

The Poverty of Feminism

Dominique Karamazov

1977

Contents

Author's note	3
The nature of rape and feminism	6
Repression and the legal carnival	9
Woman and desire	12
The contradiction in feminism	20

Author's note

We see in *The Poverty of Feminism* how feminism, in spite of its emancipatory and radical aims, remains in the area of capitalist society and even becomes guardian of traditional female alienation.

Against trials for rape we oppose a critique of emotional, social and sexual poverty, both male and female.

Feminism is a manifestation of daily banality. It is not enough to define it an incomplete revolt, soliciting it to become total by abandoning the purely women's point of view — following the same logic that opposes generalised self-management to the errors of self-management. What needs to be shown up is its content and the inversions that it involves in terms of real solutions.

Who are we addressing ourselves to? First of all to feminists! Obviously not the professional ones, but to all those who find and identify themselves in this movement, demonstrating that only the transformation of social relations makes it possible to resolve the problems and needs that are lost in this cul de sac.

“Ras le viol!” “Terre des Hommes, viol de nuit”, “La drague, c’est le viol”.

“Pornography = theory, rape = practice ...”

Feminist slogans echo the headlines in the sensationalist press. A new battle horse has taken the place of abortion. Graffiti, demonstrations, judicial battles, debates, trials and wild reprisals have developed around it.

Feminists are leading the parade, but they are not alone. The leftists are close behind. How could they fail to react to such an odious form of oppression — after all are they not specialists in totally unfocussed denunciation? And long live women’s struggle alongside that of the workers, unemployed youth, oppressed nations, hunters and wild ducks! Of course it isn’t always easy for them to make pronouncements on everything without becoming aware of their contradictions, but then, don’t they present themselves as not merely the gatherers of dissent, but also as the necessary unifiers of discontent?

The media don’t sit on the side lines. They wisely condemn “excesses” but take the opportunity to liven up the monotony of their news by echoing the feminist “struggle”.

On television, the radio, in the trades union press, there are discussions to find out whether rape is the act of “uncouth” individuals, or of the mentally sick. Does it or does it not produce incurable trauma? Rape victims from young girls to grandmothers testify. Even ex-rapists...

The traditional women’s papers are clearly not far behind. They change as women change. After all it’s in their own interest if they don’t want to lose a considerable part of their readership. Already in Germany the magazine “Emma”, which is clearly feminist, not just feminine, has established itself in the market. In France, “Marie-Claire” contents itself with a feminist supplement.

Readers who are no longer satisfied with the lonely hearts column or the art of knitting can be titillated by such articles as “How to say no to a rapist and survive”: “So here you are in the bushes, still standing but reeling with the man’s hands grabbing you. The effect of the shock wears off a little. You realise this is a rape attempt and that you are the victim. What you need is to gain time to think without him hitting you. How?” (“Cosmopolitan”) Be prepared: take up martial arts, yoga, practice psychological ruses; it’s good for the figure, for your health and then, you never know...

Rape does exist and, just as with crime in general, it’s on the increase. Various factors contribute to making rape common, even normal in the eyes of some people: revenge or an easy compensation involving no great risk. In fact most rapists don’t get caught. Often the victims don’t even report it. Due to shame, fear, a sense of futility or not wanting to bring punishment to a member of the family? From a gang of lads who “take advantage” of a “girlfriend” with fifteen of them gang-banging her, to those weekend “funseekers” who kidnap and amuse themselves with a mentally retarded girl, not forgetting the horror of rape followed by the murder of children, women or couples, it is possible to accumulate a hoard of sordid, tragic and sometimes tragi-comic tales.

Yet it is difficult not to feel uneasy about the fight that is being put up against rape, about the tone and methods being used. Moreover this unease is probably felt by those involved as well: some feminists make it clear that they are not against all men, that rapists are above all victims of society, that they are not calling for repression and only use the courts for publicity, in order to break the silence.

Not all feminists express such understanding. Some call for heavier sentences. In Rome demonstrators against the gang-rape of Maria reacted with anti-male hysteria. In Wisconsin, USA, the

feminists together with some institutions hardly to be suspected of extremism got on the tracks of a judge. His crime? He had refused to imprison a fifteen year old boy who had raped a sixteen year old girl at school, putting him on a year's probation and justifying his act as something normal given the victim's sexy clothing and the generally eroticised climate in which it took place.

So rape is everywhere. The chat-up is rape, domination is rape. Man is by nature rapist and woman his eternal, innocent victim.

Some extreme feminists claim that penetration is an act of domination, a form of humiliation to be refused. Some of them even say that violence and exploitation are the acts of males alone and that this part of humanity must therefore be neutralised or eliminated by the arrival of a world of women where, thanks to the progress in biology, reproduction will be carried out without men.

No matter what delirium might strike feminism and the progress in biology, it is true that to claim to discourage rapists without having recourse to police and judicial repression only complicates the matter. When the conditions that give rise to rape — the fact that it expresses (even in a barbarous way) a fundamental need and that it is a response to a certain general female attitude — are not understood, or there is no desire to understand it, the only consistent answer is repression: repress the problem.

Are rapists male conquerors chasing women through the streets, modern tarzans swinging from balcony to balcony prick in hand and a flower between their teeth? The most reliable statistics state that they are not. Immigrant worker or local family man, the typical rapist does not belong to that species. It is difficult to build them up into an expression of triumphant phallocracy, the image which so exasperates the feminists.

Rape is basically the sad revenge of a victim, a poor man's undertaking. It is not a result of bourgeois wealth or phallocratic arrogance, but their sub-product. If only rape could be proved to be above all the act of the privileged thirsting for proletarian flesh. How much easier it would be to latch the just struggle of women to the old class struggle... But there isn't always a notary such as Leroy to devour, and even maoist demagoguery has its limits!

We run up against the upholders of order, but we also keep running up against each other on a much more everyday level. This is the reality of capitalism. The problem is not to give in, but neither should we create racisms of all the real oppositions that come into being, dramatise them, create a climate of psychosis where everyone is so edgy they become victims of them twice over. All these background tensions are soon dispersed in real social war.

Militant attitudes mask the incapacity to transform our daily life and only aggravate the misery of those who adopt them. Feminist convictions can co-exist with the most common-place misery. On the one hand the dullest submission is accepted, to be avenged at the level of imagination and ideology or screwed up in aggressive attitudes which only contribute to the misfortune they feed off yet claim to fight. The more daily life needs to be dressed up with ideological explanations and rationalisations, the less it has any meaning in itself.

The failure of feminism isn't that it incites women to anger and revolt and sets off on a war against male behaviour. Capitalism or the crisis of human relations in general aren't chosen as the target due to a fear of foundering in ideology, but because of the concrete people and obstacles we run up against and which capital forces us to collide with. Let women get angry with the men who oppress them, exploit them and prevent them from living, as they reduce them to sex objects or chambermaids... And let men do the same and put an end to these hypocritical feelings of indulgence or the complacent irony that hides neurotic dependence, in order to reach

the requirements of human beings as far as other human beings are concerned. What is scorned and used cannot be loved.

A new version of the myth of Adam and Eve, of temptation and original sin, the stupidity lies in wanting it to be “men’s fault” at all costs. Perversion, and at the same time fantastic power is attributed to them, hiding the nature of the system whose development is no more in men’s hands than in those of women, even if it plays on their biological differences.

Furthermore, feminism is incapable of understanding the link between people’s biologically differentiated capabilities and needs, and their function in society. It can only deny biological differences or make them the absolute analytical principle, or even confuse both together: “Everything is wrong because of men, who are neither better or worse than women, and moreover the two sexes have similar capabilities but men abuse theirs”.

The nature of rape and feminism

Rape has sometimes found those willing to defend it. According to the “feminist” Fourier when he spoke of an individual who was sentenced for having attacked a number of old ladies, rape is nature’s way of realising unions which would otherwise be impossible.

But in all its barbarity the form the need can take is no less to be rejected than the society which refuses the possibility of its satisfaction. Rape is an expression of sexuality, but the sexual need is yet to be satisfied by it. Is that the case for the victim? Is it even for the aggressor? Neurosis and perversion exist as the incapacity to realise desire.

