

Achilles Heel

for a men's anti-sexist politics no5 £1



MASCULINITY & VIOLENCE

**Bumper
issue**

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Film stills from Ronald Grant Archive

Although in this magazine we identify as socialist anti-sexist men, we align ourselves with all pro-feminist anti-sexist men and strongly subscribe to the 'Minimum self-definition of the anti-sexist men's movement' which emerged from the Bristol Anti-Sexist Men's Conference of February 1980. We regard it as the best working draft yet achieved in Britain. It was published in *Achilles Heel* no.4.

Recently two strands of criticism have emerged from the Women's Movement directed at anti-sexist and socialist men. We want to acknowledge the importance of these. The 'Red Rag' collective in their 1980 issue criticised men who confine their anti-sexism to their sexual relationships with feminists and make the personal their whole politics. They made a clear demand that men find collective, public ways to struggle against patriarchy — not only in their relationships but also at work, in trade unions, campaigns, and political organisations. We share this criticism and we support the initiatives of groups that have formed around a public anti-sexist practice, such as Creches against Sexism (see article in this issue). *Achilles Heel* itself is an attempt to develop such a politics, though we recognise that it is still at an early stage. At the same time we do not want to lose sight of the importance and the necessity of the practices that have been the main basis of anti-sexist men's groups up to now — consciousness raising, therapy, involvement in childcare, developing relationships with other men. We want to affirm that without this kind of work it is our experience that men's support for feminism will tend to remain abstract.

The limitations of this kind of support has been most widely displayed by those socialist men who accept the importance of feminism and at the same time have not been prepared to integrate it into their political practice. This has provoked feminists to make a number of criticisms of this ambiguity. Recently all except one of the women on the 'Politics and Power' collective resigned after writing an editorial explaining that it was impossible to work with the men on the collective for this reason. The editorial statement from the men appeared not to recognise the problem. Also socialist feminist economists have made serious criticisms of the current left strategies for a future Labour administration embodied in the Alternative Economic Strategy. They are pointing out that the economic and political interests of men and women are not automatically identical and that where the position of women has been considered at all by the A.E.S. the result has been merely a tagged-on shopping list of extra demands.

These criticisms and debates are of great importance for socialist, pro-feminist men and we hope to be able to engage in the debate now and in the future in *Achilles Heel*.

Achilles Heel is

an anti-sexist, pro-feminist writing and publishing collective committed to supporting men in writing about men's politics and socialism. Publication of this journal is the major focus for coming together although we also publish 'one-off' titles under the Achilles Heel name. We encourage working relations with men outside the group and many contributions have developed in this way. So if you are interested in writing something try and get in touch as early in the writing process as possible. The next issue will be focussed around sexuality.

Our editorial politics

As anti-sexist and socialist men our policy is guided and shaped both by the socialist movement and, more particularly, by our experiences in consciousness raising groups and in living politically as men. We have not, however, been able to agree for long on a unified political perspective in relation to either tradition. There are, fortunately, contradictions in everything.

Men's groups are private places where we've come to work over ourselves and find new ways of living, relating and organising. We've found that men's power in society oppresses women by imprisoning us in a deadening masculinity which cripples all our relationships. In making this experience public we find ourselves politically as men and align ourselves with women and gay men in the struggle against oppressive sexual divisions.

Many men in our society are in deep crisis, as our traditional roles come to feel inadequate or are threatened by unemployment and job insecurity, and as we face the challenges of the women's movement. We are often isolated. There

are many aspects of our lives that we don't like to talk about, let alone write about. And in isolation, the price of the changes we need to make seems higher.

In *Achilles Heel*, we want to make public those issues that men have been grappling with in their lives, and sometimes within men's groups; to help create a public forum, and to lend support to men confronting these changes. We want to open up questions about the power we have as men — our need to control, our assumptions of superiority, our competitiveness, our homophobia; our economic and social privileges, our refusal to take domestic life and childcare seriously; our fear of emotions, our need to be right; our use of violence and the threat of violence against women and children to maintain all these.

And we want to look at the crippling cost of this power. At what we stand potentially to gain by dissolving it, sharing it, transforming it. At our difficulties in making close and equal relationships, in owning our feelings, in admitting weakness and asking for help, in admitting loneliness and asking for companionship; problems of separation, jealousy and possessiveness; problems in making close relationships with children; problems in asserting ourselves in our jobs, or in confronting unemployment; questions of how to engage in activist politics, of our changing sexuality, of our undervalued health.

We want to maintain a sense of history in looking at these questions, to seek when we can for the kind of perspective that helps us understand how we have come to where we are, and to know the possibilities — and the limits — of change.

This issue of *Achilles Heel* was put together by Mel Cairns, Tony Eardley, Steve Gould, Martin Humphries, Andy Metcalf, Paul Morrison, Andy Moye, Cris Nickolay, John Rowan, Vic Seidler, James Swinson and Tom Weld. Production co-ordinator, Andy Moye. Cover design, James Swinson.



Editorial



During recent months the issues of male violence have become current within the national media. Feminists have become more vocal and visible in their demands that male violence be stopped. This has been crystallised in the Women Against Violence Against Women demonstrations and in the media response to the atrocities committed by the Yorkshire ripper. We in Achilles Heel unreservedly support the women's movement's activities against male violence. But for us to be able to take our place as men in the struggle against male violence we need to be able to understand the roots of it. What has emerged for us out of our discussions in the collective during the preparation of this issue is an awareness that the violence within ourselves is a result of the process of learning to be men. We hope that the articles in this issue will enable us, both individually and collectively, to be involved in that struggle.

We have found it hard to explore these issues. We felt paralysed and confused; it took us a long time to move beyond that state. In our initial discussions we came to realise that it was important to spend time exploring our own aggression and being on the receiving end of it. Whilst our experience of violence is not wide, all of us had a range of experience deeper than we had imagined. It was difficult to own up to the ways we are aggressors in our lives, particularly in the face of the horror we felt at the depth of male violence both historically and in our society. It was painful to recognise the battering we have received at the hands of other men in reinforcing the male power system. We couldn't shoulder the burden for all men's violence through the ages. Yet we do want to take full responsibility for our own violence and take steps in the struggle towards stopping, dissolving, subverting, and ending male violence in general.

The Heart of the Matter

At the heart of the male condition is the contradiction that we learn to fear other men as part and parcel of learning to be men. Fear — and its shadow, violence — are integral to the process of being a man: the father, that absent figure of power, the ultimate court of appeal and dispenser of justice; the other boys at school, with whom we all too often had to compete to be 'hard'; the authorities — the upholders of male standards of behaviour. And as we internalise the daily lessons so we come to despise women for being all that we have lost. Validation is never there for

the expression of vulnerability or pain. Put simply: big boys don't cry. Anne-Marie Fearon in an article in 'Shrew', 'Come in Tarzan, your time is up' summed up the process succinctly: "You frighten the child — with a monster mask, perhaps, or a cap gun. In the case of a girl, you don't let her retaliate; you tell her that girls are pretty and nice, they don't put on ugly faces or play with guns; but you let her feel frightened, cry and run to mother. Chances are mother will say: 'Never mind those nasty boys, you can stay and help me make the scones.'" Thus the girl learns her role in life; she is to be frightened, helpless, tearful and in the kitchen. In the case of a boy, you forbid him to cry or run to mother, (if he does, he will be called a "wet" or a "drip"); and you teach him to deny his fear and hurt. This is very hard and puts him under constant tension; so you give him a gun and a monster mask, and now whenever he feels that tension he can channel it into aggression, and project his fears on to someone else. He is now ready to frighten the next generation of little ones, and so keep the whole system going."¹

Our understanding of this system is that it is based on both patriarchal and class oppression. As we write we find ourselves seesawing between these analyses, searching for the links between them. Whereas both men and women are exploited by virtue of their class, the whole system is maintained and reproduced in part by means of a male monopoly on violence. This monopoly operates at the state level and also at a personal one. As men learning to accept a violence in our relationships with other men as a 'natural' commonplace we become the unwitting/conscious accomplices of a system dependent for its survival, in the last instance, on the violent suppression to all threats to its existence. As men we are taught to expect violence from the time we are born; it is a fundamental part of what makes men 'masculine'. We learn to be violent in all areas of life, with wilful aggression against others as part of the collusion in the preservation of male power through the denial of rights to women and gays. Theories have been developed justifying male aggression as a natural state. At the same time as learning some of the most positive aspects of our existence from fathers, brothers, heroes we learn how to oppress others; that the easiest way to express pain and anger as a man is through physical rage? that to

compete with men is 'natural' and that 'success' and status are worth denying ourselves and others for; that violence is a necessary currency for men to use.

It is clear to us that under capitalism and imperialism the majority of women and men suffer much violence and degradation. With this comes frustration and rage which men do not always direct at the source of oppression but take out on individuals — especially women and children. We recognise and support the popular armed struggles of those peoples suffering the brutalising regimes of imperialism. But, it is because violence has become an essential part of a man's relationship with the world and himself that a violent response to oppression cannot always be accepted uncritically. Throughout the world popular movements to overthrow oppression (which we support) contain within them the contradictions of the old order. In Cuba, following the revolution, all manifestations of gayness were suppressed. In Iran, the process of removing the Shah has established a more entrenched and archaic form — in Islam — of male dominance. In Ireland, many of those fighting British imperialism, have set their faces against the struggle for women's rights. In Britain, much of the left has ignored the mounting violence against women and the media's treatment of it; and it is an open question how seriously many male socialists address these questions.

A Price to pay

In this society a sexual division exists — not as a necessity rooted in biology — but as a structural system of inequality which men resolve both ideologically and materially to their advantage. However veiled and uneven this distribution may be, and however much individual men may feel that they don't resort to violence in their day-to-day lives, it remains true that men derive benefits and power — economically, socially, sexually, politically — of which male violence is an essential part.

We have to realise though that whilst men derive benefits from the male monopoly of violence, there is always a price to be paid. Partaking in, and retaining the image of, being a 'man' involves the loss of our sensitivity, vulnerability and capacity to love. We have become so good at deceiving ourselves that even though we feel the pain we are paralysed by the

complexity of a reality we have colluded with. Imprisoned like this our violence and anger often emerge as substitutes for other — disallowed — feelings. Of weakness, fear, and pain. The appearance of physical strength or a dominating social presence is so often a mask for inner weakness, confusion and underdevelopment. Men rage because their vulnerability is touched and they have no language to express it. So perhaps one of the ways of confronting male violence will be by encouraging other kinds of emotional expression. Men don't know how to be assertive without being violent because so often they are deeply unsure whether there is a 'self' for them to assert.

The politics of the present government have introduced a new urgency into this discussion. It is a government with an ideology which accentuates patriarchal standards and practices; its path is one of governing by fear. Its attempts to discipline the workforce through mass unemployment (and to impose masculine values of authority and competition) have led to a dangerous situation where men — increasingly isolated and unable to fulfill their male roles in work — are liable to take out their frustrations in forms of violence against women. Thatcherism has laid the ground for increased attacks on those who stand outside the bounds of its severe normality — white, heterosexual, patriarchal.

