

Nevertheless, the bourgeoisie has not disappeared and neither has its need for the most favourable possible conditions for the transmission of capital between bourgeois men. Capital has not become ‘virtualized’ or ‘free-floating’.

We do not live in a Huxleyan Brave New World where reproduction goes on in the factory-laboratory and children are manufactured and then conditioned. Even the most “capitalized” among us does not live atomized to the extent that he or she relates to others only through commodity exchange, with mon-

ey mediating everything including affective, love, marital and parental relationships. Let's leave it to science fiction to imagine the world of the absolute individual. Libertarian-liberals seem to be all for the legalization of drugs, but seldom for the abolition of inheritance. The family ensures the maintenance and transmission of private property. It is no surprise that rights to inherit goods and money are a central stake in civil partnerships and homosexual marriage contracts. When patriarchy falls, inherited property stays standing.

**You explain a lot by the transmission of inheritance, but most people don't have much to pass on.**

That's true, but that is not private property's only function. The class division is founded on control of the means of production by the bourgeoisie. Private property structures our society and imposes its logic on everything. Even those people - and I admit they are very many - whose worldly wealth adds up to €1,000 in a current account, generally live within a social unit that surrounds and protects them - the family. Within the family that €1,000 is all the more precious because the group has no other reserves, and its existence revolves around the upkeep and education of the children. It's not because they give birth to children that women are forced into a subordinate role, but because this (maternity) takes place within the imprisoned and imprisoning context of the family, which specializes women forcibly into specific, essential, and undervalued tasks. Admittedly, it changes a lot that in North America and Europe domestic inequality is now less

the norm than it used to be, with domestic tasks and responsibility for children better divided between men and women. But at the same time it changes nothing fundamentally - women stay trapped in the traditional function of mother. Women are still locked into a dominated role... and men into a dominant role. As long as the family is the basic social unit, masculine domination will persist, at best in an attenuated form.

**Aren't you understating the importance of the reproduction of the labour power ?**

That importance doesn't contradict what I've just been saying. Any society must control the reproduction of its members. Up until now, almost all societies have done this by forcing women into a submissive role. In a society governed by work, in the modern sense (wage-labour), it is the reproduction of the labour power that organizes male domination. A long time ago, the husband was the instrument of appropriation of the female body. Nowadays this appropriation

has changed from individual to more collective and socialized. Some female tasks are carried out by the day nursery, school, canteen, social services, etc. Though capitalism does not eliminate the role of the family, overall capital itself ensures the renewal of the labour power at least as much as the family does.

**Is the family necessary to capitalism - yes or no ?**

No. But as the family is there, the result of millennia of human history, capital lives with it, profits from it, maintains it and remodels it to its own ends.





## **So capitalism will never lead to equality between the sexes ?**

No. For that, you have to imagine a society made up of flows of circulating value with no material substrate, that reduce human individuals to mere exchangers. It is unthinkable today, outside of theoretical abstraction or science fiction.

The proliferation of divorce, the decomposition and reconfiguration of the family, civil partnerships, gay marriage, and not to mention artificial insemination, surrogate maternity etc., not only do not erode the persistence of the “family unit”, but in my opinion consolidate it.

## **Exit Foucault**

**Your analysis seems a little simplistic - as if for you Foucault never happened...**

Biopolitics started to become well-known at about the same time as I was writing in *Le Fléau Social*. It starts out from correct and important observations, but which only appear new from the perspective of the sterile Marxism that Foucault and his friends were familiar with.

Foucault's work shows that since the 17th century, power is exercised through the control of population, body, and lifestyle. One of the key moments, in France, is what he theorizes as the “Great Confinement”: of delinquents, the mad, the sick, vagrants; groups likely to obstruct the establishment of the bourgeois order. Since then, the more social the state makes itself, the more it intervenes in our daily lives, health, and intimacy. That's exactly right. The trouble is that he rewrites two or three centuries of capitalism putting control and mechanisms of control at the centre of everything. Vulgar Marxism explained the whole of history, from the Middle Ages to the 19th century, by the rise of the bourgeoisie and capitalism. For Foucault, “the Great Confinement” func-

tions as a cause, of which capitalism is apparently an effect.

For him, it is no longer wage-labour (and the control of wage-labour, and the conflicts born from them) that determines social change, it is the ensemble of apparatuses of control. Insofar as these theories are interested in labour at all, it is to say that labour is exploited no longer primarily within capitalist enterprises, but everywhere. Production and reproduction take place everywhere, and capitalism (if the word even still fits) from now on supposedly exploits not so much labour as the whole of our life, affectivity, and energy. The solution to this universal conditioning is supposed to be a kind of revolt more or less everywhere - instead of revolution, millions of little subversions.

These theses are still fashionable forty years later. Proletarian failure in the 60's and 70's has led on the one hand to a retreat into the private sphere, individual consumption, the body, personal development, etc. and on the other, to the quest for new communities potentially capable of changing the world, little by little. This is the breeding ground of post-modern philosophy. All in all, I preferred the naive “sexual revolution” of 1970. Now people are snobby about Reich. But at least he had the merit of being more straightforward, i.e. his limitations were more visible.

**Exit Foucault - but some people are still dominant and some dominated, no ?**

I am getting a little tired of “domination discourse.”