Rape is a contradiction in act. It is the expression of the need for a social and loving act absent in masturbation, swindled in prostitution and even in regular domestic sexuality.

An incapacity for characterological reasons and the lack of a social context in which to meet people and assure the coincidence of desires. Frustration engenders aggression. The need for love veers into a relationship of domination and destruction. In fact most solitary rapists, paradoxically trying to arouse approbation or recognition by force, feel rejected and despised.

Rape is linked to a whole non-sexual, anti-sexual way of considering and practising sexuality, where women have a role to play just as men have, even if their role consists, among other things, of not being responsible. It is impossible to understand anything about sexual misery if the way the behaviour of each sex balances and responds to the behaviour of the other isn’t admitted. The alienation of men finds support in that of women and vice versa. Homosexuality might confuse the issue, but it doesn’t break the rule. To want to make woman the passive victim of male behaviour or of her situation under the guise of exonerating her from blame is to treat her with the utmost disdain.

In the United States the average duration of coitus is two minutes. The accuracy of these measurements and records may be doubtful. But they fit in with other information and show what the degree of sexual poverty must be in the United States and not only there. Particularly with men, such behaviour reduces fucking in the first place to a release of tension, “having it off”, or simply scoring. A way of operating which is in fact nothing more than a reluctance to display a loving sensual attitude. The same behaviour which in rape goes with the conviction that there is no need to worry about the way that goal is reached.

How could people suddenly abandon themselves to their sensuality, love, caresses, rhythm, to their lover, when their education and all their circumstances push them towards controlling

themselves rather than letting themselves go, to seeing everything in terms of competition, power relationships and bluff? How could they when they come home in the evening knackered from work, when at the weekend they are hampered with the children, when they drag through the years with partners they no longer love? There are many unhappy people whose profound misery and overwork extinguish love.

Alongside all this shit rape remains quite a marginal phenomenon, even if it is produced by it and the reactions it arouses are echoes of it. Nevertheless it is quite hard to imagine feminist militants demonstrating and demanding that men love them better, and therefore fuck them better. That would be to say that those who treat them as ill-fucked women are right, and to recognise a fatal dependence on men. Moreover, it is true that it is not a question here of making demands, but nevertheless it merits taking action — and even of making a revolution.

Rape existed before capitalism, and rapists are not necessarily mentally sick. So is the cause really as social as all that? Some people want to make out that in the beginning there was rape and that, thanks to civilisation and repression, this primary behaviour has now been outgrown. Rape: biological or social phenomenon?

Rape is not bestial but human behaviour, even typically human, linked to the fact that human sexuality is no longer guided by rigid mechanisms and concentrated in precise periods like that of animals. Is rape normal or abnormal behaviour? Still a weak question: it is obvious that any man placed under certain conditions of excitation, frustration or force, could be capable of rape. Rape is neither the foundation of, nor external to, male sexuality. Rape cannot be dealt with by moral judgements but by the creation of conditions which permit the harmony of desires and do not push individuals up blind alleys. Under certain conditions anyone can commit murder. What shocks, perhaps, is that rape is almost a male privilege. This lack of reciprocation is a flagrant injustice. Perhaps we should stop asking for laws on equality and ask instead for the abolition of sexual differences, which nevertheless continue to give some people a few innocent pleasures.

Feminism is the expression of a basic movement bred by capitalism. A formidable movement which tears woman from her traditional position and revolutionises relationships between the sexes. It also contributes to a more recent phenomenon which is countering and recuperating any tendencies towards qualitative change: the reformism of daily life.

It would be a mistake to see feminism, just because it raises “human problems”, as a radical revolt within the multiform movement which is undermining the old world. But it would be equally mistaken to reduce it to the distorted forms the malaise of the middle classes takes, just because it is particularly among this social strata that it has become an autonomous movement of women for women. The milieu that supports feminism, just as the lawyers and writers and journalists who peddle it, makes its mark upon it but does not explain its nature. As for those people, such as the “total woman” movement in the United States, who want feminism to take the opposite course and maintain or restore the happy subdued housewife, they are swimming in vain against the current.

It is not feminism but capitalism that is throwing women into wage-earning and reducing the time and effort dedicated to maternal and domestic functions. Capitalist progress has led to the disappearance of the principal role occupied by human energy. Energy has become that of machines; violence that of firearms.

Apart from a few exceptions, maternity remains the prerogative of women. But the modern woman lives longer than her forebears, has fewer children and dedicates herself less to them. Given the decrease in infant mortality, and hence a more efficient reproduction of the species, in-

creased life expectancy, contraception, feeding bottles, creches, schools..., the maternal function defines and occupies women far less than it did in the past.

The essential issue is that the traditional division of labour between the sexes is losing its reason for existing; and that capitalism and not women's struggle against male oppression is undermining the old hierarchical relationship between men and women. The important thing is that it is the communist revolution and not feminism which could complete this movement and reveal its content.

Feminism often proclaims its hostility to present society. It is striking how little opposition it meets at the level of ideology and principles: just a few sneers and grunts. That is what leads to its raising its voice.

Feminism, in its widely acknowledged form as the ideology of women's emancipation, just as in its more radical one, is an expression of the action of capital which is tending to liquidate old structures and integrate women directly into its processes. Its fundamental nature prevents it from transcending this, and any time it gets involved in socialism and revolution it is usually to spread confusion. It latches on to the cracked myth of the socialism of Eastern European countries, pointing out that women are no better off there than under capitalism. It argues that women should participate as such, or at least autonomously, in all political revolutions in order to impose their own interests. And it obviously intends to represent them in a political and democratic way; it is speaking in the name of half the human race! It denounces the concept of "conjugal duty" as covering up "legal rape", but almost forgets to denounce the institution of marriage which is just as deadly for the man as for the woman. It conjures up a hypothetical and antediluvian matriarchy to evoke future victory. It believes itself to be radical because it has discovered that sexual inequality and oppression came, before capitalism and are therefore more fundamental. It refuses to see to what extent capitalism has revolutionised and modernised the nature of this old oppression. Feminism is a product of the modern world which it is incapable of understanding.

Feminism leans on the misery of the female condition, but it is above all an expression of the rapid changes in this condition and the problems thus raised. It is not a reaction against the old inferior position of woman so much as against the contradictory functions and status which are tearing women apart within the global transformation of society. Above all women feel themselves to be in an inferior position because, in spite of the fact that the old forms of inferior status are crumbling and their situation is becoming comparable to that of men, they are still relatively handicapped and unarmed compared to them at work, in the street and in the family. Feminism is the falsified and militant representation of this liquidation of the old female status. It sets up a movement which fundamentally escapes the will of women (as well as that of men) as the struggle of women and their allies against male oppression and inequality. It only exists to the extent that certain militant and political actions — De Gaulle and the women's vote for example — effectively liquidate old political and judicial shackles.

This militant vision is projected everywhere, and it mistakes the secondary backlash that it gives rise to as the root of the problem in much the same way as leftists see repression as the root of capitalism. The problem becomes that of the dominance of men over women, which is to be abolished or reversed by reaching equality of the sexes and the sharing of power, or by the predominance of women. The problem of the relationship between the sexes is conceived of as being in the first place a power relationship to be frozen and codified in terms of "rights" and "duties". Everything is channelled into the false language of the political and legal.

Capital does not develop smoothly and automatically. There are resistances and setbacks. New contradictions develop. Feminism takes root but it remains a prisoner of the capitalist universe.

Being a problem of the power of men over women, it imposes the amount of fuss made over the question of rape. It embodies in a brutal, unquestionable way the domination of men over women at the level of and by virtue of the sexual differences. The phallus becomes an instrument of an aggression which has no equivalent. That's what rape amounts to: not sadism or an expression of sexual misery.

From there onwards rape can be seen everywhere. It is not considered as a concentrated and exacerbated expression of misery and dislocation but as a model of interpretation to which everything can be reduced.