What can men do about patriarchal violence? We can discover the ways in which to unlearn what it is to be a man and not become the most powerful and deadly creature of the species. As men we can work with each other in counselling and therapy. We can learn from the writings and experiences of women and gay men. We can challenge the violence of other men in all areas of our lives; we can publicly demonstrate against male violence. We can insist that within the struggles we are involved in, questions of women's oppression are not relegated and subordinated.

The articles on violence in this issue explore at greater depth some of the issues touched upon in this editorial. We would like to devote a section of issue 6 to feedback on the writings in this issue for we are aware that we have only touched upon an enormous area; and that we would have progressed to producing this issue were it not for the work already done by the women's movement and gay men. We would also be interested to hear from and include writings from men who are already involved in counteracting male violence.

Note

1. Shrew, *Feminism and Non Violence*, 1978.

MASCULINITY ACQUITTED

Tony Eardley looks at the implications for men of the recent trial of Peter Sutcliffe.

Behind the legal ballyhoo and the column yards of prurient media 'revelation' the real significance of the Sutcliffe trial lies in what remains obscured. One could scour the pages of cross-examination and defence, psychiatric judgement, family gossip, and pious editorialising and not find one man asking the real question — what is it about our society that causes men to go around murdering and mutilating women?

It has been left to feminist commentators to expose this evasion. In her *Guardian* column Jill Tweedie¹ suggested that men's apparent silence on this question means that we are complacently resigned to some sort of biological determinism — that violence against women is encoded in our genes, always has been, and always will be, amen. Psychologist Anthony Storr, writing about Sutcliffe in the *Observer*, certainly fell back on this explanation, harping back to the old story of our hunter past.

Many men would dispute this, feeling that the complicated and varied elements of their own life experiences deny this reduction to biology. Many men also resent being automatically characterised as rapists and murderers by virtue (?) of their gender. But it is precisely men's overall silence and the apparent lack of any widespread disquiet amongst men about male violence which makes women justifiably suspicious that even those least personally violent among us secretly enjoy the benefits that accrue from the violence actions of others. from the violent actions of others.

The Sutcliffe murders have provoked confused feelings of anger and shame for many men; for some of us, anti-sexist and socialist men, who see ourselves as potential allies of feminism, it feels a responsibility we cannot accept but somehow must. As one friend I spoke to said — "I don't want to feel that it's part of me, and yet it is." The problems we have in articulating any kind of political response seem to spring from a deep seated reluctance to uncover the roots of

our own masculinity and the construction of our sexuality.

For, of course, it is the construction of a masculinity which requires a violently enforced power over women which is in question, as the Sutcliffe trial makes clear, if by default. 'Not mad, not bad, but MALE' — the trial graffiti is succinct and to the point, but disquieting for those of us who feel uncomfortable with the idea that maleness is some kind of hereditary disease. If we don't believe this then we have to face this question ourselves.

To find a way in to what the Sutcliffe affair means for us it is instructive to look at the trial as a kind of institutional cover-up job — a public exercise of the individual self-evasion which most men habitually indulge in. The fact that all the institutions concerned — police, judiciary, and media, are largely male-dominated and were in this instance represented almost exclusively by men makes this all the more apt. But more than that, they are the institutions of the state which are responsible for invoking the 'criminal process'. This is the basis of the bourgeois justice system and by its approach to criminality which treats offenders purely as individual 'deviants' it has the function of reflecting and upholding the dominant ideologies. In this case the process proceeds from the assumption that the forces which shape masculinity are in themselves beyond reproach and that a problem occurs only when an individual does not fit in, or acts in some excessive way. Thus, as Lynne Segel points out², Sutcliffe was tried from within a value-system which could only see him as an 'aberration' rather than an expression of the consequences of this very value-system. This approach makes it possible to ignore all the other 'sexual' murders of women, the thousands of rapes reported every year, the overflowing Women's Aid Refuges around the country, and the daily abuse and harassment of women on the streets; not to mention the porn shops stuffed with magazines of sexual violence and the steady flow into mainstream city cinemas of films depicting the sexual murder or terrorisation of women.



guilty



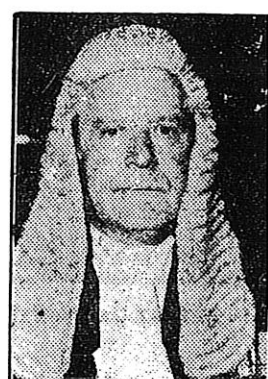
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This individualisation of Sutcliffe's crimes is the first stage of the cover-up. Any responsibility which might fall on society (i.e. other men) is sloughed off and the way is paved for Sutcliffe himself to be partially absolved through the plea of 'diminished responsibility'. It is significant that the Attorney-General accepted the defence plea, backed up by the full weight of the psychiatric establishment. If the judge had not overruled him and insisted that a jury had to decide on Sutcliffe's mental state, he would have been packed away quietly in some mental hospital with very little fuss. The Times described the trial as "a public catharsis, an exorcism" and it's true that it was a show trial but not quite in that sense. What the judge's decision meant was that the public conscience needed to be assuaged; by invoking the full criminal process of trial and punishment we can reassure ourselves that we are a sane society in a situation which begins to provoke some doubts.

Then there is a plausibility in the 'diminished responsibility' argument which serves only to mystify the whole process. The rolecall of psychotic symptoms sounds convincing. They add up to the classically recognizable picture of the 'over-controlled' character — capable of violent outbursts under provocation. But it is presented as though mental illness develops entirely outside any social context, and none of the doctors had any words to say about what sort of society we have that creates people in that mould. It might be more possible to take it at its face value if the 'over-controlled' character didn't sound uncomfortably like a description of the end product of 'normal' male socialization. But in the end, in the trial's own terms, it becomes meaningless to ascribe



total responsibility to Sutcliffe, and so, in the absence of any willingness to look at the social construction of masculinity, one is left with a moral void into which can conveniently be dragged the classic *Deus ex Machina* or 'God told me to'.

Women to Blame?

With the question of responsibility fudged, everyone now sought 'reasons' for Sutcliffe's actions and for his mental state in the behaviour of the women around him. Nothing demonstrated more clearly and disgustingly the complacent commonality of values between prosecution and defence, murderer and media. We heard that Sutcliffe's mother had had an extra-marital affair, that "the happy marriage was destroyed and so the father become unfaithful". By implication the mother's callous betrayal of the marriage led to Sutcliffe's instability. Sonya Sutcliffe looked well set up for blame once the papers discovered that

she herself had a mental breakdown some years earlier: "The mania of ripper's wife!" screamed one tabloid. The Attorney-General listed her "impossible behaviour": "He had to take his shoes off when he went home, wasn't allowed to use the washing machine and had to do his own washing. She was obsessed with cleanliness, cleaning the carpet with a brush and pan. She pulled the plug out and shouted at him." After all that, we are to suppose that it was hardly surprising that he went out and killed 13 women!

We were told that the first time Sutcliffe went to a prostitute she cheated him out of £10 and mocked his impotence with her. Havers again — "It was a reaction which, you may think, was not altogether surprising, the reaction of a man who had been fleeced and humiliated. It was the sort of loss of control which you don't have to be mad for a moment to suffer". This theme runs through the

whole saga: that is somehow 'natural', if a little excessive, for a man to suffer a 'loss of control' when cheated and mocked by a prostitute and to brutally kill her. It is made clear that it is altogether more understandable (and excusable) when the woman is a prostitute by the constant distinction drawn by police, journalists, and lawyers, between the prostitutes and the "respectable" women. The Attorney-General again — "Some were prostitutes, but perhaps the saddest aspects of this case is that some were not". What he is saying, and this attitude is shown to be broadly shared by the police, the press, and the defendant, is that prostitutes are fair game, they are outside of society and part of a filthy underworld which society must defend itself against. What we are invited to be really angry about is that, unlike that other folk-hero the original Jack, Sutcliffe broke the rules and killed 'respectable' women — 'our' wives, mothers and daughters. This is certainly backed up by the kind of remarks I have overheard men making. And, of course, it is not the first time that prostitutes have been officially recognised by the courts as fair game: the London police officer who suffocated Pat Malone and cut up and concealed her body was eventually prosecuted not even for manslaughter but only for 'unlawful burial'. But then she was lesbian too, which puts her even further beyond the pale.

What comes over so clearly in this trial and others involving prostitutes is men's total sense of a-responsibility — as though it isn't men who demand their services, who control their incomes through pimping and 'protection', who then prosecute them for soliciting. Those images spring to mind that give the word hypocrisy its meaning: the politician who fulminates against vice in the House and slips off to the call girl, the judge who jails the whore and pays another to whip him. The issues raised by the Sutcliffe case may have been instrumental in encouraging the introduction of the private members bill to decriminalise prostitution which fell in Parliament in June this year. The Government's official reason for opposing it was that they preferred to wait for any recommendations from the forthcoming report of the Criminal Law Revision Committee, but since the arguments used by organised action groups like PROS who support decriminalisation are directly those which challenge this male hypocrisy, we can expect other attempts to sink similarly unless backed by massive support.

There is of course a danger in overplaying the importance of prostitution as such in this case. What distinguishes prostitutes from some other women more than anything is their particular vulnerability to attack by men. That's why Sutcliffe chose them — because they were available. And when other women found them-

selves in the same position — alone in a secluded place at night — they became equally vulnerable. Nevertheless the institution of prostitution is central to the development of male sexuality both historically and at present, and Sutcliffe was obviously part of a northern 'brothel culture' and a frequent visitor to the red-light districts with his male friends. So it is not insignificant to look at what light the existence of prostitution sheds on the nature of male sexuality.

Sexuality and Male Power

But why do we talk about 'sexuality'? Surely most acts of violence against women, most rapes, have little to do with sex but are to do with asserting power? This is true, but in a world of enforced inequality between the sexes sexuality becomes inextricably bound up with power. Men are brought up to expect women to cater to our needs, physical and emotional — to be bringers of comfort, reassurance and delight. But in this process we are lucky if we ever learn to look after ourselves. It is a terrible weakness often desperately concealed behind insouciant machismo. Women generally recognise it but are expected to pretend not to, and we dread its exposure; marriages (and other relationships) are rooted in this fear — we exchange a share in our economic and social power for the emotional and physical services of women. Under these circumstances any sign of autonomy in a woman, of independence, is a terrible threat, and one which many men have no resources to deal with except by violence. Yet somehow we expect in the act of sex a dissolution of this power structure in a free exchange of love and tenderness, and when this is not forthcoming our security collapses under the weight of its own coercion. One of the most abiding and seductive myths that all of us, men and women, are instilled with from our first understandings of love and sex is that the bed, the privacy of 'freely' exchanged sexual love is that one place where we cast off the world with our clothes and become anonymous, essential, lost in one-ness with our partner. When in fact the opposite is the case. Angela Carter, in the preface to her book, "The Sadeian Woman"², describes it thus: "*no bed, however unexpected, no matter how gratuitous, is free from the de-universalising effects of real life. We do not go to bed simply in pairs; even if we choose not to refer to them, we still drag there with us the cultural impedimenta of our social class, our parents' lives, our bank balance, our sexual and emotional expectations, our whole biographies — all the bits and pieces of our unique existences.*"

And so the moment of apparent equality is the moment which most harshly exposes the inequality between men and women, and economic and social power

become crucial elements in our love-making. The alienation from ourselves that this causes at the moment when we expect to feel most integrated, affects both men and women, but this is when men expect women to make it all right for us and when they do not or cannot our frustrations are once more unleashed. The fantasy of the prostitute gains its attraction from this unexpected collapse of our power. I have never been to a prostitute but the fantasy is one I have learnt among others growing up as a man. The attraction of the prostitute is that with her we can buy entry to a controlled environment, a playroom — a "rumpus room of the mind" (Angela Carter *qv.*) — where we do not have to acknowledge the undermining reality of women's lives, but instead can purchase complicity in an elaborate simulation of love unshackled by domestic realities. But the prostitute must remain excluded from society, secret, illicit. Not just to maintain our illusions, but also because she is dangerous in that, seen too clearly, the purely economic nature of the contract with her may expose that same reality which exists, mystified, in marriage or romantic love. This exposure may threaten that very basis of our power and our security.