Apart from sadists, nobody dominates for the pleasure of dominating. This pleasure needs to be enriched with concrete, material benefits. Masculine domination was only established and only endures because it produces something - and not just children. We can only understand the division of labour if we include the sexual division of labour; but we can only understand the latter through its role

in the whole division of labour. The question, seldom posed by feminism, is that of the relations of production, including domination and exploitation.

Detached from production, domination seems to create and maintain itself *ex nihilo*. You certainly find it in the boss/employee binary, but equally in black/white, majority/minority sexual orientation, teacher/student, doctor/patient, old/young, North/South, elitist/popular culture, parent/child, able/disabled, and of course man/woman. Each one of us has to occupy several of these positions in one day. The same person will be dominated by her husband at home, her boss at work, and a cop in the street, and dominate her subordinate at the office and her child when she gets back home. Domination only makes sense if it happens everywhere. It cuts across class and permeates through the whole social fabric. The concept's appeal comes from the dilution it operates.

Theories of domination became popular just as the critique of the state entered into crisis, including "reformist" critiques that aimed at winning positions in state institutions. After that, the problem was not to seize central power, and much less to destroy it, but to act on the ensemble of daily behaviours and practices of control and management.

**It was very fashionable a few years ago, especially with John Holloway's book *Change the World without Taking Power* !**

... but without destroying power either, according to Holloway. While the social project appears to expand, in fact it shrinks. To see capitalism, power and the state at once everywhere and nowhere, one loses sight of their centres, the focal points of their essential contradictions. The reformism of daily life proclaimed in '68 has only gotten worse since. They started out saying that capitalism is omnipresent and capillary (the theory of the "social factory"), and now they argue that it is

everywhere, therefore that no domain or site is more important than any other.

**And "everywhere" is often reduced to daily life: the private, the immediate, the body, questions of behaviour and sexuality, which are seen as free choices. We retreat into a private sphere that we imagine ourselves to have conquered.**

As the theory of domination allows us to. If the dominant/dominated relation is determinant, there is no hierarchy, but a continuity and complementarity between the domination exerted by a boss on his employee, and the domination of sexual norms on my sexuality, or school discipline on the body of the pupil. There is only a tangle of power relations all propping each other up.

I have nothing against the *concept* of domination. It grasps a reality. But the *theory* of domination is something else; it is an overall vision which claims to explain the world - and it carries a political program with it. To "fight domination" can only mean one thing: to take some power (or even all the power) from those who monopolize it, and to give it back to those who have none. In the case of women the goal is to create "man-woman equality". But as long as masculine domination exists, "equalize" can only be synonymous with "legalise". For example, demanding legal gender parity in public and political life.

**Engels wrote "*the woman is the proletarian of the proletarian*". According to you, can we say that the husband exploits the wife and that, collectively, all men benefit from the exploitation of women ?**

In fact Engels borrowed that phrase from *Peregrinations of a Pariah* by Flora Tristan<sup>30</sup>. I agree that in the family the husband exploits his wife, as long as we specify what the verb "exploit" means here. It is misleading to de-

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30 Book published by Flora Tristan (1803-1844) in 1838.

scribe the family as a site of exploitation with the head of the household holding the position of the boss. Even if he does take advantage of his wife, the husband is not a boss. Though he gains a material advantage, he does not valorize a capital in competition with other capitals, producing goods to be sold on the market. By extending the concept of exploitation that far, we dissolve the specificity of the concept of capital. This is the tendency of most theories that “go back to Marx” only to make him devoid of substance. Exploitation is absorbed into domination. The domination of one sex over the other, as it happens. Everything becomes “labour”, “exploitation”, “social reproduction”: the result is that we no longer know how society really functions.

Just as capitalist exploitation (and for the record, we are talking about capitalism, whether in Tunis or in Shanghai) extends over the planet as never before, the concept itself is at risk of dissolving. Isn't that strange?

## Gender - word and concept

**You were just speaking about the domination “of one sex over the other”. I noticed the absence of the word “gender” in your 1974 article. This was logical at the time, but I imagine that it’s one of the few things that you would change in this text to bring it up to date ?**

No, I don't think so. I would have done it if I was sure that the word gender, or the concept, truly added something we can't do without. But here I have to admit that I'm at a loss.

**In what way ! ?**

Firstly, I am astonished that feminists, so quick to identify signs of sexism and anti-woman positions, would welcome with open arms an idea that most figures of power, including masculine power, defend. I am also astonished

that so much credit is granted to what remains a product of academia. Since when were the benches of lecture theatres and erudite conferences hotbeds of social subversion? Or even radical feminism? I have nothing against male nor female researchers - there are worse ways to earn a living. But when the university promotes a concept or a theory, it is inevitably to dull its critical edge.

How did it come about that gender is now part of educated consensus and that you read it in women's fashion magazines, school textbooks, and the leaflets of left parties? Even the World Health Organisation, famous for its persistence in treating homosexuality as a disease, ended up joining in the chorus. In the last forty years, opposing sexuated social identity (“gender”) to biological difference (“sex”) has become commonplace, if not obligatory, in dominant discourse, in politics, in the media, at the university, at school, practically in the street, and more and more in radical milieus. Consensus and social critique seldom make happy bedfellows.