Here we find the role of the old anti-fascism at the level of everyday life and its modern politicisation. The enemy is overt, brutal constraint. The problem is a problem of power and its solution is democratisation. The question of finding out how capitalism exploits and alienates people at the same time as it fulfils their needs and elicits their participation is avoided, as is the bourgeois nature of democracy. Anti-fascism is not capable of understanding fascism as a product of capital even if it tries to explain how it came about, but tends to see fascism everywhere. People only act in that way if they are constrained and forced to by those in power, never because of impersonal mechanisms and needs.

The effects of power which show themselves at the everyday level are just as much the doing of women as they are of men. The impossibility and incapacity to act and to love is transformed into action against the other in a perpetual search for power. But this is the result of a dead-end rather than its primary cause.

Even if the number of indictments for rape were multiplied by ten (1.589 indictments in France in 1975), it can be seen that the risk of a woman being raped is quite slight. Wouldn't it be better to worry about grandmothers whose savings get stolen or their handbags snatched? There are countless vulnerable victims of ruthless hooligans!

The problem isn't that rape is singled out, although it is not a waste of time to point out its marginal character compared to the burglaries, car accidents, and industrial diseases which affect the female population just as badly. The problem is the way, for the want of a high statistical frequency, its emotional content is used to dubious ends.

We shall see how feminism is nothing but a sub-product of this "phallogratic society" which it denounces. First through the question of repression and the use of the law. Then, as far as the relationship between rape and desire is concerned, where it becomes the guardian of traditional female alienation.

Repression and the legal carnival

Feminists imply that due to phallogracy rape was never seriously punished before they began to intervene. In reality, throughout the ages rape has been considered a singular crime that had to be severely repressed. And it is possible even here to see the effects of phallogracy. For the Romans it was a defence of the matron and the sacred character of marriage (linked to that of property). In ancient times drowning or stoning was the punishment. Women were strongly encouraged to defend themselves or to call for help, so as to allay any suspicions of complicity which would have led to their being punished along with their aggressors. William the Conqueror

instituted castration and blinding to whoever raped a virgin. Rape is punished by imprisonment or death according to Article 120 of the American military statute book. In China and some other vanguard countries sexual delinquents are shot.

Of course a certain slackness can be noted, especially in times of war. But the same goes for pillage. It's war, and social rules don't apply to the enemy. Nevertheless it could be said that rape has always been considered a crime. A particular crime not linked to damage or material deprivation, but an attack on morality and sexual property. The existence of rape cannot be dissociated from the system of morality and sexual property which provokes it and condemns it at the same time.

The accusation of rape tends to be just as severe and disproportionate to the real damage caused as there are rapists who remain unpunished. Sentences must be all the heavier, in some cases ridiculously so, as the guilty are seldom arrested. Is it a question of entering this logic, screaming that rape is a crime which must be recognised and penalised all the more as it is difficult to isolate and punish? Of having to make examples? The fact that individuals, especially young people and adolescents, are condemned to prison with sentences often ranging from 5 to 10 years, is just as vile as rape itself. Rape ends up being punished more severely than passionate murder. It is just as vile that proposals have been made to offer a choice of prison or castration to the sexually disturbed. And once "treated", they are exhibited and boast of their newfound tranquility. How good it is to live without being pursued and plagued by all those unhealthy impulses!

Feminist have put themselves on a legal terrain, first with the question of abortion then with rape. In the first instance to defend the accused, in the second it is they themselves who do the accusing.

It is obviously very dubious to make appeals to bourgeois justice in order to defend one's interests, and be reduced to conducting one's struggle in such a way. But often those who point this out and consider it quite normal to "subvert" the law by using it against the bosses and so exploit "the contradictions of the system", are themselves highly suspect. The fact that those accused of rape are victims, exploited in turn and sometimes immigrants, isn't a sufficient basis to call for discrimination in their favour. Even though they are far more vulnerable.

Not wanting to get involved in repression, rape victims and their lawyers are often content to demand a symbolic sentence. Such was the case of Brigitte (March 1977). She was attacked by an Egyptian student, Youssi Eschack, who was eventually revealed to be impotent. The solicitors of the plaintiff and the accused met to ask for Youssi Eschack's release from prison where he had been held for a year pending trial. The court refused, pointing to the "seriousness of the disturbance to public order" and to the fact that, being foreign, he could abscond.

For Brigitte's solicitors it was necessary however that the defendant be judged in the High Court so as to have the criminal character of rape recognised. Was there rape, or at least attempted rape? It is there, on the nature of the aggressor's intentions, that the debate was centred, around which everything hung. Did this "beggar of love", as his defence called him, content himself with assault and battery, of strangulation in the heat of the moment, or were they the means to satisfy more sinister designs? What in fact was the nature of his impotence?

The problem is that feminism places itself just as much on the terrain of legality as that of morality. And even when it wants to play judges without soiling its hands with repression, as in the case of Brigitte, it reveals itself to be just as inconsistent as the impotent rapist. Above all what matters is that rape be recognised by society as a crime — hence the need for rape to be judged in the High Court. There must be a victim, a culprit and a sentence. Also it should be

underlined that the severity of the sentence does not necessarily depend on the jurisdiction of the court. We, on the contrary, prefer to support repression. In the sense of a good kicking.

One solution for a woman in the face of an attack which she feels to be unbearable and, rightly or wrongly, also actually dangerous, is — as has already happened — to injure or even kill her aggressor. Such a reaction, whether effective or not, whether rational or not, and whether proportional to the danger or not, is qualitatively different to any activity which is intended to dramatise, condemn or punish. Whether by recognition of and appeal to official justice or by the institution of more or less picturesque people's tribunals.

It has been proposed that rapists' name and the terms of sentence be displayed in town halls. He would lose the esteem of his fellow citizens and — why not — also his job. Perhaps two birds could be killed with one stone thus remedying female unemployment: would an unemployed hitch-hiker have any chance of becoming a lorry driver?

Nobody doubts the material reality of murder, so why should that of rape be doubted? It should be considered an offence and a crime and it is time we started to take it seriously!

What is the reason for all this? First of all, the lack of physical traces left by rape make the subjective witnessing of the victim all important. And then, there is a certain male complicity, in any case rape is considered a crime, not just a misdemeanour or a simple slap in the face, but it is difficult to define its limits. Doubt and bad faith find fertile soil on both sides. Honest citizens, even peaceful teachers, have been seen to be wrongly accused of acts which they never committed and which never even took place.

The sentence for rape rests solely on the testimony of the victim. And if that is to be supported, one must effectively be convinced that sadism, perversity and vengeance are exclusively male properties, and that a woman cannot be affected by them. It's as though the accusation of rape has never been used for settling personal, racial or political accounts, notably against revolutionaries. It goes as far as weighing up and deciding the eventual sentence on the basis of the morality of the accuser and the suspect. These sentences vary greatly. Those who defend the elementary rights of the accused are immediately ready, no doubt as atonement for centuries of women's oppression, to base everything on the testimony of the plaintiff alone.

It is a fact that the genital mucous membrane heals quickly, in less than six hours. Should one complain? Murder itself isn't as easy to circumscribe as that. How many people die because they have gently been pushed to suicide, or had their health undermined? In the factory? In the home? More people are killed this way than by what are actually recognised as crimes.

What has to be exploded is the concept of crime instead of clinging to it and closing ourselves up in it and calling for "the introduction of a penis into a vagina by force" to be condemned as something completely distinct from common "assault and battery".

Murder kills on every occasion, but not all rapes have the same effect, because they contain different levels of sadism, and because the victims vary. There is murderous rape and the "game" pushed too far. And, contrary to what a decree of the Supreme Court of Appeal (June 14, 1971) states, it makes no small difference "that the woman be a virgin or not, married or single, honourable or prostitute". The same violence could push one to madness but leave the other with no more than a piquant memory.

Is this differentiation suspect? Yes, if reality is flattened into its legal or police dimension. It is deceitful to drown all rapes in the same indivisible horror. The shock experienced by the victims is not external to the atmosphere of fear and sexual poverty in which we live.

If an immediate solution existed whereby all sexual acts, just as all relationships between individuals, could be based on mutual consent and reciprocal pleasure, we can wager that it would already have been found. But that cannot be. Reality, as far as it is concerned, does not let itself thus be raped by whoever wants to impose their desires upon it. And perhaps the result of it would be no more than a pallid evangelism.