I am not in a position to talk about Sutcliffe's childhood, his socialisation, but I have no reason to suppose it was remarkably different from that of most men. Where men are not taught at an early age to cater to our own needs but instead to use our power to obtain others to do this, violence becomes at once the ultimate sanction and a front behind which to conceal our insecurity. We all become 'over-controlled' and go around with unexpressable needs, only really knowing how to demand compliance. To recognise this is not to excuse the consequences but only to open it up to question. The institutions which have grown up perpetuating and legitimating male dominance only serve to mask the truth that this domination is based not on any intrinsic superiority but on brute force, and the Sutcliffe affair, for all its publicity, was an evasion of this truth. People hoping for a private reconciliation or accommodation of power and sexuality within individual relationships are doomed to failure because that private retreat is an illusion. It is up to us to find public and political ways to uncover the development of our own masculinity and to challenge the presentation of this masculinity as given, natural, and inevitable.

Tony Eardley

Thanks to Steve Gould for the development of some of the ideas in this article.

References

1. Guardian Women 21/5/81.
2. 'God, the Ripper, and the Prosecution'. Big Flame June 1981.
3. The Sadeian Woman, Virago 1979.

Thank God I
remembered my boots!!!



Mike Abrahams (Network).

I drove the car fast up the outside lane into New Cross, looking for a place to park. I was late for the demo, and it looked like being a big one. Up at the junction, nothing much had happened yet: the big crowd blocked the road causing a traffic jam; on the speakers' stand, Darcus Howe was winding the temperature up . . . "The black community will not allow the National Front to mount these sort of provocative actions — make no mistake about that." As he finished, the chant roared out: "The National Front is a Nazi Front. Smash the National Front." I looked at the punters in their cars; they just

wanted to get home for Grandstand, that's all. But this was our reality, not theirs, and for once they were trapped in it. Near the crash barriers, where the road divides, I asked a black guy if he knew where the Front was. He didn't know but showed me his preparation — a long steel chain wound round his waist. There was going to be some heavy action going down this afternoon.

Later, much later, a man ran down New Cross Road, shouting, "They're lining up to march through." I couldn't see a thing. Another false alarm probably. Suddenly a mass of police appeared a hundred yards away.

"Block the road — form a line."

Christ, where is everyone? They look as if they've got the whole force out for this. Nobody's getting it together — who's meant to be co-ordinating this anyway? They're going to march them right through us.

"Link arms." Who said that? Was that my voice? Shit, I'm in the front row . . . a woman to my left, man to my right. We look so small. Still, zip up the jacket, no loose clothes; check boot laces and hold on tight. One figure in blue advances:

"This is a lawful march. Disperse from obstructing the road at once. This is your last warning — if you do not disperse, the police horses will be sent in."

The riders leant into their charges, shouldering them forward. The horses, high stepping all the way, accelerated as they came close to us. One moment it was link arms, the next I was knocked sideways by a horse breaking our line. Its massive chestnut thigh, rich with a thick gloss and wider than a man's frame, surged past my face. It was big, animal, and unpredictable. And I discovered, when I found myself on the pavement panting, it had just **STOOD ON MY FOOT**. The leather had a fresh gouge, the imprint of a hoof, taken out of it. Thank God I remembered to wear my boots.

Political violence is a serious issue; it's been at the heart of much debate between socialists for a long time; reform or revolution, armed struggle or peaceful road, Allende or Ho Chi Minh. But the discussion has echoes beyond that of strategy. The gestures, the tones, the postures, all imply the choice is between milk and water suburban-safe reform and red-blooded steel-hearted revolution. If you're man enough, revolution is the road for you. A host of masculine meanings attends the debate. But, like gate-crashers at a private function, they are acknowledged but never directly addressed.

All too often, what has been lost in this little world, is the sense that whether you like it or not, politics is about violence. At its core, a political practice revolves around the control and authority of ruling groups and the rebellion and revolt of subordinate ones. Oppression will always engender revolt. And those who have chosen the "peaceful road" may well find themselves on a battlefield, with the rhetoric of violence, but with none of its tools. There is a photograph of Allende on the last day of his Presidency. All his efforts to appease the Chilean Military had come to nought. He had let the army crush dissent within its own ranks, disarm militant workers, and prepare for a coup, and still they wanted to overthrow him. He is entering the Moneda Palace for the last time, surrounded by a few young men — his bodyguards. On his head, a steel helmet, and strapped to his waist, a leather hand gun holster. Not really enough against tanks, artillery, Hunter jets, and a battalion or two of assault troops. But at least he died like a man. Precisely, exactly, like a man.

After the horses, in trooped the marchers, dwarfed by their police escort. And with the Front's appearance came the rocks, half bricks and pieces of timber from the other side of

the road. The marchers, crouching under this hail, holding bleeding heads, looked thin and meanly fed. Terrified, they scuttled along, shying away from the brick throwers, so that they were only three or four yards away from us. All the while, the chanting poured down on them:

"Fascist scum! Smash the National Front!"

Could this ragged crew be the principal threat to life, liberty, and multi-racialism? Next to me a gangling white man had his own private message: "See, see, see how it feels." He screamed. "How do you like that, eh? Hurts, doesn't it? How do you like a taste of your own medicine. Next time you go round beating up Asians, you'll know how it feels, won't you." This was it. Vengeance is mine. I reached down for a brick. The NF were only spitting distance away.

It must have been 1969-70. The union meeting was packed — eight or nine hundred people. I could hardly see her from the back. A small woman with black hair; the Representative of the People's Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam. She spoke quietly and in Vietnamese, translated by a man. Outlining the present stage of the struggle and the PRG's platform, her words absolutely lacked any rhetoric. The hall was quiet, but here and there little eddies of disquiet spun up, searching for some inspirational phrase to latch on to.

Against the pulp of my finger tips, the brick had a rough grainy feel. A scurry of movement caught my eye as three policemen banged through the crowd to pounce on a man a few yards away. Arm lock, knee in the nuts, and they were gone with him. Shitting hell — they've got snatch squads out. It's getting more like Belfast every day. My fingers held the brick, my eyes watched the Front, my mouth shouted, but my arm wouldn't throw. They were close, so close. I put it down. Picked it up after a moment, and then put it down again.

OK. So I chickened out. I could have thrown it but I didn't. I was scared, sure. But I couldn't overcome the fear. They were just too close. And a police horse had just trodden on my foot.

Zing zing, like ice along the veins, the stream of clarity poured out of his mouth. Our power, the hot beauty of its crystalline analysis. History in his hands. Hands pounding, fingers jabbing; he stood at the rostrum, denouncing police harassment, decrying a state within a state. He pulled this thin thread of thought from clenched teeth and concluded: "comrades, we must never forget that the state will inevitably block the transition to socialism with all the violence at its disposal." It stirred: it was right.

Outside, a big sky dwarfing the street, I felt confused. Riots may come and riots may go, but the labour movement remains silent. Demonstrations are met with bullets in Derry, but parade through London in ritual peace. The police intelligence computers whirl on untroubled by socialist activity. There was something missing . . . was it an AK47 machine gun under the stairs or a sense of myself?

In this confusion words take on different meanings. Political violence can never only be a question of political strategy. Between head and hand there can be an echoing void, that no amount of theoretical debate will fill. Into such hollows, the rhetoric of the left swirls and buffets, but leaves unmoved a strange gallery of scenes. Family tableaux of anger and authority; the corridor outside and duty master's office; father carves the Sunday joint, his sons finger their knives; the brotherhood of playground rites.

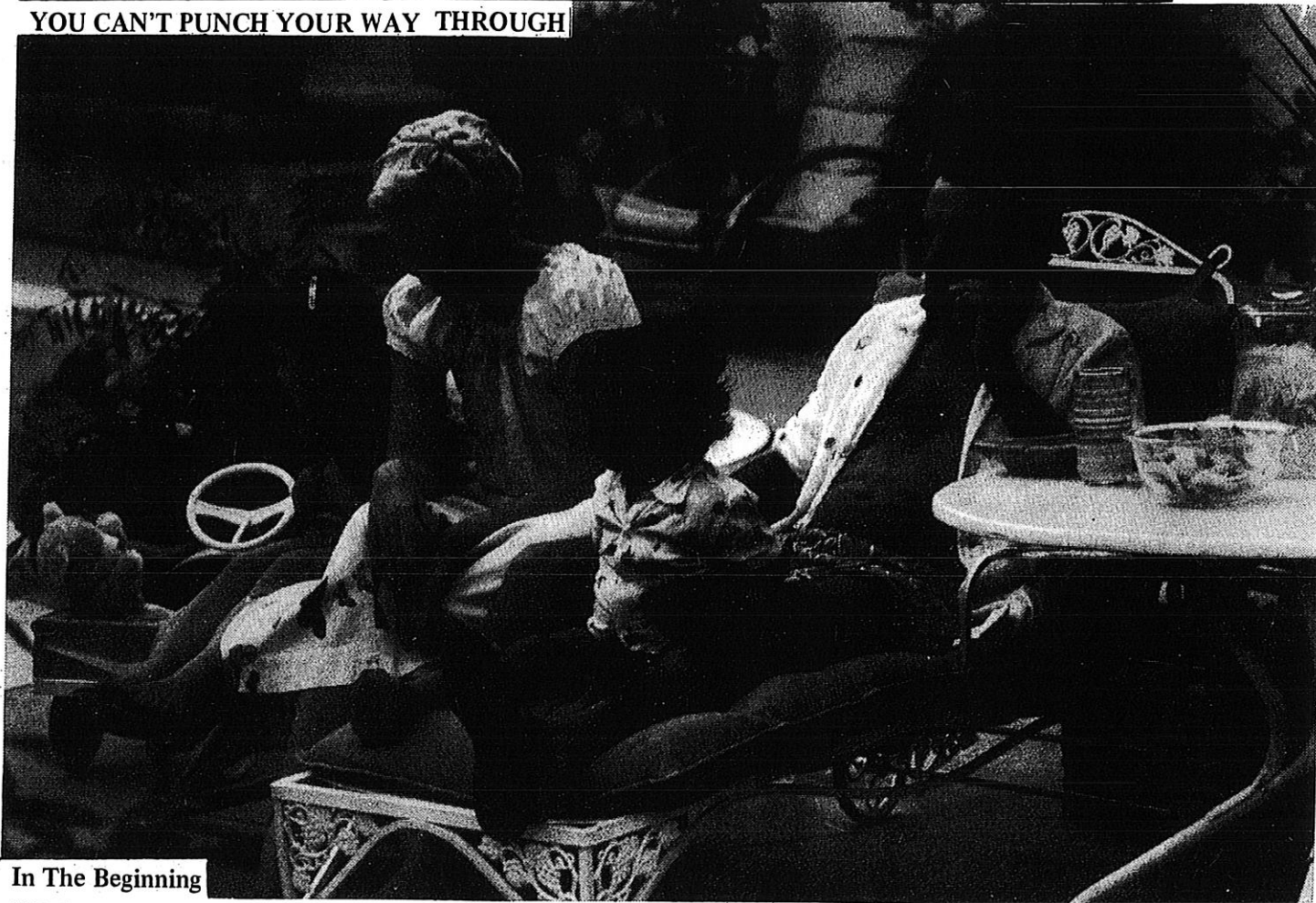
I've kept the boots. I'm very fond of them. You can still see the mark on the side of them. I'm convinced it's the mark of history.