**And what does that prove? The concept of “class” has been used by Stalin, by academics... But that doesn't stop us from reclaiming it.**

Firstly, “class” and “class struggle” are words and concepts imbued with ambiguity. Remember what I said about this at the beginning of the interview. But I do not place gender and class on the same level. Stalin affirmed the class struggle, and the concept of class now serves as a sociological tool, stripped of revolutionary significance. That's obvious. That does not take away the significance of the concept, which is essential to comprehending the world.

But is that the case for gender? It is not just me who poses the question. It should be noted that this concept, gender, could only be imposed in France with some difficulty. It has only been omnipresent for the last ten years.



It was only very gradually that gender studies replaced feminist or women's studies, making the word "woman" vanish. Quite a few feminist researchers and theoreticians, at least, have expressed reservations about its use and its trivialisation. I'm thinking of Geneviève Fraisse, Françoise Collin or Nicole-Claude Mathieu, for example. Certain feminists think that, instead of providing women's struggle with a sound foundation, this concept risks dissolving the question of women in the question of gender. I would agree with that.

**Your reluctance is surprising. You must recognize the difference between biological sex and social gender, and that highlighting and conceptualizing the distinction is important! It enables us to think the possibility of exiting these imposed roles. In this society it may be unimaginable, but the question is posed for the revolution. You think nothing of the "abolition of gender"? Gender makes a useful, and I would even say necessary, concept.**

To be sure, you would have to explain what the concept of gender adds to Simone de Beauvoir's thought- provoking words in 1949 : *"One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."* Radical feminism has agreed with that for a long time, without using the word "gender". What it designates - being socially sexed - was thought out well before the word gender arrived. But if a word preponderates, and a perception of the world along with it, it is because it meets a need. Our era has produced the concept of gender to rationalize a problem it is unable to confront. Patriarchy corresponded to a society (peasant or artisan), where the basic socio-economic unit was the family (father + mother + children) and where the man (the father) was head of the family. The man directed the family through his controlling position on the farm or in the shop. In less than two centuries, industrial capitalism has blown all that away.

What is new is not that women work (actually they often work even more, both for a wage and as housewives and mothers), but the fact that their work is no longer related to the activity of the household. They also tend to have the same jobs as men, which was not the case in agricultural societies, nor in the factory a century ago. The wage creates an infinitely more fluid and mobile society, with legislation and a tendency towards sex equality, even in the police and the army.

But the sexual division of labour endures. You'll see a woman driving a bus, but rarely behind the wheel of a truck. Choice of profession, image, wage, position in the command chain - the sexuated hierarchy is not dead.

This is how the concept of gender finds a truly non-subversive social utility. The sexual roles of the pre-industrial world obeyed rigid norms, frequently broken, but nonetheless known and recognized. Now these norms no longer function, or function weakly. Many children have a "natural" father, but live under the authority of another man in the position of social father, or second father. A high-ranking professional woman may very well give orders in her workplace, including to men, but she is treated as inferior in the street and perhaps at home. This contradiction creates a mental disconnection between an undeniable biological fact (called sex) and a historical-social reality (called gender since the 1970's). This is where the distinction between natural sex and social gender comes from.

The concept of gender is what helps society (i.e. almost everyone, from journalist to college teachers to mothers) think man-woman relations that have ceased to appear natural and fixed and are not taken for granted anymore. We used to invoke "nature", to resign ourselves to the inequality of the sexes. Now we invoke "gender" to think we can abate it. Finally, what the concept of gender says is that there is no human nature and therefore no

male nor female nature. To be honest, I knew that already, and so did you.

**But, if “gender” is a rhetorical position without real content, why go to such lengths to demolish it... at the risk of sounding like a dangerous reactionary ?**

Because giving priority to gender diverts attention away from what has the potential to revolutionize society. Is it a coincidence that the emergence of gender studies has coincided with a decline in talk about class? Referring to “gender” is not neutral. A concept unites elements together by separating them from others, which are therefore inevitably undervalued. For example, speaking about *class* demotes the individual, social stratum, category, ethnic group, etc. to secondary roles. To speak about gender is to consider social activities that derive from the sexual criterion (imposed or chosen) as primary, and consequently to consider relations of production as secondary.

**If the concept of gender added nothing new, as you claim, it wouldn't provoke such hostility.**

If the concept of gender helps us deal with the turmoil in contemporary morality, and particularly the crisis of the family, that doesn't mean it solves everything for everybody. There are those whom it helps. There are also those whom it troubles. Shaking up assigned roles seems to jeopardize the family, which now appears as a last refuge. Of course, it wasn't gay marriage or gender theory that unsettled the family, it was the decline in living conditions, casualization, unemployment, and “the crisis”... But to get to the true causes would mean taking on capitalism, which is no small matter. Much easier to denounce the commodification of existence within a single domain, like the family, and then to invent an imaginary danger that is supposed to threaten it, like gay marriage.

The enemies and defenders of the concept of gender have one point in common: the illusion that there is enough there to profoundly change society. The reactionaries reject the change, progressives encourage it.