To repress rape would not even be a sure way of inhibiting it, but even if it were we would still have to know the price of this inhibition. The rapist is more dangerous the more frightened he is. Would it regulate the basic problem of repression and sexual frustration? A heavily policed country like Japan has very few instances of rape; yet this country is inundated with sado-masochistic and pornographic literature and comic strips. In no way is it a paradise of female emancipation!

Prison sentences and judicial carnivals where lawyers fill their pockets and build reputations while supporting great causes... But if we were to accept all that or call for things to be run better, we would simply be accepting this society based on solitude, non-communication, obsession and fear of sex, latent sadism and vindictive imbecility.

Woman and desire

The struggle for free abortion, like that against rape, is a struggle whose objectives cannot be rejected. But these objectives mask deeper issues and a more profound aspect of women's identity, their social role and the real desires involved. The problem of abortion is also the problem of the woman's acceptance of her role as a mother. It is a problem of sadism towards herself and the foetus, of guilt and a desire for punishment linked to sexuality. It is also a matter of cramped living conditions and low wages... To reduce all this to its "practical" dimension, ignoring the deeper needs and the real constraints involved, is to put oneself on the same terrain as capital. And a little post-operative psychological or political counselling is not enough to remedy it.

The debate to determine whether abortion is murder or not, and hence to justify or condemn it in these terms, is sadly weak on both sides. It side-steps the question and returns to the theological domain of asking when the soul enters the body.

Some societies have practised infanticide to limit their population. A human community can come to an agreement on the right to kill. The lives of incurable patients, malformed children or foeti are not above human judgement. And the problem is not that of asking for their consensus!

What is being sold with the liberalisation of abortion is the triumph of asepsis. The butchery which is unbearable when a baby is involved seems normal there, it is carried out in the dark and an act of killing is transformed into an "operation". The same society which is afraid of death, blood and screams, maintains a whole industry around the suffering and death of animals and remains nonchalant about mass starvation in the third world. The same society that once wanted to transform life is now content to "transform death"; it would like things to get better but is scared of the revolution because it might be violent.

"Free abortion on demand", why not? But of course the time when free bread was what was dreamed of has gone. But why, amongst a whole host of things, should it be abortion and not housing, milk or meat? It is true that some leftists are also calling for free weekly transport passes. Not the underground, free transport, but free passes to get to work!

Sexuality is par excellence the domain of abandon. It is a matter of being “ravished”, “captivated”, of delivering oneself from oneself in order to be transported by one’s own passion and abandon oneself to that of the other.

But the claim to be able to dispose of one’s body freely which appeared concerning abortion and rape is a defensive reaction. Precisely because it no more than translates and justifies a situation which puts everyone on the defensive. The foetus, and even the capacity to have children, is not the property of the mother, or even of the mother and father between them. This vision is nothing but capitalist delirium, the defence of the property of the body and its products. At a time such as this when what is needed is the blowing up of registry offices, people are suggesting that women keep their own names instead of taking those of their husbands!!!

The problem of the desires and needs which are being suppressed here is being put forward by the revolutionary movement. Despite what feminism says, women should be brought to question to show that it is not a matter of denouncing male desire, but of inciting the emergence of a female desire which is not buried in passivity, and an identity which is no longer inferior.

Germaine Greer speaks of the female eunuch. It is not only women who are reduced to eunuchs, but it is true that female alienation is determined by the way woman relates to her desire. Man can see the satisfaction of his desire countered, woman cannot manage to find the language of hers. She cannot desire frankly and openly. She places herself at the service of man as the bearer of his child and as a more or less passive object of desire, docile and resistant to change. The problem of woman’s desire and social affirmation are absolutely inseparable.

This is obviously not purely social. The social is also a translation of the physiological and biological. But it is absurd to believe that women are condemned, either by their own nature or that of men, to behaving passively. Obviously women have their own desires and activities and no-one has ever succeeded in castrating them completely. It is not all that simple; they have more possibilities to fall back on.

Women, of all times and in all societies, have managed to get round their desires discreetly. There is no general law here. For example some, thanks to the society in which they lived and their privileged social position, never missed the opportunity to choose their lovers openly.

The current difficulty in asserting their desires now that they have no social legitimacy produces a contrasting and contradictory image of woman: virgin or slut, mother or whore, absolutely innocent or infinitely perverse, a symbol of gentleness or an example of spiteful malevolence.

Women are dispossessed of the power which men monopolise. Yet women, precisely because they cannot openly desire and manage their own affairs and are at the service of others, are often more in search of power than men. They live through their husbands, their children, their office boss and want to possess them. This power, by its very nature private and emotional, is obviously ridiculous – a blind alley where amorous pleasure is lost.

Women can also take a castrating attitude towards men and children, denying them and undermining their desire. If physical violence is very rare, a product of dementia or an effect of jealousy or vengeance – like the Czech veterinary student who recently anaesthetised and emasculated her two rapists – castrating behaviour is far more common and engenders various forms of impotence and inhibition.

Woman’s strength, her power, is that she can refuse herself, can “not let herself be fucked”. It is only a step from denying herself as an object of desire to denying the man the moment he advances his desire, to degrading him and blaming his sexual impulses, therefore his need for

a woman: it is well known that “in every man there sleeps a pig”. Today this reaction is being transferred into politics.

Some want to see “provocation” as the cause of rape, even to the extent of denying the reality of it and transforming it into that of female bad faith or the miniskirt. In contrast, others defend the right to dress as they please, as if dress and appearance did not have a social meaning.

Rape is not independent of female attitudes, even though the problem cannot be reduced to that of an immediate personal relationship between the victim and her aggressor. Just as those who are burgled are not necessarily those who possess and display most wealth. The attack is made on the weak points...

Women who are raped, or even chatted up, are not necessarily those who are most “sexy”. At the extreme, “provocation” at the level of anonymous relationships can be seen as an expression of defiance and power to discourage those looking for an easy target and only have recourse to force because they themselves are unsure.

Men react to a frustrating situation and to a certain image of woman. This image corresponds less to a particular real woman than to provocatively eroticised representations of an omnipresent but inaccessible woman who is universally on offer through the commodity market. Representations which correspond to female aspirations and in turn remodel them. Relationships are contemplative because of their glamorous packaging as merchandise, as something consumable; but also because the direct correlation between people who are constantly near each other but meet on nothing and for nothing, tends to be reduced to one of images. It is not only a question of consumerism playing on narcissism and multiplying images of woman, it is also real women reduced to images, assimilated to the consumable in the multiplicity and anonymity of primarily visual relationships.

A whole female mode of behaviour is aimed at attracting the attention and desire of others without being able or having to openly affirm itself as need and appeal. This unconfessed and irresponsible behaviour goes as far as to be surprised by the consequences it can arouse, refusing to accept them as responses. Female seduction radiates in all directions, and only feels responsible for that which it recognises. It disdains some, but also sometimes resents those who were not aware they were being aimed at.

But this still doesn't get to the root of the problem. Women will still claim that in dressing or behaving in such and such a way they are only trying to please themselves and to be beautiful with no intention of seducing. And in part this is true: their attitude is narcissistic. But this narcissism needs to be supported by someone else's gaze and interest. They need to arouse desire in direct or disguised forms, but with precisely no intention of responding. It's a matter of reassuring and valuing oneself while remaining inaccessible and conserving one's innocence.

In this case provocation and seduction are not steps towards initiating a convergence of desires as they are often considered to be, but are an expression of suppression, an incapacity to desire openly and frankly, hence the indignation concerning advances made.

To have access to a woman a man must pay the price in sentimental rubbish, or just plain rubbish, which is as much a concession to her narcissism as to her need to be taken into consideration. This need for consideration is all the more fundamental as woman is undervalued as a person. It affirms itself as that of being taken into consideration as a woman in default of being esteemed as an individual.

Respect a woman, show her attention and feeling and finally, a little pressure, and access to sexual consumerism will be the reward! This dissociation at the basis of courtship leads to pla-

tonic love, which does not dare to make the woman descend from her pedestal; or to rape, which wants to obtain consumption without having to pay the price.