Andy Metcalf

"RAGING BULL"

YOU CAN'T PUNCH YOUR WAY THROUGH

Ronald Grant



In The Beginning

"I believe that all human beings, even male ones, are born (or at any rate conceived) sensitive, loving, intelligent, open and real. We all know that they don't stay that way for very long and that males in particular tend to grow up arrogant, insensitive, alienated and above all, violent." This is the way that Anne-Marie Fearon opens up her article in Shrew 'Come in Tarzan, your time is up'.¹ She helps us explore the way this transformation takes place. I feel it has a crucial importance for men coming to terms with our particular histories and experience. It means learning more openly and honestly from each other and recognising the importance of working emotionally and politically with other men.

As men we are often brought up to be strangers to ourselves. We experience little connection with our emotions and feelings. Often this is part of the price we are forced to pay for being effective and competent in the world. This can make consciousness-raising a particularly threatening and difficult experience for men. It is often easier especially for middle class men to talk about our experience in an intellectualised way. For some of us this can be yet another way of retaining a certain distance from ourselves. We can envy the access that women seem to have to their emotional histories and experience. With the growth

of the womens' movement we can also envy the relationships they have with each other. This can make us more aware of lacks in our own lives. But it can also drive many men into a deeper silence about ourselves, guilty about our position within the relationships of power and subordination. The idea that 'all men are violent' or that 'all men are potential rapists' deeply challenges our sense of our masculinity. But it can also produce a sense of despair and self-hatred. It leaves no room for men to change. In a strange way it can leave many men untouched as they accept this judgment of themselves intellectually. They can credit themselves with supporting the womens' movement while not really having to challenge themselves.

Masculinity is a deeply shared historical and social experience. As men we have had to come to terms with it in one way or another. We each have our own histories. I don't think we should underestimate the difficulties of changing ourselves. We need to be aware of the deeper patterns in our experience and relationships (especially when we are thinking of the relationship of masculinity and violence). Sometimes the mens' movement has been too easily identified with a change of manner in which we have wanted to recover and identify with the softer qualities of warmth, emotionality, caring and

kindness. Not surprisingly it has often been men who have experienced a very ambiguous relationship to traditional conceptions of masculinity who have most easily identified. But this has its dangers.

The World As a Boxing Ring

It is partly because of the ways in which we are made emotional strangers to ourselves that our violence can erupt in such frightening ways. It can take us by surprise. Often for men anger can be used to dispel feelings of vulnerability and need which are taken to be signs of weakness. I can remember the constant anxiety at school of having to prove my masculinity. Because I wasn't tall or strong I felt vulnerable to being called a 'weed', 'soft', 'puny'. These were different ways of not being a 'proper man'. This creates constant anxiety and tension. You get so used to living with it that it comes to feel 'normal'. Masculinity is never something we can feel at ease with. It is always something we have to be ready to defend and prove. Often this meant putting others down, especially girls. It is partly because feelings of softness, vulnerability and need are so peculiarly threatening to our very sense of ourselves as men, that we fight them off so strongly. But this can also give us an ambiguous relation to our anger, especially if we don't

feel the confidence of being able to defend ourselves physically.

I grew up constantly aware of the threat of physical violence. At school there was the constant fear of being 'bashed up'. This was an aspect of the relationship between children as much as it was an aspect of the authority and power of teachers. Competition was always combined with the threat of physical violence. Adorno is right to remind us of the unity of a politics which focusses too exclusively upon issues of hierarchy and competitiveness as we did in the 1960's and early 1970's — as he says.

*'In fact, competition itself never was the law according to which middle-class society operated. The true bond of bourgeois society had always been the threat of bodily violence . . . In the age of the concentration camp, castration is more characteristic of social reality than competitiveness . . .'*²

As boys we often have to be constantly on the alert to either confront or avoid physical violence. We have to be ready to defend ourselves. We are constantly on our guard. This builds tension and anxiety into the very organisation of our bodies. It makes it difficult to let go or relax. This fits with the ways we are encouraged to treat our bodies as efficient machines. We become independent and self-sufficient barely acknowledging our need for others. This deeply marks our sexuality. Often it means we have very little relationship with our bodies. We don't see them as a source of contact and satisfaction. We are estranged from them. This makes it easier for us to use them in an unfeeling way. Sexuality becomes an issue of performance and conquest. It often becomes a question of how many women you can get off with and how many times you can screw them. In this sense sexuality is closely identified with power and getting our own way. This becomes almost second-nature. Often it becomes connected to violence. This is partly because this form of sexuality can often leave us frustrated and unfulfilled. It can be easier to blame and take it out on others than to look at ourselves. The roots go very deep.

Fighting Off Need

Anne-Marie Fearon tells us how her son came home from nursery school one day with the information: *'Girls are soppies'*. She points out that *'This did not emanate from the school which is consciously opposed to sexism; but the active members of the male 'club' seem to say these things with such conviction that it only takes one or two of them to affect the whole class'*. As a boy you have to be ready to defend yourself. You don't expect mothers or girls to fully appreciate this. You can't admit your fear, not even to yourself. If someone challenges you,

you can't afford to be a 'scaredy-cat'. You have to learn to fight, or at least pretend to be ready to fight. You can't afford to let others think of you as 'wet' or a 'drip'. This partly explains the symbolic importance of boxing within masculine culture and experience. At school we were expected to do it, even if we hated it. Luckily we didn't have to do it often. This becomes the training ground for masculinity. As Ann-Marie Fearon says *"you teach him to deny his fear and hurt. This is very hard and puts him under constant tension; so you give him a gun and a monster mask, and now whenever he feels that tension he can channel it into aggression and project his fears onto someone else . . . But it doesn't do him any good because the only way to get rid of the fear and pain is to feel it and discharge it by crying and trembling; and this is forbidden. So he is stuck with it; fear, tension and aggression become a way of life, and the only consolation is that the Club tells him: 'it's natural, that's what boys are meant to be like — now you're one of us!'"*

Ways of Change

How can we change as men? I don't think enough attention is given to this. Often we have been brought up emphasising the importance of self-control. It's easy to feel that showing any feelings is a sign that we are losing the precarious control we have of ourselves. It's often been important to learn to control our anger. We know the different ways it gets us into trouble. This can be especially important within relationships where we have power and control. But there are forms of control which are built upon experience, rather than repression. This is the importance of particular forms of therapy for men, ways in which we can safely explore our anger, resentment, fear, hurt and violence. This involves developing more contact and experience of ourselves, rather than simply denying these feelings as 'unacceptable'. It can even help to talk these difficult feelings out with other men. Often we learn how they cope with similar feelings, resentments and frustrations. If we repress these feelings we will often act them out unknowingly in our relationships, often without realising how controlling we can be because we deny these very feelings in ourselves.

Our violence and anger can't simply be denied. This is particularly true given the ways we have been brought up. We need to learn to control these feelings through more experience and familiarity with these different parts of ourselves. This can mean that we don't have to act upon these feelings so blindly as we become more capable of acknowledging and sharing them with others. We can learn

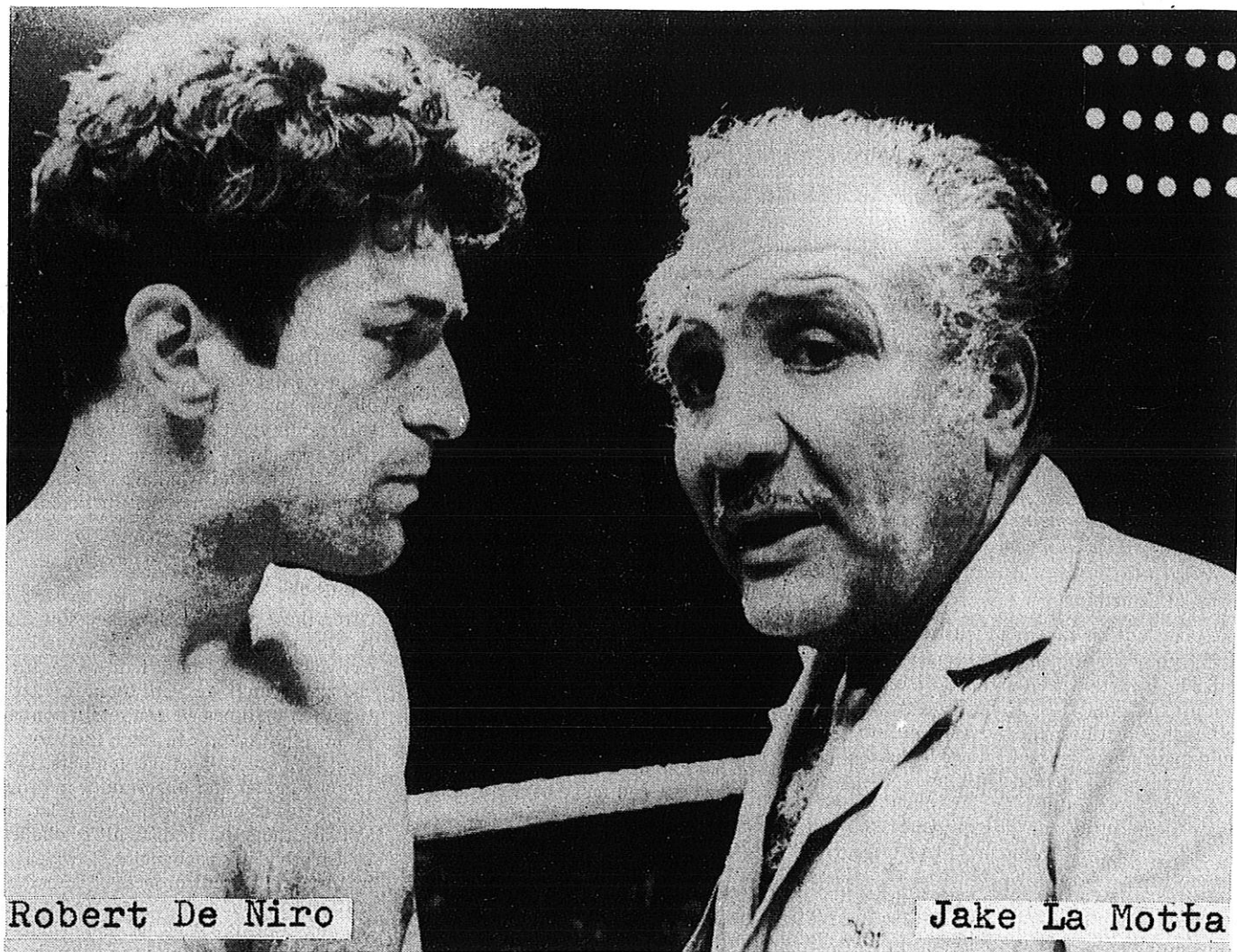
that our violence is a sign not just of our strength, but of our impotence and frustration. Therapy can be important within this process giving us a space and time within which we can explore a whole range of feelings we would often be uneasy with. It can help us challenge traditional conceptions of change built upon denying this exploration as 'self-indulgent'.