**One strength of gender theory is that it brings women together as a unity.**

Or at least it is presented like that; a means of re-founding feminism by going beyond it, which explains its public success. A purely female solution to the woman question seems absurd, so theorists strive to put women back amongst other dominated or inferiorized groups; in the work-place, but also minorities of colour, age, illness or disability, religion, ethnic group, sexual orientation, etc. As it proves so hard to unify such different situations, gender, which concerns all of us, at least seems to establish a link. But it remains to be seen what unity is thus formed. This raises more than just a shadow of a doubt. 40 years ago I refused to dissolve the problem of woman into that of wage-labour. Now I fear that, while believing we defend women, we drown them in gender. It is a mirage to believe that public or official recognition of gender necessarily benefits women's cause. Indian society is not known to be particularly favourable to women, but transgender people have just received legal status there, according to which they will be officially neither male nor female<sup>31</sup>. Certainly a progression for the people concerned, but nevertheless perfectly compatible with masculine domination.

## **Femino-Marxism ?**

**But aren't you confusing the criticism of the concept of gender with that of a political current that prioritizes it? The concept could enrich Marxist analysis.**

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<sup>31</sup> Legal recognition of a “third gender” in 2014, for the *Hijra*, eunuchs, intersex or transgender.

I'm not the one who creates the confusion. You obviously know Christine Delphy, one of the founders of what I would call Femino-Marxism. Many people are inspired by her, whilst also distancing themselves from her thesis of a domestic mode of production coexisting alongside the capitalist mode of production. What she proposes is a duplication of Marxist theory; another (domestic) mode of production is added to the capitalist mode, and another class or group is added to the proletariat: women.

I understand why it's appealing to attempt to build a rational feminist theory in which Marx is not rejected or refuted, but demarcated and duplicated at the same time. But do we need such a construct for us to understand that two combined exploitations are at work and that the female wage-labourer is doubly exploited? Especially if the political conclusion is that the group of proletarians fight against the group of capitalists to abolish capitalism, and the group of women fight against the group of men to abolish patriarchy. Leaving it to be seen what proletarian women will do caught between two different enemies and two separate struggles.

### **Nobody dares an explanation for that.**

We would need barricades with three sides... The theories that I'm criticizing are inspired by a completely legitimate desire to integrate the reproduction of human beings with the general mechanism of social reproduction. The question is how they are articulated together.

The human species is reproduced within the social reproduction. A woman who gives birth is not only a woman who gives birth; she is also a mother, with all that motherhood imposes, according to country and time (things are very different in Sweden and in Yemen, for

example). The biological act of giving birth is as social as it is natural. Social reproduction determines the conditions of the reproduction of human beings. This does not mean that it conditions it completely, or that the latter is simply an effect of the former. Therefore it is the capital/wage-labour division, and not the (nonetheless real) man/woman division, that structures capitalist society.

If one chooses to define class in relation to the reproduction of humanity (thus of any human being, be they bourgeois, proletarian or other), then logically there must be a class of women and one of men, women guaranteeing an unpaid labour (maintenance of the home, children, etc.) that men are exempt from. They form a group comparable to a class since it plays a specific role in social reproduction. In my opinion that is where *Lies* journal ends up<sup>32</sup>.

If on the contrary, as I believe, class depends on the relations of production, then there is no class of women, as the function of bourgeois and proletariat can potentially be occupied by man or woman.

### **Class or not class... it's a semantic question, an esoteric debate.**

Well, no. What's at stake is understanding the society in which we live and its possible revolution.

Ultimately, for the supporters of the thesis of a "class" of women, domination takes precedence over exploitation. I do not deny that one group (men) dominates another (women), or that proletarian men benefit from that. The rich bourgeois woman will always be discriminated against as a woman. But all things are not equal in the functioning of a society, nor in its revolution. It is only by "emancipating" the bourgeois woman from her bourgeois status that communism will emancipate her from sexism. That will only be possible through the action of proletarian men and women together.

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<sup>32</sup> *Lies* : materialist feminist journal  
(<http://liesjournal.net>)



**But what you call “Femino-Marxism” puts gender and class on a kind of equal footing, in two... intermingled exploitations ?**

Do you find the term “Femino-Marxists” insulting? If I call it Femino-Marxism, it’s because there is some feminism in it. It is legitimate to describe positions that put the woman question at the centre as feminist, which these positions certainly do.

Although it remains committed to feminism, Femino-Marxism wants to distinguish itself. It regards the man/woman division as primary (which is where it sticks to feminism), while treating gender as a class division (which is its common ground with Marxism.) “Treating gender as a class division”, however, doesn’t mean these theorists put an equals sign between the two. The proportions of gender and class vary depending on whether they lean more towards feminism or Marxism. But all followers of Femino-Marxism agree on one common base: gender and class both determine history. Hence, the capital/wage-labour relation is no longer at the centre of the modern world. Instead it is apparently a mix of relations of production and gender relations. The art of discursive construction consists in finding a plausible balance between the two. But luckily for him or her, unlike the tightrope walker, the dialectician seldom gets hurt when he or she falls.

**What is interesting in their position is to start from what is common to all women, as women, whatever their social position.**

Exactly, and that is where the proponents of this theory stumble.