Feminism and the mistrust it gives rise to are not the cold expression of calculations between distinct and adverse interests in bad faith. Under the guise of “justice”, “rights”, “defence” and “autonomy” it touches the world of desire. This explains the reactions of embarrassment, guilt, irony and aggressiveness beyond a proclaimed reprobation of bad boys and sadists. Feminism comes to be seen as hypocrisy, a double game, a perverse attitude. The accusation of rape concretises this threat of seeing woman taking exception to and putting an end to a game in which she was an accomplice from the start.

Through the feminist denunciation of rape, fear and the refusal of desire itself is outlined, a fear and refusal which is not usually stated openly, simply because it remains ambiguous and equivocal, but which is occasionally crudely shown up by a few extremists. Those who are caricatured or caricature themselves, scissors in hand.

Woman asks “love” to prove to her that she is not a sexual object, and to reassure her. She wants to be loved, loved for herself and not for “that” and demands feelings as an assurance. She contributes in this way to re-inforcing the sexual as something separate, instead of dissolving it in loving relationships. Tenderness and esteem only prepare for or accompany sex and even constitute a form of barter: “I can have my arse touched but not before I and my problems have been taken into consideration!”. This attitude is not simply a heritage which could be liquidated with new habits. It is also the attitude of these young “emancipated” women who put it into practice, reassuring themselves with a stream of lovers.

Anything that upsets this stratagem is a threat: not only rape and brutal sexual propositions, but also any living desire that is unexpected and clearly stated. Everything that escapes or disturbs pre-established codes is considered rape or a danger.

By turning chatting-up, sexual propositions or leers into rape, one is apparently denouncing a situation where woman is reduced to an object of consumerism. But in reality it is the very act of desiring which is being attacked. And the problem of woman is reduced to that of not being harassed; thus her desires or her — negative — reactions to the desires of others are denied.

To the chat-up we must oppose true encounter, to “voyeuristic” stares, the expression of desire and communication. The enemy is not men and their desires. The pickup is an immediate product of the city, anonymity, solitude, the destruction of the possibilities of encounter. The instigator himself uses defensive attitudes, false self-assurance and a false disdain of women.

The predatory male, and in the extreme the rapist, is a nuisance or a danger. But embarrassment or injury are above all rooted in all the misery and solitude of the victims. They are provocations, injurious responses painfully felt because they cannot fulfill, a caricature of the hope of something else. If the rapist were Tarzan, perhaps he would be forgiven. But the kerb crawler rarely has the appearance or the manners of a Prince Charming. His “prey” sees her own misery reflected in his.

Rape as an act, but more frequently as fantasy, is the product of the form of relations between the sexes and the contradictions therein. It is the politicisation of an old, more or less obsessional female fear, a fear which covers a desire for sexuality which cannot acknowledge or assert itself.

Rape fantasies and dreams about housebreaking express sexual fear clothed in the fear of aggression. But this isn’t only fear, just as it is not only passivity; fantasy is also an action. Desire takes form by discharging responsibility and blame on to the aggressor. In his way the latter embodies desire itself. He is desire, but coming in from the outside. Just as the active male fantasy,

and even rape itself, are products of impotence, the passive fantasy in woman is also an expression of her need for action; she acts out her desire and so deals with the reality which refuses her this right.

In the active fantasy, the desire for and refusal of the other find an outlet in domination and aggression. It is as much a question of self-defence as it is of attack, self-protection from the risk and anguish of refusal by the other with an attitude which makes neither acceptance or refusal possible. Desires, fantasies and various forms of sado-masochistic behaviour are not the product of a primary attitude which has been superficially glossed over by civilisation, and is tending to re — emerge. The image of the pre-historic woman as a prey pulled along by the hair and who, one suspects, enjoys it. No, they are the product of man's liberation from his real needs, which then come back to haunt him in a distorted form. Abandon, the submission which a loving relationship implies, unaccepted because it is in contradiction with a whole way of life, returns in the form of an exterior domination that is violent, imposed, feared and desired at the same time.

The *Story of O* was openly presented by its author as the dream of an emancipated woman. The success it met with and the disturbance it caused are far more an expression of this modern state of affairs where passion must be released and character armour shattered, than of an innate archaic need to suffer and submit along with the complimentary desire to dominate and torture, whether in dreams or at the cinema.

Susan Brownmiller, in her book *Against Our Will*, doubts that it was a woman who wrote *The Story of O* and is annoyed with the complacency of certain authors, even female ones like Anaïs Nin in her diary. Rape is carried out "against our will", and women should be cleansed of all suspicion. All this female masochism, these aspirations for rape, are just inventions.

Yet masochistic fantasies and fantasies of rape still flourish, although with embarrassment, within the bosom of the feminist movement.

The feminist magazine 'Emma' dedicated one of its issues to the question "Our masochistic sexual fantasies": "This documentation on masochism and sexual fantasy has taken up our editorial group for weeks. The greatest surprise for us was the great number of women who have such fantasies. As soon as we began to talk about it, we discovered that some of the women among us were also concerned. They only dared outline their fantasies in a very hesitant way. Each was afraid of being judged by someone who did not have any". ("Emma", September 9, 1977).

The editorial group quote studies carried out in the United States, which demonstrate the frequency of masochistic fantasies: "... the psychologist Barbara Hariton, who gained promotion on the strength of it... found that 65 per cent of the women questioned by her had "erotic fantasies" during sexual intercourse with their partners (men or women). Thoughts of another man (or woman) were most prevalent, then visions of rape, and in third place fantasies about "perversions". Very frequently women also imagined sexual intercourse with more than one man at the same time or voyeuristic situations where they were observed or were watching others".

The American journalist Nancy Friday analysed a few thousand women's letters. She found that the majority of women's sexual fantasies "are of a masochistic nature".

Robin Morgan, who wrote a book on the subject, says that during a meeting on sexuality attended by a group of 80 feminists, one of the participants admitted: "... it's strange... we are feminists, but... I sometimes have sexual fantasies which in some ways are masochistic, and... I wonder if any-one here has already had the same sort of experience. Perhaps they could raise a

hand". She fled from the room. A deathly silence followed. Then, very slowly, each woman, one after the other, raised her hand.

Robin Morgan, who herself has such fantasies, tries to change the nature of them, to dream herself the dominator, to imagine herself the sultan, professor, rapist, but that only works if she thinks of people of her own sex. Hence the hypothesis that: "... I could raise myself above them, but never above a man". But: "That would be an unworthy understanding of myself [...]. I forced myself not to have any more fantasies, upon which my capacity to have orgasms decreased, which all things considered was even more depressing. I capitulated when I became afraid of becoming frigid, and felt like an alcoholic who goes back to the bottle". (Quoted in "Emma").

All this is extremely disconcerting. How can these fantasies, which are sometimes the only way to reach orgasm, be condemned without appreciating that "they are to be found in strong opposition to the dignity for which women are struggling today"? ("Emma") In despair Robin Morgan explains that ever since men have reversed matriarchy through trickery, all this has had time to be registered in her cells. "Emma" reaches the following conclusions: 1) Our fantasies are the product of social conditions. They reflect the submission of woman in a male dominated society. Fantasies say nothing about what is really desired. The contrary can be the case. When a woman finds pleasure in imagining herself being raped that in no way means she really desires to be raped.

It is more a case for diminishing women's responsibility than explanation. The fantasies are only reflections. Women are imagined to be so malleable, poor dears! And they even go along with it. Fantasy is obviously linked to social reality, but is an active means of compensation.

A woman who dreams of being raped has every chance of being disappointed, disillusioned, by real rape, firstly because one is rarely raped by the man of one's dreams, even if he is an anonymous figure. Nevertheless, it is not possible to dissociate and oppose fantasy and real desire in such a way. And what is expressed in fantasy will also certainly have an echo in actual behaviour.

In order for woman to be exonerated, she is lent a monstrous alienation and is presented as a passive receptacle of images. An absolute dissociation between dream and real behaviour is pictured. In misery one sees only misery and opposes it with a struggle for dignity. If one places oneself on the terrain of dignity, it must be very difficult not to despise those who in private find pleasure in this way, and in public demonstrate a saintly fury against rapists.