I want to illustrate these themes through looking at certain scenes in Martin Scorsese's controversial film *Raging Bull*. Many people refused to see the film. There are moments when it seems to come all too close to a glorification of violence. The camera seems almost transfixed with certain brutal scenes in the boxing ring. The use of slow motion can serve to romanticise. But it can also help us understand how male violence works, even if it leaves us with little sense of how men can change.

'Raging Bull'

The film is about the life of Jake La Motta, the 1949 middleweight boxing champion. It's about life in the Italian community in the Bronx, New York, in the 1940s. It's about a world that is very different from the suburban Jewish middle-class into which I grew up. But the film is about masculinity, male violence, frustration and pride. It hits home. In parts the violence is unbearable and out of control. But it didn't estrange me. It was painful but understandable for most of the time.

I felt that *Raging Bull* can help us connect to an aspect of our masculinity that we too easily deny. It can put us back in touch with our own 'raging bull', the desire to hit out and hit back. Scorsese himself is no tough guy. In an interview which Don Macpherson and Judith Williamson did with him for *Time Out*³ he admits *"I don't punch people in the face, I'm too short, and I can't run — I've got asthma"*. The film can also help us face our rage and anger, rather than think these feelings will disappear if we feel uneasy and ashamed about them. Rather than keep these feelings to ourselves it feels better to socialise them, to bring them into the open where they can be explored, possibly in a safe environment men can create with each other. This is to suggest a different conception of the ways men can change. Often if we deny our feelings they simply reorganise themselves at a deeper level, expressing themselves in more spiteful and hidden ways. It can be through exploring our anger and rage that we come to be more familiar with these feelings, clearer about the different feelings of need and vulnerability they sometimes cover and hide. This can give us more control of our emotions and feelings. This won't be a control based on repression, but rather on an experience and understanding of these feelings. At the moment we often take out these fears and frustrations on



Robert De Niro

Jake La Motta

those we are closest to, often the women and men we are sexually involved with. Sometimes this is the only situation we can feel safe enough to share these feelings. Often these feelings and resentments have different sources, often ones we have little awareness of. We can find ourselves hitting out blindly, especially after a difficult and frustrating day at work. But women are refusing to support us in this way. They are refusing to do all the emotional work in our relationships and forcing us to create other situations in which we can learn to develop this fuller contact with different parts of ourselves.

Fighting Your Way Through

There is an early scene with Jake at home in his Bronx apartment. He is sitting at the table as his wife is standing cooking him a steak. He is impatient. He doesn't want to wait for the steak to be ready. He gets annoyed at his wife because the steak isn't ready. He blames her. It's her fault. He wants it to be ready when he wants to eat it. He wants to be able to control it with his will. He can't and he feels frustrated. She can't take it anymore. She gets angry and lets him have it as it is. She locks herself in their bedroom. She stands up to him. He hits her. He takes out his frustration on her. She won't take it. The relationship breaks up.

The film shows Jake developing a relationship and eventually marrying

Vikki, a young girl from the neighbourhood. He is infatuated with her, though he hardly knows her. He is introduced to her by his brother who also likes her. His brother is brighter and more intelligent, but Jake is going to be the champion. The film shows the rise and fall of this relationship along with his rise and fall in the boxing ring. He is set on fighting his way through life. It's the only way he has been taught. There is a scene when Jake gets his brother to hit him hard as he can in the face. His brother thinks this is stupid but Jake forces him to do it. Jake wants to prove he can take anything given to him. In the final moments of his boxing career when he is eventually beaten for the championship, he stands there almost letting himself take whatever punishment is given to him. When he's finally lost he goes up to Sugar Ray Robinson who has beaten him and with blood pouring from his face, he says with stupid pride 'I could take it. You never got me down'. Robinson just laughed. Jake seems to have proved something to himself. He has proved he can take whatever the world has to throw at him. It is a difficult moment.

Not Getting Your Way

This connects to another incident the *Time Out* article mentions. It takes place when Jake has won the championship. He's moved into a new house with Vikki. He has never been able to satisfy her in

their sexual relationship. He is suspicious that she is having relationships with other men. He feels deeply possessive towards her. He is madly jealous. You witness some tenderness in their early sexual relationship, but even here he is always telling her what to do. He gives her a series of instructions. Sexuality remains so much an issue of power and control. He won't allow her her spontaneity. He is forced to withdraw to reassert his control of the situation. He always needs to have control. He cannot surrender to his desire for he cannot surrender control. In this later scene 'Jake is watching TV in his living room with his brother. His wife Vikki is upstairs. As he messes with the faulty set, Jake's huge, powerful body is useless, and his pent-up frustration builds at this thing he can't make work by hitting – like his home life.

Confronted with something too complex to be bent to his will in the only way that he knows, Jake goes berserk on a quite different tack. His suspicions rise to an accusation of his brother: 'You fucked my wife? You fucked my wife?' 'You ask me that, your own brother? You expect me to answer that?' Both are outraged with a sentimental pride that's peculiarly masculine. Jake goes upstairs to his wife. His insane jealousy takes the form of both physical obsession with what he imagines to have happened – 'You sucked his cock?' – and of physical

revenge. In the culmination of the episode he beats up both his wife and his brother. The success of 'Raging Bull' is not in just showing more male violence, but lies in the fact that the TV-set build-up is inseparable from the whole sequence and creates, not the sense of Jake's strength, but of his impotence.

When in another scene, Vikki observes idly that a young contender has a pretty face, Jake can't rest until he's knocked the boy's nose halfway to his ear, in one of the film's most brutal boxing scenes: 'He ain't pretty no more'. But again, instead of power we feel the inadequacy of using the ring to work out a paranoid personal obsession."

Forms of Control

Jake takes out his anger and frustration on this young contender. In this way he thinks he is getting even with Vikki, or even proving something to her. But this isn't even something she knows about, or could guess about, since he doesn't share these thoughts or feelings with her. Jake's emotions and feelings are much nearer to the surface of his experience than is often true within a more controlled middle-class experience. He has less control over them. You gain little sense of his ongoing relationship with Vikki. You simply learn of the restrictions he places upon her freedom and the intensity of his jealousy whenever she makes any contact with other men. You have little sense of his acknowledging and expressing need in the relationship, of his vulnerability. It is this sense of 'self-sufficiency' that is deeply related to masculinity. He is the protector who can't afford to have weaknesses. He is the champ. He has to get his way, even if he doesn't admit it. This is often what makes our relationships difficult. We are brought up to feel that even needing others is a sign of weakness. We grow fearful of acknowledging and getting to know those needs, lest they threaten our very sense of masculinity or grow to such proportions that they threaten to overwhelm us.

Within a middle-class setting our bull is less likely to rage. It is too firmly controlled. We are brought up cynical and spiteful. We are brought up to use language to control and moderate our emotions. We are likely to be greater strangers to our violence. This doesn't make it any the less threatening for being veiled. It doesn't necessarily mean we are more capable of asking for what we need in our relationships. It becomes easier to feel self-sufficient, to feel we don't really need things for ourselves. We can pride ourselves on our reliability and our dependability. This doesn't mean that we don't expect women to cook and clean for us and that we don't

get irritated when things don't go our way. It's our invulnerability that can block us from deepening relationships we have, since it is harder for us to recognise the kinds of needs we bring into a relationship and so what could bring us satisfaction or fulfilment. It is tempting to express them ourselves. It is tempting to feel that we shouldn't have to ask for what we need, as if we can expect people who love us to have some kind of intuitive grasp of what we need. Often this is avoidance. It means we don't have to take the risk of asking and don't have to accept the pain of rejection. I remember the difficulty of asking girls to dance at the local youth club when I was 14. I would find a way of asking without really asking. In this way I would never have to feel rejected.

Accepting Feelings

If Scorsese is right that "*You have to claw your way through . . . the 'negative' aspects*" because you come to a point in your life when you can't any longer deny them, we have to be sensitive to the differences in our class and racial backgrounds. This means coming to terms with our individual histories, with the experiences that have shaped our masculinity. This has been part of the importance of consciousness-raising for men. But it has also shown the need for different kinds of therapy for men where we can begin to learn how to relate to ourselves, rather than assume that all our happiness has to come from within our relationship. This is to suggest a different notion of emotional autonomy. It becomes a matter of coming to know and explore the broader extent and depths of our feelings and emotions, not judging them too early and too easily. This is part of what Don Macpherson and Judith Williamson might be getting at when they say that Scorsese "*goes where the energy is, as if saying that's where you confront it, work it out in your own life, not goggling at an ideal life to which you aspire . . . So we move out of a territory where things are prejudged right and wrong, into how that energy can either celebrate or destroy*". This involves acknowledging the full range and force of our emotions and feelings, often resentful, painful and spiteful as well as needs which can make us feel dependent and vulnerable. Therapy understands the importance of expressing these feelings in a way which recognises their meaningfulness. This promises to give us a fuller contact with ourselves. Sometimes we will learn how our feelings and experiences are shared by others. This itself can be a form of liberation as we are often brought up within liberal individualism to assume that our fears and inhibitions are completely private and individual.

Some of this became clearer in our...

collective discussions. It showed that Scorsese had expressed something of more general significance. Often we don't thank people for putting us more in touch with ourselves, even when it is women or men we are particularly close to. It can be difficult to accept this in a straightforward way, often easier to hit out. This can connect to an impulsive feeling to reject the support and help others are ready to offer us, even when this is exactly what we need. Again it can be difficult to acknowledge this need and vulnerability. At some level we can continue to feel this as a form of weakness and defeat, even if we have consciously rejected this notion of self-sufficient masculinity.

Emotional Work

Often these patterns have deep sources. As men we are often brought up to get our way. We can find it hard to accept changes, even if we want them intellectually. Sometimes we can retain control in our relationships through the very unspoken sanction of our tempers. This can create fear and uncertainty in others. It can give us power within the relationship as others find it difficult to challenge us directly. This is changing slowly. It involves a different process of transformation for men and women. This has to happen at different levels. Sometimes for men it is through coming to acknowledge and accept our vulnerability, pain, longing and fear, so that we don't feel the need to respond immediately with anger and violence. This means learning to do this emotional work for ourselves, rather than relying upon women and men we might be in relationship with. This involves a different kind of responsibility for ourselves as we learn to gain more support and understanding from other men. It is partly through coming to more understanding and experience of our own 'raging bulls' that we can begin to re-evaluate what matters to us in our lives and what kind of relationships we want to have with others. This will mean learning to ask more directly for what we need and accepting we won't always get it.