Sheryl Sandberg is Facebook’s Chief Operating Officer. Her fortune, estimated at a billion dollars, does not save her from being discriminated against as a woman. She therefore has an interest in common with all women to

33 Sheryl Sandberg co-authored *Lean in : Women, Work & the Will to Lead* (2013), a best-seller, and regards herself as a feminist activist.

fight against a masculine domination which also weighs on her, i.e. to obtain equality between men and women, whatever their social position, as you say.

But this is where women’s interests diverge, even within this schema. When the combat for equality comes to wages, Sheryl Sandberg, as a bourgeois woman, needs wage inequality between men and women, just as much as she needs wage inequality between permanent and casual, national and foreign workers, etc. The struggle for equality hits a class limit. Imagining that perfect wage equality between men and women existed at Facebook (which would also be excellent for the company’s image, by the way) it would strictly only apply to Facebook personnel; not to the cleaning lady employed by a service provider sub-contracted to clean the offices. A ruling class always needs to divide those it dominates.

To believe in a “woman group”, you would have to believe that Sheryl Sandberg and the cleaning lady have more in common - their undeniable oppression as women - than they have dividing and even opposing them. The facts show the opposite, but feminism is still not convinced<sup>33</sup>.

Femino-Marxism also remains squarely within the boundaries of feminism: some call themselves “materialist feminists”, but they still treat women as a social unity presumably endowed with some coherence and capable of specific historical action, defined as a “class” (for Christine Delphy for example) or “group” (for others).

To be honest, I get tired of these discussions that deal with what should be prioritized, combined or intersectioned : class? gender? now race? We do not have to choose between workers and women. I put “class” neither before nor above gender. I repeat, I am not for the class struggle, but for its end. Believing that the world we live in is structured by the capital/labour relation and therefore by the

class struggle means neither that class is the sole reality of the world, nor even that class struggle is the most important aspect of a revolution which would, on the contrary, tend to overcome class.

**So you aren't interested in the research that enriches Marx through analysis of social reproduction and women's work ?**

What research are you thinking of? I don't agree with everything that Paola Tabet writes, but her analysis of sexuated inequality and what she calls "sexual-economic exchange" is a great contribution. And there are a mountain of other works that I don't have any particular problem with. But through these thousands of pages, despite relevant remarks and refusals that I share, I find myself all too often not really getting what they're trying to say. The solution is not adding a dose of feminism to your theory to make it sexier or less flimsy.

**I wonder how much of what you say is provocation.**

At least provocation gives us a rest from the politically correct. Can you believe that I saw a debate about skirts and miniskirts, to decide which one was more sexist? That reminds me of an old Italian film where they try to judge which is more right-wing, the bath or the shower. Don't laugh! Theory has its own politically correct.

Virginia Despentes, for example, doesn't claim to be a theorist, but she makes me think. *King Kong Theory* has a way of tackling some questions directly.

## **Worker identity & gay identity**

**You want a revolution based on the class struggle, to overcome class. Some people say we have already finished with class identity, and good riddance !**

I am as critical of the worker identity as of the "woman" identity.

In 1974, many comrades thought we could shoehorn the female identity into the worker, waged, or proletarian identity. The schema was simple: a group (the working class), had the capacity to revolutionize society and emancipate humanity. When everyone becomes a worker, work will cease to be work, when there is only one class left, there will be no more class, no more capital, eliminating ipso facto all oppression, including that of women. Communism will be the power of the associated workers. You could call it a "classist" vision.

**According to that schema the question of the oppression of women would be resolved after the victory of the proletariat...**

Exactly; a consequence that follows just like that.

Today, if classism is dead and buried, it's in part because proletarians started to criticize work in the 70's. But it also has to do, unfortunately, with capitalist evolution - our society makes wage-labour more central than ever, while being unable to hire as wage-earners billions of human beings. This is one of the major causes of the crisis of the labour movement. Beforehand the worker identity had focused a whole array of interests and specific combats around itself, especially those of women - although not without rejections, contempt and conflicts, of course. The fragmentation of the work-related identity, particularly the worker identity, released those other identities that had depended on and been defined in relation to the world of work - even those that were against it. We are living a period of competition and crossover between orphan identities cut loose from the central mass around which they were supposed to gravitate. Everybody retreats into their own group which serves as a substitute community.

**But the gay community is very real. Just like the LGBT movement, even if it is a small minority.**

There are homosexuals in all sorts of social milieus. But what is known as “the gay community”, which generally wants to be visible and empowered, unites a particular minority of male, white and rather middle class homosexuals - it’s a fact. But is there a real *gay and lesbian* community? I doubt it, and if so, it has neither the visibility nor the weight of the specifically *gay* community. That says a lot about the persistence of masculine domination. I suppose we agree on that. It’s not enough for lesbians and gays to meet up one a year for Gay Pride.

On the other hand, there is no LGBT community, only LGBT activists and groups.

The contradiction in what the initials “LGBT” cover is wanting to be visible and invisible at the same time. It is undoubtedly an effect of contemporary society, but it is striking that those who seek to escape coercive norms demand public recognition of their own difference, while at the same time demanding not to be treated differently from anybody else!