These phantasms are a heritage of the millenarian oppression of women. Is there not, rather, a link between this feminism and these fantasies? Are the feminists not also dead against rapists because they dream of rape and sadism? Everything is thrown in together in a dissociated way, and opposing elements prop each other up, even if one is the overthrow of the other.

In the United States an artist has started a course in masturbation for women and has relaunched herself in the selling of suitable instruments. All the same, the pupils still seem to have a need for some theatricals and their fantasies predominantly take the form of rape. The social relationship evacuated at the practical level returns to be set up as imagination, and precisely in the form of law-breaking.

Masturbation is in fashion. It is another liberty to be conquered. Mrs Shere Hite had a best seller in the USA with her book *The Hite Report*. It is the result of an inquiry which in some ways is a summary of female sexual poverty and her own intellectual frigidity. Her discovery is that masturbation is the key which allows female sexuality to be understood like male sexuality. She starts from the fact that many women do not have orgasms through vaginal penetration but

reach it through clitoral masturbation. Moreover coitus does not seem so great as: “the fact is that it is not realistic to expect a man to ensure total pleasure for his partner at the same time as himself”. (Interview in “Reader’s Digest Selection”, July 1977.)

From this follows some practical conclusions that a woman should know in order to avoid letting herself be intimidated or forced to have sexual relations. If a man has an erection, “nothing in nature, no physical force makes him have this orgasm inside a vagina. The stimulation he feels is coupled with the desire for orgasm and not for sexual relations as such”. Masturbation can do him as much good and even: “there is no imperative reason for him to have an orgasm at all”. (Hite Report). Thus the woman would be no more than a wanking machine for the man. The problem becomes knowing whether she wants to put him to the same use or not.

Along the same lines, but in the “futurology” section, another American philanthropist has proposed that the female population be radically reduced in relation to the male population starting from the moment when the sex of the foetus can be determined. Everything will be sorted out thanks to the supply of ersatz women. Fucking machines will replace pin-ball machines. But why such a barbarous and tortuous solution? To solve the population explosion. Tilt!

Obviously we have nothing against masturbation and the various ways of reaching orgasms which do not involve classic coitus, whether they bring the fingers, the tongue or the ears into play. But what Hite and her French counterpart Cabu, “ecology” tendency, question is the sexual union itself: “Let’s stop fucking like primitive people, coitus is out of date”. Hite wants to deliver us from this “cultural definition” and Cabu from social conditioning. And they go so far as to speak of humiliation and defilement. It would be interesting to know the results of her erotica-ecological research for “just as intimate approaches”, but ones which are clean.

Misery becomes arrogant and pedantic and does not hesitate to take a liberatory tone even though it is not very good at disguising itself.

The church, society, tradition, present complete coitus as the normal official form of sexual activity. First let us say there is often a gap between the norm and reality as it is lived. Masturbation, coitus interruptus and sodomy have all played an important role, primarily for reasons of contraception.

But isn’t contemporary social conditioning leading to an essentially masturbatory sexuality, without actually seeming to? Hence the difference between the classic mode of sexual relations and practical aspirations and behaviour.

First, there is the simple fact that adolescents generally experience sexuality through masturbation and that sometimes this is the only form, or the habitual form their sexual activity takes for a long time. Access to sexual relations comes far later than sexual impulses. For reasons of their living situation, fear of pregnancy, inhibition, adolescents cannot have a satisfying sexual life at a time when sexual tension is often at its strongest. Petting or masturbation substitutes coitus. The prodigious career of the Hollywood kiss finds its explanation in this contradictory situation which combines a mixture of prudishness and eroticism. Thanks to contraception, amongst other things, this situation has begun to thaw. This is where the feminists and ecologists come in again. Masturbation is not an apprenticeship to sexual union. The physical contact and means of excitation used are not the same and so they prevent sexual development.

Hite says that a large number of American women (82 per cent of those questioned) masturbate. No doubt men aren’t far behind. So masturbation is not only a memory of adolescent practice, but is also present in adult behaviour. The problem isn’t that people wank as well as screw. The

masturbatory character of sexuality is manifest — and there is poverty in the sexual relationship itself.

Sexual union becomes the means of a quick and effective sleep-inducing release. In order to make it work better and reach orgasm, one tunes into one's repertory of fantasies and screens one's lover out.

This attitude is masturbatory because it is the fantasy that becomes the source of excitation. It is a matter of a refusal, at the psychic level and even at the physical one, where it also becomes an impossibility to abandon oneself to one's partner and one's own sensations. The other is used for masturbation. The consumerism of the sexual spectacle comes from the same sort of thing.

It is not surprising that many women, because of their own blocks or their partners' behaviour, have no vaginal sensitivity or pleasure from penetration. It is prevalent for women to ignore the existence and use of the vaginal sphincter. The Americans, Masters and Johnson who demonstrated that orgasm, even through penetration, was the result of indirect stimulation of the clitoris, base an anti-frigidity therapy on the contraction of this sphincter.

It would be mistaken to see sexual difficulties as a purely physiological question which would respond to adequate exercise. And orgasm in itself is not the solution which will sort everything out, be it only because there are orgasms and orgasms. What we are up against is the way the body, through impotence or absence of orgasm in screwing, registers and fixates misery. But the reformists, seeing this misery as a natural phenomenon, jump up saying we must pass over "prejudice" and come to terms with it: solitary or reciprocal masturbation is a short cut to pleasure, a remedy for impotence.

For Hite & Co., sexual relations are reduced to helping each other towards pleasure, to rendering each other a service, naturally blending the sauce with the indispensable tenderness. Reciprocal masturbation would be the ideal. What escapes them is the possibility of self-abandonment in the other, a uniting of prick and cunt mixed in the same pleasure.

The way this society investigates private life allows the devastation produced by it to be isolated and its causes to be mystified. "Science" offers remedies to the catastrophes so revealed, but its outlook carries with it the very dissociations which are at the base of this catastrophe. What we can discover is the depth of the social fracture and how far it penetrates people's intimacy.

If it is just a matter of the intensity of pleasure, then there can be no doubt that the electronic feeling and sucking machine will win out over masturbation nine times out of ten. If there isn't a short circuit. If the users don't give up. If it doesn't make them howl with despair as it supplies them with its atrocious and inhuman pleasure. The question is not that of pleasure as such but of encounter, recognition, the union of desires and bodies, and of the harmony, pleasure and ecstasy which follows. Happiness, sexual satisfaction, is not just a matter of pleasure but also of the direction which that pleasure takes. In any case the intensity of pleasure doesn't boil down to mechanical friction.

It is in no way surprising that the Don Juans, the machos and prickteasers prefer to wank; their behaviour is dissociated: on the one hand the social relationship is reduced to conquest i.e. to narcissistic reassurance and on the other to the satisfaction of needs.

The reverse of sexual freedom is revealed: dissatisfaction and disillusionment. The more sexuality is set free, the more it is seized on by a world of relationships of strength and competition. To fuck someone is to take advantage of them, to exercise power over them — hence the defensive reactions notably on the part of women who appear most vulnerable. But such defensiveness and fragility exist perhaps even more deeply in men for whom sexuality is valued as affirma-

tion of self, and where aggressive and defensive sexual mechanisms overlap. But all this also demonstrates a need and a basis for a different kind of relationship.

What the ideologists of the right to orgasms and equality in pleasure fail to grasp is the complementarity and union of the sexes. They don't even know that that's what it's made for. So, unaware of its use, nothing seems to irritate them more than a phallus. Here it's a matter of *La Petite difference et ses grandes consequences* (Alice Schwarzer). B Groult in *Ainsi Soit-elle* (So be she) simply sees the differences between the sexes as no more than a question of a tap.

It was around this difference that Freud saw fear of castration in boys and penis envy in girls; being reduced to a simple possession of a prick, this difference is minimised or devalued by the feminists: it is insignificant and is only a question of a tap. It matters little whether the difference is great or small, it exists. But above all just to see a difference is to be content with comparisons. Woman is reduced to a man without a... denying her identity and the form of her desires and being in a way more denigratory than Freud's "phallocratism".