If Jake learns this it is almost too late. His wife has left him. She couldn't take it anymore. He never understands what she wants from him. He has provided her with a big house and with children. He can't understand that she wants something more from him, a different kind of relationship. He is no longer the fighter. He is left on his own after his night club was closed by the police for serving drink to young girls. His brother doesn't want to know him. He hurt him too deeply in the past. He is fat and his face has been smashed in. He was never very smart. He is left staring at himself in the mirror trying to get his act right. He is left a lonely and pathetic figure. Nobody wants

to know him. He had believed in masculinity as strength and power. He had learnt to fight his way through life. It didn't leave him with very much. He had been wasted.

We are left with a bitter taste. We learn something about how masculinity is used within the larger society. There are different ways in which this is done. We don't have to be boxers.

Refusing Violence

This inevitably remains a partial response to male violence, especially when it is taken out on women and gay people. Nothing can justify this violence. Individual men have to be held responsible for this verbal and physical violence. It is up to all of us to say that this behaviour is unacceptable, whether it is going on within a relationship or not. Often we collude in silence. We are brought up within liberal society to think that it is a 'private concern' we shouldn't interfere with. Often we remain silent rather than challenge friends who are involved in violent relationships, or people we see chatting up women in the street. Until we experience this not simply as a violation of others, but also as a violation of our own humanity, we are likely to collude. Often it's difficult when a man responds to us saying "I'm only having a bit of fun why are you taking it so seriously?" — we can easily feel that we open ourselves for ridicule if we intervene. These are situations we need to confront openly and directly. We are surrounded by them most of the time. It is easy to collude in denying the significance, pain and violation taking place. Andra Medea and Kathleen Thompson in an article 'Little rapes' in *Peace News*⁴ talk about the gradual effects of having to endure walking down a city street, even your own street at night or even during the day:

"If you are subjected to this kind of violation every day, a gradual erosion begins — an erosion of your self-respect and privacy. You lose a little when you are shaken out of your day-dreams by the whistles and comments of the construction workers you have to pass. You lose a little when a junior executive looks down your blouse or gives you a familiar pat at work . . . In themselves these incidents are disgusting, repellent — in fact, intolerable. Acceptance of them as normal is dangerous . . ."

Learning and Action

It is important to know that this behaviour is completely unacceptable. At the same time as it is important to be able to identify with other men in the ways they behave towards women, understanding the frustration out of which they sometimes respond. This very much has to do with the relation-

ships of men with each other. Too often the left has limited its understanding of the women's movement to a support of demands and campaigns which have been left to women to organise. Often this has been a comfortable tactic since it has meant that we haven't had to challenge the sexist practices which are often deeply endemic within almost all social institutions. But if we aren't to fall into a moralistic position we need much deeper discussion of the experience of masculinity. This has always been slow and uneven in development, partly because as men we often don't have a language to identify and express our experience. We can feel uneasy and nervous in personal discussions. We have little sense that there is much to be gained from this kind of exploration. We feel confident enough in the public language we have been brought up to use. At some level we often feel guilty for the ways we treat others. We don't want to be reminded of this.

We often hurt those we feel closest to. We take out our tensions and frustrations on them. As men we often have little trust and confidence of how things can change if we are ready to talk our feelings through. Often we lock them tightly within ourselves until they explode or we tend to disappear into ourselves. Somehow we

need to connect the frustrations generated through the indignities and subordination people often have to endure at work with the strains and tensions in our closer relationships. This involves developing a socialist theory and practice that doesn't divide work from other areas of our lives. This has been one of the deepest contributions of feminism. With the strains of a more intensive work life and the frustrations of unemployment we are often finding the family as a locus of violence and tension. Often people are left in isolation to work things out. It is through sharing our experience of masculinity that isolation can be challenged. This involves the development of a different kind of socialist politics.

Vic Seidler

Notes

1. Shrew, Feminism and Non Violence issue, 1978.
2. Theodor Adorno, "Social Sciences and Sociological Tendencies in Psychoanalysis", April 27th, 1946.
3. Time Out, 20th-26th February, 1981.
4. Peace News, 22 April, 1977.



Ronald Grant

Robert De Niro with his "Raging Bull" nose, now the most expensive on record.

STONY SILENCES

A DISCUSSION OF ANGER AND VIOLENCE

This article is based on transcripts of tapes of two evenings of discussions in the Achilles Heel collective, and was put together by Andy Moye and Tom Weld, two members of the collective. *

These discussions gave us a focus for exploring our own experiences of violence — both as perpetrators and victims — as a crucial step to demystify and understand the meaning of what we all know and feel to be so much part of ourselves as men.

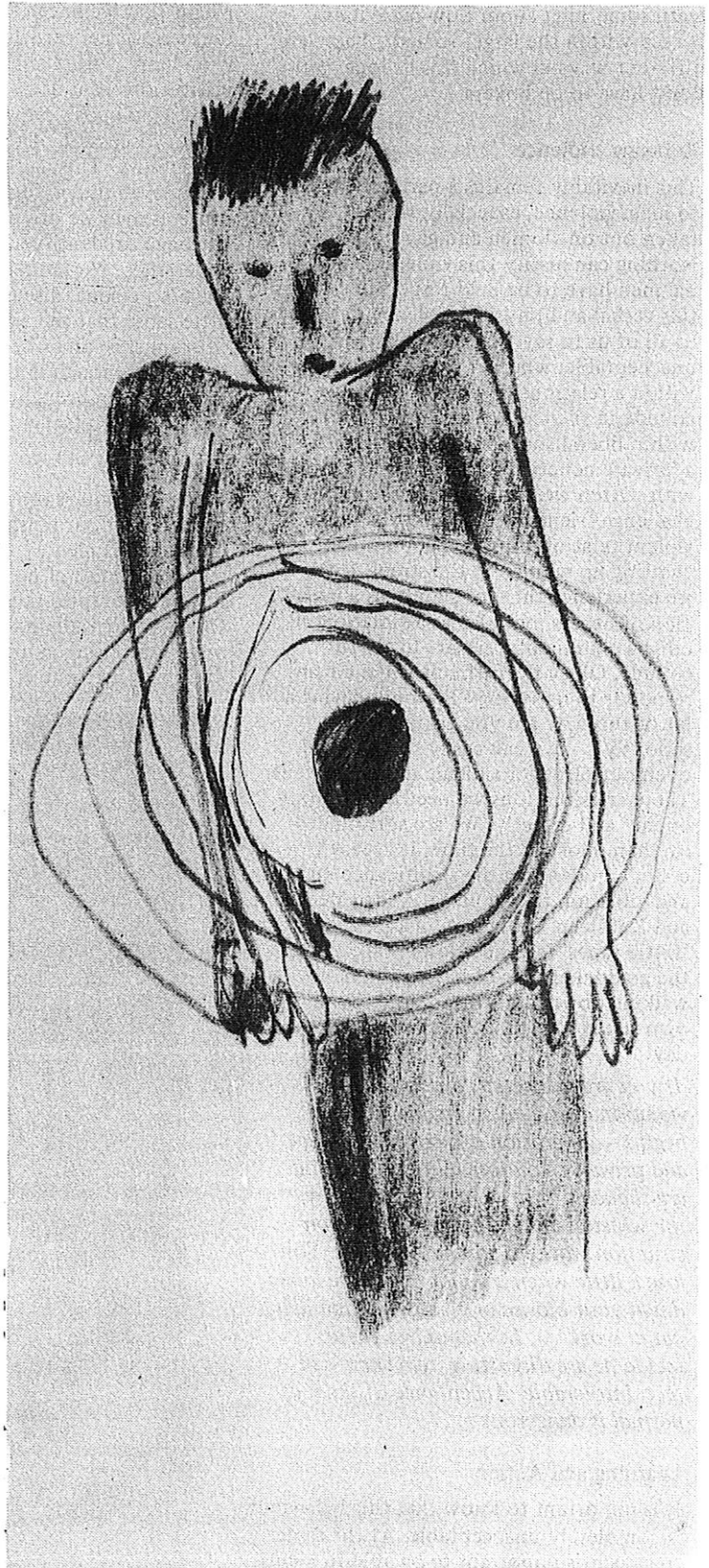
We felt it important to explore these experiences as honestly as we could, whilst recognising that the violence we talked about doesn't define or delimit ourselves as men. We took it on trust from one another that when we spoke about violence in our relationships, past and present, we were attempting to disentangle the negative from a whole range of feelings and consciousness, positive and negative, which lay outside the scope of the discussion. The focus on violence was a means for us to get through to some of its roots in order to understand it better.

At times it was a demanding and painful process, speaking of experiences we have kept hidden from others and often from ourselves. But through sharing those experiences we began to uncover common threads and consistencies in our anger and violence. We began to see that as men we have learnt a language of anger and violence in fantasy, and in practice, as substitutes for an emotional language and the expressions of needs which we have learnt to deny and suppress. All of us have learned this language, even the "gentlest" of us.

We have divided the discussion into four sections: Violence within the body; "Temper" and anger; With Women; and, finally, Schooldays. All of these sections overlap to some extent, although the final section on our experiences at school stands apart from the others in the sense that it is about a specific situation in our pasts.

There are many situations and experiences of violence and anger which we didn't discuss. But we hope that by publishing this piece despite all its omissions and inadequacies more men will be encouraged to confront and explore together their own aggression as a step towards discovering a masculinity unburdened by the latent threat of violence.

* The names of all those involved in the discussion and all those mentioned have been changed.



Tom Weld

WITHIN THE BODY

All violence has a bodily aspect. Whether we are overtly, physically violent, verbally violent, or boiling inside, there is something happening in our bodies. How the emotion gets there in the first place is one thing which we go into elsewhere, based as it is on a variety of situations; what we do with it from there is another matter, with tendencies learned early in childhood. The results range from nervous illness caused by extreme internalisation, to external physical violence towards another person.

The language which comes up again and again is descriptive of direct physical experience — “gulp down/back”, “turning in on oneself”, “holding on”, “gritty-faced”.

There are ways in which we *need*, in a physical sense, to hold on to our anger, as though it gives us a warped kind of security. If we do hold on (gulp down, turn in on ourselves), we are at least in familiar territory. Everything is under control inside us. If we let go, on the other hand, get angry, come out with it, even though we might know in our heads that we would feel better in the long run, we risk a new and threatening situation.

The turning inwards of anger can become hatred. The image of the stone held inside us. Almost as if we could point to the place in our bodies where we “hold” it. It is one of the many physical pressures which lead to stiffness and aches.

What happens to us over a number of years if this is our pattern?

Mike: “I went to the ironmongers and the two people were taking orders over the phone. I wanted to buy something. I could see it, I could actually have got hold of it. They could see me, but they just went on with these phone calls as though I was invisible. I felt this anger rising, rising, rising . . . more than five minutes, nobody else in the shop, they knew I wasn’t being served, and they just went on with these phone calls . . . I saw these two choices; either screaming at them, or walking out. I knew I was going to walk out. That’s just what I do in that kind of situation. And then at that point, having made that choice, I started wondering had I actually done myself damage, had I internalised this fury, and was that another nail in my coffin? I happened to need to go into the same shop later that day . . . apparently without any anger at all, and I felt as if nothing had happened. I felt on the one hand bad about not having let my anger out before, but on the other hand maybe it *had* all disappeared. But then I’d been saying to myself “it’s all disappeared” for years, and I know really it hasn’t because I do feel these fantastic wells of fury around quite a lot of the time. I find it no easier to get angry at the time in an appropriate way than I ever did. At least, I have occasionally been able to, but it’s very hard . . . although it’s always worth it.”