Which leads to two consequences: Firstly, a never-ending race to re-definition. It is constantly necessary to subdivide and redivide, producing new neologisms ad infinitum: FtM, M+F, MtF, MtN, etc. As if demarcating a category were going to protect a way of living. The “Q” often added to “LGBT” which stands for “queer” for some and “questioning” for others (the category of none-of-the-above), obliges LGBT to become LGBTTTQQIAA, so that nobody gets left out. The second consequence is a need for protection against newly discovered discrimina-

tions that require judicial sanction modelled after the anti-racist and anti-sexist legislation. Constant calls are made for laws against homophobia, then transphobia and lesbophobia, perhaps tomorrow biphobia. You will see the list lengthening to infinity. In democracy, there is always a mistreated minority. These groups stand towards one another as strangers, albeit occasionally in solidarity, as much rivals as allies. Each unity is defined less by what it is, than by being “the other” of the neighbouring group.

**Do these questions of identity seem as problematic to you now as they were in the 70’s?**

I know gays and lesbians who treat (male or female) *bi* people as somewhat suspicious allies, as if they had only gone half the distance without daring to completely break with the hetero model. A bit like a workerist in the same far left group as a teacher, who tends al-

ways to see him as a “petty bourgeois”, especially when disagreements break out.

By the way, what is a homosexual? I

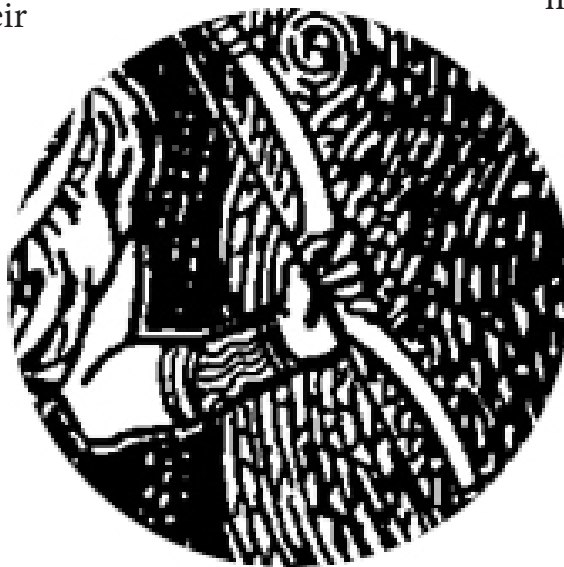
met a gay man who had a hard time recognizing as “one of his own” a boy who was attracted to men but who had never done the deed. The same gay

man had no problem

classifying as straight a

teenager attracted to girls but

who had never made love with one. The criteria are tough when it comes to demarcating communities! In certain groups that think of themselves as the most radical, there seems to be a new tendency to reject bisexuals, and replace the initials LGBT by TPG or TGP (Trans





Gouines Pédés = Trans Dykes Fags). It must be a reaction to the increasing institutionalization of LGBT organisations.

## What is to be done ?

**You criticize everything, but what do you propose? Do you see any possibility of change, and how ?**

That is the fundamental question.

It is undeniable that until now, masculine domination has persisted within all revolutions or attempts at proletarian revolution. After taking part in the action, often as much as the men, sooner or later the women retreat from the field, which is to say they are pushed back to their sexuated tasks. In Spain 1936-37, it didn't take long before they were excluded from the ranks of combatants and returned to traditionally female tasks, like nursing.

Of course, if very few women took part in armed struggle, one could not even speak about communist revolution. But even massive female participation doesn't guarantee anything.

In Kurdish areas, for example, there are long traditions of female organization, sometimes feminist, sometimes even autonomous, and women have led daily life struggles that have gone as far as in the so-called modern countries. That's why Kurdish women frequently fight guns in hand in women's units or alongside the men. But that is not enough to eradicate masculine domination from Kurdish society. It will still be necessary to break state and capitalist social organization as a whole: nothing less than a social revolution, which I don't think is underway in Kurdistan<sup>34</sup>.

Until then, even with RPG's, women will emancipate themselves as women no more through armed combat than they do by going to work in the factory or the office. My ideal is a world without armies, not equality within armies.

The difference between past insurrections and the communist insurrection is that it will do away with work as work. However the social division of labour includes the sexual division of labour, which goes well beyond the waged work-place in the factory or office.

The communist insurrection is at the same time abolition of wage-labour and of masculine domination. This will not be achieved in a few weeks or months, but it must start from the very first days. The end of wage-labour is not a cause of which the end of masculine domination would be a mere after-effect. The latter is a necessary aspect, one of the conditions, of the former. Both will take place at the same time or not at all.

One of the foundations of capitalism is the separation between the space-time of wage labour and the rest of life. Productivity and profit require that labour-time be distinct and cut-off from the other moments, so that it can be controlled and measured to reduce the cost of labour.

One element of this separation is the public life/private life duality which brings women back to the woman role, the family role. Even if they work outside the house as well, "at home" it is primarily women who "keep house", cook, take care of the children, etc. And this forced specialization concerns much more than the home; it limits women to a set of tasks and functions; teaching, health, voluntary work, associations, charities - everything that falls under the word "care", related to proximity and affectivity, for which women are supposed to have a "natural" vocation, arising, as one would expect, from motherhood.