A prick doesn't separate a man from a woman, it's what allows him to unite himself with her. To see a prick as nothing but a tap is to deny it as a symbol of desire, above all as desire in the flesh and in deed. When talking of female attractiveness, do we have to say that what distinguishes a woman from a man is a hole and bumps? Such miserable plumbing and coach-building! The legal-political vision which only sees differences and wants equality to reign goes together with a castrating vision which ignores and refuses the world of desire. They put individuals side by side, never together.

The cult of the phallus must be abolished. But where is this cult of the phallus to be seen? Just as society practises a publicity cult of the female body, so the poor phallus is left in the shade. The erection becomes shameful, but not for want of putting the arse if not in a place of honour, at least on the wall. Let us remind leftist moralists that the female body is exhibited and reduced to an object of consumerism not to stimulate erections but to sell goods.

The psychoanalysts very much in fashion today have revealed to us the phallic character of the insignia of authority: sceptres, batons of command... But the phallus is not accepted and respected because it is maliciously masked. It's not simply a game of prudish hide and seek: it is denied and its meaning is inverted. The desire for power is not the same as the power of desire. Let's oppose phallocracy, yes, but because we are against power and for the phallus.

The contradiction in feminism

Feminism feeds off the resistance that the capitalist movement for the equality of women produces. That of the husband who doesn't see why he should give a hand with the housework when he gets home from work. That of the woman who clings to a role and an image of femininity which is less and less tenable. That of businesses which prefer to engage cheap labour... In fact it is easy for it to draw up a list of cases where women find themselves in inferior situations as regards wages, domestic circumstances, etc. — where they are the ones receiving the blows. But feminism doesn't just feed off this resistance, it is itself resistance. It is so precisely at the point where it imagines itself to be *avant-garde*, subversive, as its real aim is legal and practical equality.

Alongside and running through the practical demands against discrimination which logically tend to liquidate the particular image and status of women, there is a will in feminism to self-

affirmation and recognition of women as women. In other words to protect or restore women's status which is crumbling because capital is undermining its foundations and because everybody is making room for themselves by elbowing someone else. Feminists are demanding the consideration due to women ("respect us as women"), for the innocence which is to be attributed to them. They count on indulgence towards women and their contradictions, and are annoyed when they don't get it.

Why this double attitude? Because on the level of the struggle for equality, which is also that of the most ruthless competition, woman usually finds herself in a position of inferiority, vulnerable at work, in the street, in her sexual relations. This inferiority is due to her education which is addressed less to the struggle than to the fact that until Moulinex "liberate women" by bringing out hatcheries for foetuses she will continue to exercise a maternal function. An inferiority which arises out of her own nature and needs. It is not so much racism or an anti-woman ideology as practical conditions which are hard for the egalitarian ideology, State action or female charm to compensate for. But feminism, unable to go beyond this to a point where woman will not be limited to denying herself so as to "earn her living and her independence", works on two levels and confuses two contradictory discourses. It also plunges into dishonesty. A male chauvinist conspiracy is used to explain why, despite judicial proclamations and modifications, women remain trapped. It is this being trapped that feminism expresses, an immense malaise which appears to have no way out and can only express itself through defensive attitudes that are sometimes vicious and delirious, rarely justifiable.

It is all very well for feminism to denounce male authority. It must, in fact, call on justice and the State if it wants to be effective. The State is the arm of the weak. It alone can seem capable of ensuring respect for those who are not able to make themselves respected. For example, the idea of wages for housework could only come about through State intervention. It is the same for more or less everything concerning the defence of women. The militantism which organises abortions, shelters battered women and supports unmarried mothers is only a solution by proxy, by "red" nuns. It is, while defending oneself, a re-enforcement of State intervention in private life. A glimpse at the Soviet Union is instructive. It was there that Amalrik, arrested by the KGB, got to know the "alcoholics" whose wives had denounced them. It was there that a woman was sentenced for passing on syphilis to two married men.

Feminism proves to be incapable of understanding the evolution of the female situation and women's misery. By reducing the male situation to a question of power and aiming to oppose men with women, it becomes incapable of making a true critique of male behaviour.

The more it wants to make the capacity to live, feel and have a good time a female prerogative, the more its language smells of lies. This intellectualoid and insipid waffle hopes to evoke marvelous understanding, indescribable female sensations. The past is regurgitated and sets to war against abstractions, seeking allies in the palpitations of the body, daisy chains, the earth-mother image, and modernist and psychoanalytic stereotypes at the precise moment that it has no more to say that is concrete. An incapacity to feel, love and communicate plays with vagueness and concepts at the same time, hoping to bring about change by passing off an empty package as lavish illusions.

In this way woman does nothing but make the most of, appropriate herself of, the ghetto where she is confined in impotence, feelings, intuition and "human relations".

In a more active and aggressive way the taste for power, violence and politics that would characterise males and is postured as the cause of all ills is given free rein through feminist

waffle. Waffle which believes it is protecting itself from criticism in this way but which reveals its essence: jealousy and competition with men, or rather a caricaturised image of men.

Can feminism be reduced to “move along and make room for me”? Perhaps it can for those Italian women who want 50 per cent of jobs to be assured to women. But at another level, feminism as resistance to the movement of capital is also claiming what it denounces. In its way and through its inverted language it does no more than turn around and take up the complaint of those who say that there are no longer any “real” men. The enemy is patriarchal society, male authoritarianism. But where is this authoritarian male, this master of the house who keeps wife and children under his thumb?

The peasant family of yesteryear, where a man could exercise his physical strength and his primary role in production to establish his authority and direct the family, has practically dissolved even in rural districts. Wage labour has made the man a “bread-winner” expelling both himself and his productive activity from the sphere of the family. The proletarian brings home money, but he is not the dominant figure even inside his own family. His children do not see him toiling for the family subsistence before their very eyes as was the case for peasant families.

There has been a profound change in family relations and in the nature of paternal and marital authority. There is economic dependence on the father, but his authority appears ancillary and does not arise directly from his function. As a proletarian he is subjected to authority in his activity; he may have fits of despotism when he comes home, but he can no longer seriously pass himself off as the master, which he fundamentally is not. He is not at home in the factory, is he even in the home? In the popular milieu it is frequently the woman who manages the household expenses, giving back the man his pocket money. It is a well known fact that 80 per cent of household purchases are made by women. Housework has been compared to serfdom and in fact the wage relation has had to rely on this submerged activity. But to say that woman is the servant of men is just as true and just as false as to say that she is the servant of the bourgeoisie. “My boss” is the popular expression. But the man, unless he is someone is often more lost than the woman, his life and activity have less meaning than that which is left to the mother and housewife.

In bourgeois circles on the contrary, he has remained the master in the house as in the social field. Roman law was reintegrated establishing the man’s place as the head of the household over the woman and young minors. So women and children find themselves far more restricted to a dependent role than in the popular strata. Inheritances have to be waited for. Today the young bourgeois rebel against daddy, sometimes even confusing proletarian revolution with the liquidation of their Oedipus complex. Note, however, and the Editions des Femmes know something about it, that the possession of great fortunes often comes back to women. Thus, according to “l’Expansion”, the two wealthiest people in France are women: a widow and a single woman...

There is a general contradiction between reality as it is lived, and what persists as the official figure of authority and strength as the ideal to be attained: bishops, generals, foremen, astronauts and heads of State are usually men.

Educational needs and parental influence in the family are increasingly fulfilled by women. This reality is carried over into the school itself. The father generally remains the figure of authority to whom recourse is made and who, when the occasion arises, dispenses of punishment and reprimands. But even here he can be perceived as an outsider, the instrument of a power that is not his own — i.e. that of the mother who uses the threat to keep the children in hand, and who then makes him act it out.

This transformation is accompanied by a transformation in the nature of authority itself. Women and rebellious youth, along with those who take up their struggle, wage war against authority and he who incarnates it in the family. And they certainly have good reason to fight against the suffocation and constraints of the family. But in their search for a culprit aren't they magically trying to believe in an authority whose suppression would solve everything, and which they simply lack?