On the other hand, Mike also mentioned one possibly healthy area of release for those emotions:

“Smashing things can be quite therapeutic and does actually release something because the very action, the very physical action is, in bioenergetic terms, exactly what one needs to be doing. That’s why I love playing squash, and probably partly why I was mostly even-keeled when I lived in the country, because I cut all my own wood and it involved an enormous amount of chopping each day . . .”

Kevin: “That’s right what they said about cold showers and chopping wood!”

Mike: “I was realising the other day how many things I do with my fist clenched, which all relate to anger and holding my anger in. Other things which are open and the anger’s gone,

like massage or dancing or swimming, are all things which I love doing but somehow I find difficult to build into my life.”

BOY, HAS HE GOT A TEMPER!

We talked a lot about anger — about how we found it difficult to be plainly, honestly angry, without a surge of rage and violence sweeping through us. Much of our “anger” seems very abstract, without a real context or point. So much of our experience is about bottling up all kinds of fears and frustrations which can then be unleashed in “appropriate” situations and “appropriate” ways — with women friends in particular, even if not directly aimed at them, but displayed in front of them, for our benefit.

This abstractness to our anger and the ritual ways in which we all display it (and it was noticeable that we each have our own rituals) establish us very close to violence. It would be pointless perhaps to mark the transition from one to the other. They are inextricably bound up together, with a logic which we became increasingly aware of.

“Big boys don’t cry” is a violent imperative which we have all experienced in one form or another. This amounts as a matter of course to a pressure stifling our emotional life at source. What is allowed, and given subtle encouragement, is precisely male anger, as a socially acceptable safety valve for everything else which is not allowed. A pejorative pressure is put against our expression of an emotional language — especially expressions of that which hurt us — a father’s contempt or lack of interest say. But there is validation and legitimate space given to “anger”, “temper”, etc as “natural” characteristics for a man.

As men we come to know the power this validation gives us. It is readily and controllably expressed. We all noticed how we retold tales of our own “fits of temper” (how archaically biological that phrase is) and the amount of physical havoc we had wreaked in our displays, with a distinct, if subtle pride. In this sense, even anger becomes detached, another dislocated element in an emotional dyslexia we are encouraged to take for granted. We have all learnt this lesson and become our own best bosses, bullies and petty tyrants.

Mike: “I had a ‘temper’ — I have a temper. I’m wondering though about this notion of ‘temper’. I remember in our family there was a big thing about which of us had bad tempers. My mother’s father had a bad temper, and there was this myth that if your eyebrows join you’ve got a bad temper. He had this bad temper. And she used to say, you’re just like him, you’ve got this terrible temper. And his eyebrows joined like mine do. Really I was given a certain kind of validation — that it was alright for males to have a temper. When they gave me a travelling clock two Christmases running and I broke them both within two days of getting them, the story was related with a certain amount of grudging acceptance or even admiration as though it was alright, though it was fucking stupid. And I still smash things, or slam doors, or break things, or tear clothes to bits. I do things which are almost uncontrolled but at the same time I’ve never actually smashed my fist. I have put my hand through a window and cut it, but not at all badly. In a way I knew I wouldn’t. It’s only just controlled but it’s controlled, nevertheless, or nearly always.

I’ve thought about my son a bit — he’s five — and he shows his anger in a very immediate and full way, in a healthy way. In fact the only people I can think of who do this are children. Adults find children’s anger hard to accept in the same way we find their tears hard to accept; and the reason we say “shut up, be quiet, stop crying” is partly because they are showing up the difference between them and us — they’re showing us that we can’t do this anymore. In a way what we’re feeling is envy.”

Nick: "I think you get to a stage where people start saying "Come on now, be grown up — you're a big boy now. You can't behave like that anymore — throwing tantrums". That word 'tantrum' at a certain stage becomes very pejorative, doesn't it? Something which you should shake off when you get older. I know the way I express my anger has a lot to do with my childhood. My brother had 'a temper' and he used to flare up at things which seemed unrealistic . . . unnecessary. He was very sensitive to a lot of things. He would flare up and have these huge rows and storm out of the house and disappear for hours on end and my parents would get all freaked out. There was this whole ethos in my home where things like that were seen as really indecent.

Unlike my brother I was always characterised as being even-tempered, even-keeled, and I tended to have to mediate between Andrew and my parents. I feel it's left me for years with a real fear of violent scenes and angry scenes. Any anger I did have became bottled up and I didn't know how to use it."

Kevin: "Was your brother ever given any validation for those scenes of anger? Was he ever asked why he was angry? Was that ever worked through between your parents and him?"

Nick: "Well, a lot of it was to do with these real difficulties he had in his life. He had this very bad speech impediment, he used to get bullied at school. He was very unhappy really. I think my parents recognised that and he used to go to speech therapy. It was all kept very hidden from me — I was younger . . . it was never talked about openly in the family anyway. But on the one hand, although they recognised the objective reasons why it happened, they couldn't deal with it themselves. When it did happen my father's reaction was to be really angry with Andrew for disturbing the peace in that way. My mother would be more upset than angry. No, I don't think he ever was given much validation for it even though they recognised on an 'objective' level that there were reasons for it. When it happened, he wasn't acknowledged; he was seen as a problem."

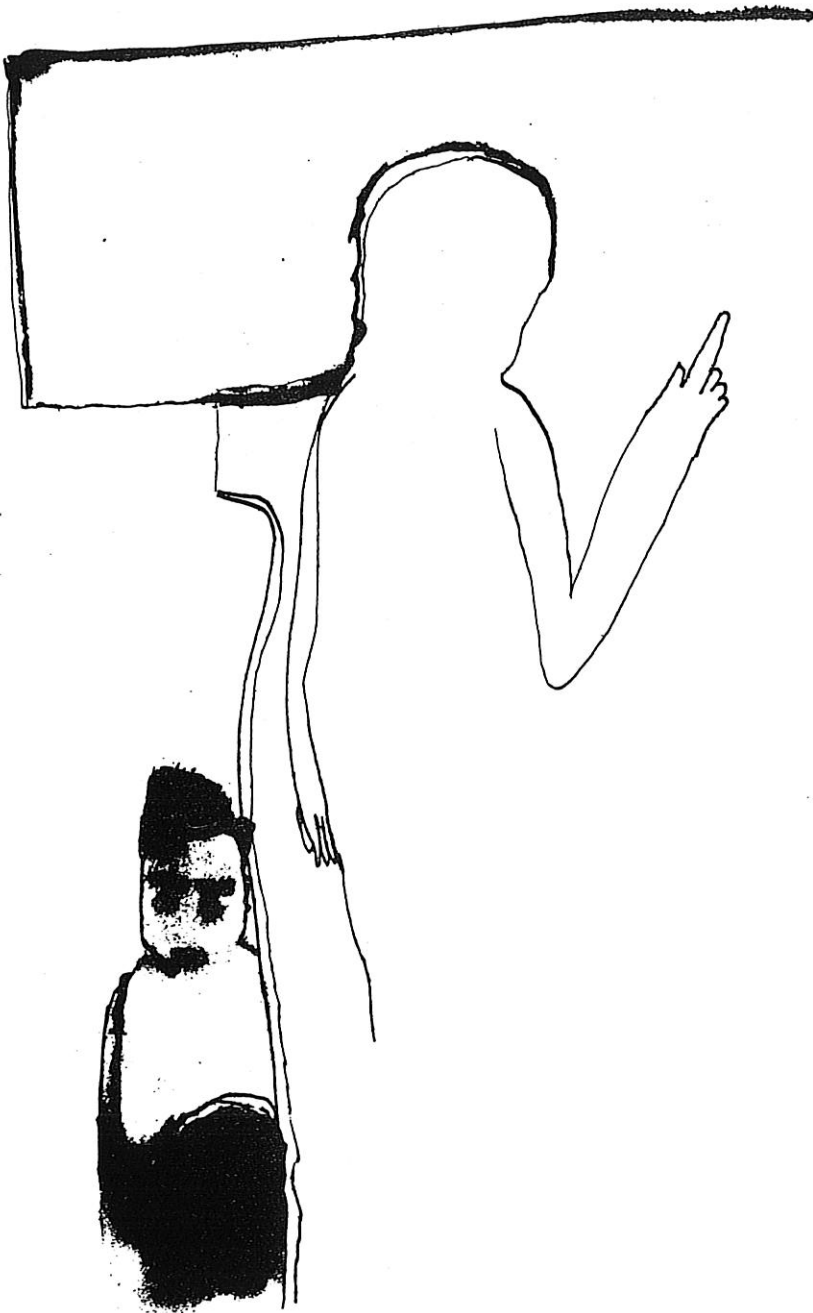
Kevin: "So, they could manage when everything was externalised onto speech therapy and 'problems at school', 'bullying'. Those were 'his problems', but when he actually flared up . . ."

Nick: ". . . he was the problem . . ."

Kevin: "Yes, he was the problem — 'Stop making a scene, stop being stupid!' "

Nick: "Exactly that. I can just hear them saying that and him stomping out.

I was talking to Sue the other night, telling her about our discussions, and I said, do you think I'm a violent person? And she said no, and then she said, 'Well, yes, I think in some ways you are. My experience of your violence is always in relation to things going wrong, and frustration with machinery and with inanimate things,' . . . and that's really right. I don't know whether it's a transference from feelings about people but definitely that's what makes me most expressively and physically furious. It can be a car or anything. I start cursing and swearing — 'Fuck this fucking thing!' and (thump, thump on the chair) like that . . . you know. It's the only time it really comes out, in that kind of situation. But the thing is the only person who sees that very much is Sue, and it often happens when I'm with her. And that's partly to do with a feeling of licence that I can let things out. It's also something else as well, which is while I feel I can let things out, at the same time I feel that somehow exposing myself to her means that I . . . I have less power. It means I feel more vulnerable.



Tom Weld.

And that makes it worse. It means I feel more frustrated and more angry about it. And end up being increasingly uptight."

Mike: "I don't really think smashing things is appropriate because it usually is a substitute for smashing the person — which does happen in my relationship with Ruth. I get into situations where we do hit each other. And that's not 'appropriate' either. It's wanting to annihilate the problem. It's not appropriate because when I hit her I want to smash my way through the problem rather than be angry with her or with the aspect of whatever's happening. It's like a total rejection of the problem rather than coming to grips with it."

WITH WOMEN

In many relationships between men and women, there is an underlying threat of the man's physical violence towards the woman. This may not be based on any actual violent act ever having taken place between them, but rather if the man is physically stronger and bigger (or even if he isn't, as long as she feels he is), he has a sanction over her. 'Just give in quietly, will you? I don't want to hit you, but you know I am stronger than you, and that it will hurt if I do hit you.'

Holding in; smashing things; hitting a person. A spectrum of ways we deal with our anger, all usually inappropriate. Here are some accounts of how some of us behave, specifically with the women we live with/have primary relationships with.

Ian: "It's always been important in my relationship with Judith, though gradually less so, that I'm physically bigger and stronger than she is. That's frightening. That gives me power and a confidence that I don't like. I can *insist* on things. Assert myself. We're going to the pictures: what film to see. And with issues that carry more weight."