Dismantling the private/public duality is the necessary condition for men sharing and dealing with activities that could then be distributed between men and women no longer according to the criterion of sex, but to

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<sup>34</sup> Rojava : "Reality & Rhetoric" (2015), <https://troploin.fr/node/83>

competence and taste. There will be women who prefer firing guns, and men who want to take care of the children. The women will no longer act as the women of proletarian men, but as proletarian women. If not, they will be nursing the wounded while the men fight the state military and counter-revolutionary militias.

To return to Spain 1936-37, even if they had been ten times more numerous, the most radical women (in particular the anarchist *Mujeres Libres*) on their own could not have turned back the course of the counter-revolution. After their victorious uprising against the army in July 36, the revolutionaries, men and women, agreed to fight against fascism under the direction of the democratic state. That's why they lost control of their own movement. It is because the proletariat did not undertake the transformation of productive activity, because they did not put an end to the separation between the work-place and the rest of social space, that they (men and women) allowed the bases of capitalism, including the sex hierarchy, to be reimposed. The exclusion of women from the ranks of combatants coincided with the militia's transformation into a regular army.

**I agree, but all that will not just happen by itself. There will be conflicts between certain men and certain women over the division of responsibility for different activities.**

Of course. People often cite the piqueteros experiment, but Oaxaca in east Mexico can be as informative. Over the six months of the insurrection in that city in 2006, women had a great deal of difficulty being accepted as combatants. However there were women-only barricades, and it was women who took the TV station by force and organized the defense of the building. But in spite of that, as one insurgent explained, they had to fight both against the system and against men within the movement.

Conflicts between men and women are inevitable. But it will bode very badly if those conflicts supplant the contradiction between capitalism and communism. Abolition of work and abolition of the family will go hand in hand.

The revolution is neither caused nor driven by the contradiction between sexes, but it can succeed only if it confronts and solves that contradiction.

What is difficult is seizing the relation between the parts and the whole.

Feminism, including radical feminism, turns the "woman" part into the whole, whereas ordinary Marxism drowns the part in the whole. I cannot say it better than *The German Ideology* : "it is self-evident that the abolition of individual economy is inseparable from the abolition of the family."

**If I understand you, women's emancipation is not a simple consequence of the revolution, but women's struggle is a condition of the revolution. Is that right ?**

That's right.

**Nevertheless, for you, revolution is produced by the class struggle.**

Yes. On condition that we add that this class struggle is one class's struggle to abolish itself, and thereby to abolish all classes.

**To come back to the man/woman conflict within the revolution - how do we resolve it? Should women organize amongst themselves separately, at least initially ?**

Yes, but self-organization does not mean separation, much less lasting separation. If women feel a legitimate need to meet between themselves to better pose their specific problems, that moment must be no more than provisional. To make a habit (or worse, a principle) out of it would be to perpetuate the separation.

The parallel often drawn with the black move-

ment to justify “non-mixing” rather vindicates “mixing”. When blacks organized and acted amongst themselves they prioritized actions related to the black/white question. It was foreseeable, and indeed some blacks wanted that. Wanting to preserve one’s specificity, one perpetuates a barrier. Women’s single-sex groups are believed to be the best way of escaping the dominance of male oppressors who, in mixed groups, despite themselves, maintain power over the women who are, despite themselves, inferiorized. Men are regarded as enemies who may one day perhaps become allies. I believe the opposite: what men and women share as a common interest, action and project, is more important than what women share among themselves and what men share among themselves. Women will not be emancipated by men, but neither without them, only with them and at the same time as them.

In single-sex debates, gatherings and demonstrations, the question of which categories of people are “allowed” is raised regularly. Trans sometimes take part, but not always. Why? That brings us back to the subtle demarcations between categories we spoke about a few moments ago.

What I’m going to say will sound cruel, but if people who think of themselves as radical don’t feel ready to prevent men from imposing themselves in their meetings today, I wonder what they think they’re going to do in the revolution tomorrow. Will carrying an AK make you feel more comfortable in discussions?

A future revolution will require women’s self-organization, but I can’t imagine that it would remain separate for long, as if the women needed to meet at length between themselves, strengthening themselves like sportswomen beefing up before the fight. That reduces the abolition of masculine domination to a confrontation between two

blocks. And on the other side, left to themselves, might the men not also strengthen themselves in their particularity and encourage macho tendencies? The results of such a combat are doubtful at best!

Since the 70’s, in France, single-sex meetings and actions have been standard practice for the women’s liberation movement. I see this as women’s desire to retreat into themselves and their need for protection, that in the end prove as ineffective as any border. Treating men as strangers is not how women will overcome submission to them. At the same time, in the 70’s, men and women tried to meet and come together as proletarians. That word will bring a smile to the lips of more than a few people these days - a sad smile. But all bad things come to an end...

**In communism, will “men” and “women” still exist? If so, won’t that inevitably involve inequality and a hierarchy? To come back to an earlier question - what of the abolition of gender ?**

We have to be clear. Until further notice, and probably for a good while afterwards, some human beings (let us call them women) will be born with a uterus that gives them the possibility of carrying and giving birth to children. Others (let us call them men) will be born without this possibility. I know it is not correct, but let us abstract momentarily from hermaphrodites and trans. Between what I called for simplicity’s sake men and women, there is a difference, let’s say a biological difference (to avoid the word “natural”.) Up until now, and almost everywhere, societies have built masculine domination upon that difference. The question is if this difference necessarily implies a hierarchy. Certain feminists see the cause of masculine domination in the fact of having, or being able to have, children : the inferiorization of women is believed to arise from maternity and everything that comes along with it. If this were true,



women would be fated to eternal submission. We all know the Bible says that man shall be condemned to work and woman to the pain of childbearing, but people often forget that God adds: *"your desire will be for your husband, but he will rule over you"*<sup>35</sup>.