The problem of the world and its dehumanisation is not just a problem of authority. It is that of the existence of a whole host of constraints which we are continually running up against. These constraints do not suddenly appear as a part or consequence of our activity, but actually prevent us from acting or even trying to. Not all of these constraints are embodied in the human form – i.e. our movements are shackled, but these shackles emerge neither as a product of a human will nor are they justified by one. There is no authority to which one can either submit or oppose oneself. All that begins from a very young age. Parents who show themselves to be incapable of coping and constituting a reassuring reference point give meaning to the renunciations the child must continually make and at the same time rob them of their rebellion. Love and hate become entangled. Destructive and vindictive behaviour takes over from authority and the legitimised discipline of times gone by. So the urbanised children of today, with the benefits of school and psychotherapy, find themselves far more restrained in taste and movement than in the past. But then there is always Santa's Grotto in the High Street shops and the new teaching methods!

Little boys get no better deals than little girls. They are inhibited simultaneously in their need for movement and exuberance and more harshly repressed at the emotional level. They are reduced to nothing, yet already they are being asked to prove to themselves and others that they are something.

All this engenders contradictory developments; on the one hand there is a rejection of authority often confined to its most artificial forms while on the other there is an unconfessed but profound search for idols to follow, paternal images to cling to, and more or less moth-eaten certitudes.

In its inverted form, this becomes: "it's all the fault of... men, bosses...". There is a desperate search for culprits to blame for our misery, while we are living precisely in a period in which, – and that is a sign of its revolutionary content – those "responsible" are already being liquidated, even if their position is still being argued over.

Wage labour has therefore taken men out of the family, but it hasn't stopped at recentralising or decentralising them in front of the television set. Women have also been dragged into wage labour. A part of the function they once carried out is now being undertaken by paid workers. Creches are being opened. Militants just ask that there should be more of them. Others demand that their staff be mixed and that parents participate in their running. People employ their radicality where they can!

The extension of female wage-labour in its way constitutes a true liberation of woman, tearing her away from the narrow world of a life of housework, and offering her financial independence. But it is a liberation of the capitalist kind. A movement which does not at all abolish the inferior status of the female condition, but reproduces it in other forms.

Wage differentials have often been insisted upon. The system uses women as underpaid, underskilled labour, playing on what is still a supplementary wage, which generally means a secondary contribution to the family that is assessed in relation to the women's domestic function. Less attention is paid to the nature of the jobs women get and their particular alienation.

The division of men and women into different sorts of paid jobs does not come about by chance. The great mass of women are used in the field of human relations (teaching, nursing, etc, or as unskilled labour, cleaners, doing assembly work, etc), in branches where capital overdevelops as it atomises the social fabric. Women abandon their role as mothers to go and look after children in creches, schools and hospitals; they abandon their role as wives to “lend a hand” as typists, secretaries and girl Fridays.

So their activity is not really that of a producer, i.e. it does not consist of conceiving or making things. It is an activity that consists of taking care of people.

The peasant woman looked after her children, but through “creative” activity. Human beings develop, change, discover themselves and place themselves in relation to other people through action and the albeit fragmented modelling of the environment.

So, as capital takes charge of the whole of social life beyond that of production as such, seeing to the management of human material and developing female wage-labour in the process, a paradox emerges. Women are constrained as never before in emotional and social life which are considered separate worlds.

Feminism as we have seen is a falsified representation of a real movement that has been accomplished by capital. Its real and positive role, like that of ecology, is that it brings problems to light albeit in a disguised or inverted way. It is up to the communist movement and to theoretical quest to discover their true dimension and resolution.

The fundamental weakness is that general change and discontent are reduced to the woman’s question. The opposition between men and women is, and is becoming increasingly more so, but one instance of a general system of friction which the hierarchical structure of society is producing by playing on inequalities and oppositions that are continually being reproduced while the old norms are being liquidated. There is a general crisis of identity and a general crisis of human relations. This crisis, starting from real fixations and their distorting amplification by the media, was presented for a whole period as a generation gap, and now it is being transformed into opposition between men and women.

The depth of the proletarian movement manifests itself to the extent that women participate in it. It is when things get serious, touching deep into daily life and daily needs, that women with their scorn of the political game (apart from a few notable exceptions, from Catherine II of Russia to Margaret Thatcher), throw themselves into the fray. The women who accuse their striking husbands of irresponsibility and an incapacity to bring money home for the family in an effort to protect a certain security, or who are very docile at work, are the same women who turn round and call their husbands cowards when their radicality leaps ahead as the struggle starts to overturn the social order.

The problem for communism is not the achievement of equality between men and women. It is not a matter of democratising the couple or the family and normalising day to day relationships. It is not a matter of setting up rotas for domestic tasks or hunting down fascism in the kitchen and the bedroom.

Communism attacks the roots of the family institution. It does not dissolve the family, it is capitalism that is emptying it of all meaning and taking the education of children from it, entrusting it to specialised institutions. As communism generalises free access to goods, and amongst other things transforms and increases the space available for living in, it destroys the foundations and economic function of the family. Also, as it is the realisation of the human community, it destroys the need for a refuge within that community.

The emancipation of women and children is guaranteed as there will be no constraints on life other than mutual attraction. It is on this basis that their relationships will develop. The basis will not only be relationships of affection; people will associate to act, to move around, etc. The generalisation of the community will be such that individuals will not have to cling to this or that partner or have a fundamental fear of losing them. A mother (or father) will not have to submit to economic dependence in order to feed their children. The latter will not grow up in the smothering atmosphere of the family, they will no longer be the property of their parents to be fought over in the case of divorce. They will learn to look after themselves more easily and more quickly than they do today.

However, all relations of domination and conflict will not simply disappear because of this. But these will not be institutionalised and perpetuated within a power structure because the institutional framework and economic constraints which make this possible will have disappeared.

Capital takes account of people according to their function. It profoundly ignores the differences between the sexes therefore. In the economic and political sphere this becomes an ornament which regulates advantages and disadvantages in the promotion stakes. This is carried over outside serious social matters to become marginalised in leisure activities.

Economic necessity is a great leveller. But the difference between the sexes remains. And communism cannot dismiss it, but on the contrary will recognise it in full as it is the social expression of human needs beyond economics. Men and women have different needs and a need for this difference.

Those who see everything back to front think that education is at the root of everything, needs to be changed, and that by educating girls and boys in the same way and offering them a similar image of father and mother things will take care of themselves. An imbecilic intent to level, an incapacity to play and to enjoy the difference that brings the sexes closer together.

It is this teacher-pupil relationship with its falseness and colonialism and imposition of norms that must be liquidated, particularly because it is a matter of active, militant and progressive pedagogy. Subtle relationships need to be cultivated wherein each individual, starting from their own biological peculiarities, discovers their particular social identity, their own desire and that of the opposite sex.

Communism will not set up new rules and taboos to keep men and women in limited roles. It will not constrain people in any way and no doubt men and women will carry out similar functions, but they will not be reduced to that function and from this simple fact everyone will act their own way, which does not exclude their sexual nature. Neither will it fall back into the old division of labour.

The sexual difference is excluded from the world of work today, even though it reappears through the back door and capitalism is using it to divide, using wage differentials so as to underpay what is no more than labour. It is enough to make the partisans of equal and uniform misery rise up in anger. Communism however, which liquidates work as a separate sphere and activity, will occupy itself with reuniting the two sexes, along with children, in the same activities, but without de-sexing them.

Competitive sport offers a caricature of the capitalist universe, where the pleasure of physical effort and responding to a challenge ends up lost in the tuning of winning machines. Now that women have joined the race there is no hesitation about denaturing them by stuffing them with male hormones so that they'll go faster. What separates communism from such repugnant practices is evident.

Anarchist library
Anti-Copyright



Dominique Karamazov
The Poverty of Feminism
1977

Retrieved on February 18, 2011 from digitalelephant.blogspot.com
Originally published as "Misere du feminisme" in 'La Guerre Sociale', 1977.

en.anarchistlibraries.net