The conclusion can either be to give up, or that women must no longer be mothers. According to this vision, the day advanced technology makes it possible for children to be no longer born out of women, then, and only then, could masculine domination end. "We're finished with maternity, they do all that in the lab now..." We have no words harsh enough for the cult of science, the runaway of technology, the power of experts, the artificialisation of life, medical control of the female body - and rightly so! And now we are supposed to expect a solution from hi-tech surgico-chemistry? The fact that feminism, and even the most radical, can get to that point, is depressing.

### **And what do we do about maternity and children in communism ?**

Biology is not destiny. The historians show that there is nothing eternal about the maternal instinct, or the maternal condition, nor the condition of the child. In communism, children will be born, undoubtedly in various ways (don't ask me how exactly) and will not belong to anybody, not even to their parents, biological or otherwise. What kind of relations will they have with the ensemble of what we call adults? And with their parents, biological or not? Relationships neither of indifference nor possession, but I imagine relations of a special kind, somehow privileged. Still... my imagination has its limits, and that's all we can say for the moment.

## **And until then ?**

### **And what about now ? Do we just wait ? Should we not take part in struggles ?**

Which ones? With what I can do, I take part in forms of resistance you could call daily, basic, or even reformist, for example against attacks on abortion. I am no believer in the "all or nothing" attitude.

What I don't take part in is theoretical activism in what I call Femino-Marxism, which only serves to nourish the activity of theoretical specialists. As if it were necessary to imitate the worst aspects of Marxism, believing that we can finally hoist feminism up to the status of total scientific vision of human evolution, and better still, beat Marxism at its own game, materialism. Femino-Marxism produces theory that is heavy but with no depth. I imagine that some men and woman have an absolute need for it. Some because they live off it; their profession and pastime is producing ideas and text. Others must find the sound of rigorous-looking doctrines reassuring.

### **You are still being quite vague, not citing the names of groups and authors you are criticizing. They will definitely recognize themselves, but the reader will have more difficulty. In 1974 you weren't so coy !**

Some authors I don't read any more. They would be glad to be cited, and if I don't wish them any particular ill, but neither do I do have any reason to do them that service.

**I am still finding it hard to place you, Constance. I am thinking for example about the trend called communisation, to which you seem close on certain points, but distinct on others, particularly on what they say about gender. The concept of communisation also appeared in the 70's in the milieus you were part of. What do you think about it?**

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<sup>35</sup> *Genesis*, 3 : 16.

You know in the United States they teach communism at university? I'd prefer to take a course about François Villon or Jean Rhys.

**But what else ?**

Communisation is what I've been talking about for the last hour. The process of revolution is communisation. It happens that I didn't use that word, and some people will undoubtedly criticise me for that. Well, now I have!

**How do you think this interview will be received ?**

Too Marxist for the feminists and too feminist for the Marxists.

**What have you done since writing this article in 1974? Are you still an activist ?**

I have done various things, choosing a certain discretion. I don't call myself an activist, certainly not a "militant" in the French sense: I agree with the situationist critique of "militantism".

**What do you do these days ?**

At the moment I'm writing about communism.

**Is this the moment ?**

Just as much as the 70's, but in a different way.

**You seem somehow pessimistic.**

Perpetual optimists weary me, it's true. But I would only be pessimistic if changes in the world persuaded me that feminism, and the whole of the social movement, were in decline. But I see people everywhere in revolt - proletarians, men and women. Admittedly very few in a "revolutionary" (if you'll forgive the word) way. But after all, what do we know? I have never based my life on predictions. History has some surprises in store for us, and not all of them unpleasant.

**I imagine you reading and writing constantly, only rarely leaving your apart-**

**ment, amongst piles of dusty old books... Sifting through mountains of data on your computer.**

No. I drift. Mostly I just drift.

**And you watch films! You mention films much more than you do theoretical works.**

Our era reveals itself as much on its screens as through its theoretical developments. The situationists understood that. But, to stick to the subject of the interview, what cinema shows is that not only does our time have difficulty confronting sexuality, which is obvious, but that it even has difficulty representing it.

**I don't know if I should say this... but something tells me you're not really called Constance Chatterley.**

I am! But not every day. The articles in *Le Fléau Social* were signed with whimsical and provocative pseudonyms. My choice was more literary. Also partly random. I had just read the novel by D.H. Lawrence (who wasn't a particularly likable character by the way). In the book, the name is shortened to "Connie". I found "Constance" more attractive. If I had read Violette Leduc or Unica Zürn a bit earlier... Today, I might choose Zoë Lund. I must feel drawn to energetic women with half-broken lives. But I myself am not one of them.

**Nothing is simple with you...**



*The communist insurrection  
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masculine domination.*

*This will not be achieved in  
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The latter is a necessary  
aspect, one of the conditions  
of the former.*

*Both will take place at the  
same time or not at all.*



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