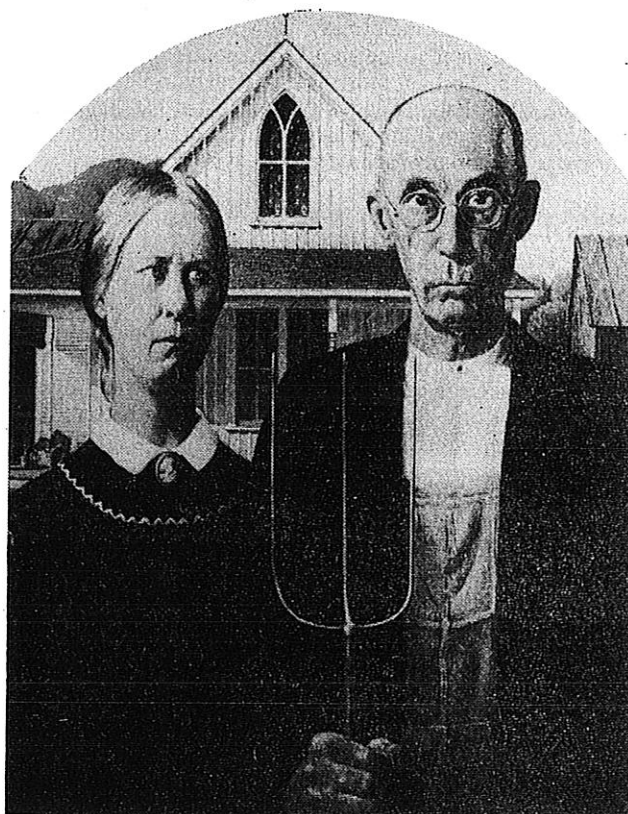
Rick: "Sounds more like power than violence."

Ian: "Behind it there's a threat of violence. I've very rarely actually been. . . . We've fought fairly frequently; but there have been times when I have been in a rage, when I've thrown things, picked up chairs. I've never actually done anything violent; but there's been that threat that if I really let go, I could do it. I don't know if I actually would do it. Judith's rage is pretty terrifying too. It would be good to get to grips with what those moments really are."

Mike: "It's only in relation to Ruth that I've ever been, and am continually really, really, angry. I can scream with my entire lungs at her, as I've hardly ever been able to do even in a group therapy situation. Sometimes it just stays at that 'pre-violent' level and it's very good. And it's a great release for years of repressed anger. But then she also gets a kind of backlog which isn't even about her. . . . But sometimes we get into a state of total frustration, often when we put each other in a double bind, where the result is physical violence. On occasion we have punched each other quite hard in the face, hit with various weapons, and thrown heavy objects. We fear each other then: and it's quite equal in the sense that we are well-matched in strength."

In my previous long relationship, I was very aware that I just held the sanction of greater strength. Having seen my 'temper', she was aware of that. She said she was afraid of me. After we parted, I felt totally sickened by that. It was just there, more or less whatever I did or didn't do."

Kevin: "Often I experience a sense of self-denial and feel un-together. I haven't cleaned up and the place is a mess, and I feel depressed with that. She comes and says the place is in a mess, and that reminds me I'm depressed, and I'm immediately hostile, and angry with myself because she's exposed me to



GRANT WOOD, *American Gothic*, 1930.

myself. I feel frustrated that it takes her to remind me that the place is in a mess. I don't want to be reminded and . . . it's really painful. And so I get all grumpy-faced."

Rather than saying, 'Yes, I've been silly not to deal with myself emotionally and open myself up before', it's more 'Oh fuck, I've *got* to deal with it'. That's where the resentment comes in. The other part of that is 'And *you*'ve made me. It's *your fault*.' "

Nick: "I get angry when someone — particularly the woman I'm involved with — starts probing away at things I want to leave covered up; or when I'm forced to try and open up emotionally, or relate to something I find difficult. I get filled with this frustration which turns into anger and is directed towards the person who's making me do it. It happens quite often. I can't get to grips with what's happening inside me in a way that I can relate to the other person. That makes me really angry. With myself, but also with her. It's a self-perpetuating thing — I'm afraid to show my anger as well. I can only show my anger with someone I feel secure with, yet showing my anger makes me feel insecure . . . showing a side of me I don't want to reveal, which in turn makes me feel more resentful towards that person who's forced me to do it. It builds up in that way."

Rick: "In the early days of my relationship with Hilary she was emotional and I was unemotional. She would get really angry about things, and I would withdraw. She was very frustrated because I never responded. Then when I got into the Growth Movement, we started getting in touch with feelings and emotions, and I started to get angry back. She got scared, that the moment I got angry I would completely beat her up. I couldn't get it right. If I withdrew it was wrong; if I got angry back, that was wrong."

Later I decided to take it in a different way. If she was angry, she was angry about something. There were two things there: one, she was angry about something and the other, she was

angry. Before, I concentrated on the something, got angry back at that. Later I began to say, 'how about this person who is angry? There's something about that, something I haven't done justice to.' So I got more able to deal with her-being-angry, and what that was actually about; what had happened, and what my part in that had been. That worked a lot better. I learned a lot more from that."

SCHOOLDAYS

In our discussions one institution had a special place — school. All of us at some stage went to boys' schools where all the teachers (or nearly all) were men. Our first taste of institutional life. Several things emerge from this experience. At one level we became part of a struggle with the other boys — a struggle always present, sometimes cruel — to be better, harder, stronger, more powerful than the "others".

One man talked about the hierarchy that existed in his school, with the 18-year-old school monitors at the top, with the power to beat the younger boys. Perhaps it is no coincidence that this was a public school. The power the school monitors had to bully and control was entrusted to them by the "masters" in the name of "the school" and its shadowy traditions of courage, excellence, leadership. For this man that hierarchy was fostered to initiate all the boys into the acceptance and practice of authority. A case maybe of "torturing the future torturers".

The rest of us went to state schools of one sort or another, where such a clear-cut story does not emerge. But we were all in a struggle for respect from our peers, a kind of authority in itself. None of us competed successfully in this struggle, but we all competed nonetheless to a greater or lesser degree. The memories of pain and fear and resentment are our testimony to this and remain part of us.

Kevin: "For me secondary school was an initiation into the most violent society I have ever been in. I remember from the first day I was at school, the older boys, particularly those in the next form up, but a few older ones as well, duffed up the first year boys — not badly, just terrorising us. It set a pattern. (I remember talking with my father about this, then. He was doing his best to console me. I remember him saying things like 'It'll be over soon, the novelty will wear off for them, just give it time'. I feel fond of this memory of him.)"

Nick: "Some people went through that, and grew up in some way to relish that, and became really sadistic. You'd go up in the hierarchy, starting off at twelve years old completely terrified of these school monitors, who had the power to beat you. Some people rose and grew into it and some didn't at all and ended up being really terrified of it."

Kevin: "This is really the first time I've talked about school. It is still painful and it still frightens me. It seems to me that a boy had to assert himself to take his place in the classroom and that usually involved violence of one kind or another. It did for me, but I couldn't cope with it. I was nearly always 'non-violent'. But I didn't get out of that trap. I internalised all the violence. The rage and frustration I felt were doubled up inside me. I remember being jeered at for not retaliating and that being as wounding, or more wounding, than getting a punch in the face. The contempt that some of the other boys showed for me was horrific — it outweighed the little support I got, the little gestures, from some of my friends. It was something I started to believe about myself in a very big way. That really paralyzed me. I've tried to erase it from my memory."

Ian: "I wasn't actually bullied a lot, but I was frightened. And I definitely kept out of the way to avoid being bullied. And

that was a deep experience for me. But since then, I've gone on to feeling that I've got to prove myself, or ought to prove myself in that sort of context. Especially in a working class group. I was very aware of the possibility of not knowing how to respond to the word 'tough'. And I wonder what I did with that in relation to my younger brother and my cousin. I'm fairly sure that I tormented my brother. It all seemed to be a question of being better or not better than someone else. I remember that sense of shame. Shame — that sounds a better word than guilt. There's a kind of shroud around guilt."

Together with these memories stand those of the school itself, its rules and regulations, the official authority exercised by our "masters".

Ian: "There's something about the whole school administration that seems ruthless — utterly ruthless. I think the main thing about institutional violence is not what people are made to do all the time, with the obvious punishments and all that — it's the balance of what is denied that's really important. Nobody cares, nobody respects you as an individual, and that builds up — you know it's building. I think this leads to an incredibly deep self hatred, a sense of loss; and it's that which often spills out, and what's often underneath the punishment of violence, which is mostly to keep all that down."

Charlie: "There's a fascination about violence — a kind of perversity — there's so much bottled up. I mean the headmaster at my school — I'd have liked to have destroyed him, quite slowly and tortuously — that was my total fantasy for a couple of years, because of things like getting caned for things I didn't do. I was put in detention by a schoolmaster who didn't even tell me I was in detention. So I didn't go. And next morning I was hauled in front of the headmaster and I was standing there trying to explain this to him. And while I was trying to explain it, he was just writing my name in the punishment book for four strokes of the cane. And I was left bottling up just pure hatred."

Mike: "A thing that happens for me is internalising, fostering, almost nurturing this sense of defiance and indignation. In situations at school, like breaking completely petty rules; instead of raging at them, I just held them in, and they became hatred, because there was no way of being angry or violent about them. I held on to that like a stone inside me, and I still do that; it's horrible. It has a physical reality."

Rick: "How does that turn into hatred?"

Mike: "Just knowing in yourself the reality of the situation, and that you were punished wrongly and that the thing was ridiculous by your and any reasonable and good standards, and just knowing 'I can't do anything to you — The Authority — but I know my values are better than yours, and I hate yours. I can't do anything — you are too powerful — and I don't know how to be angry, how to get together with other people and do something about it. The only thing I can hold onto is this hatred of it.'"



LIVE DANGEROUSLY: HOMOPHOBIA AND GAY POWER

Police tell
gay attack
victim
'You may be
prosecuted'

NEW MURDER

ANOTHER LONDONER has been murdered and police believe he was homosexual. If so, it is the latest in a long line of recent murders of gay men in the capital city.

George (39) was found strangled on March 2 in his flat in Highfield Avenue

teen years in the Foreign Office, where he rose to First Secretary rank and spent much time in Panama, Brunei and

London, as posted to Berlin at the time King killed undercover KCP.

welcome gays"

Gay kisses -
'a very grey
area of the
law...'
Gays beaten in

NEWS

Brutal police

law...'
Gays beaten in

*"This your anger and sadness, your shame to hide
that father's gift
paternal line of hatred and fear
handed down in clenched fist, a loud-mouth aggressive stance,
blows struck
for more violence and hard bitterness
against women, gays, the gentles,
who your despair and confusion turn to
enemies
to rape, beat and humiliate".
Anon poem in the Anti-sexist men's newsletter No. 11*

(This article is written by a gay man and is about gay men and homophobia. Lesbians also experience homophobia (lesbianphobia?) along with all other forms of male violence - see the attacks against lesbians by men at the lesbian conference earlier this year - and gay men (like all men) can and do show signs of phobia towards lesbians but in this article I'm speaking of my own experience as a gay man).

Be Prepared

Whenever I'm on the streets, in a pub, a park, a cottage*, or a shop I'm aware of who is around me and how they are reacting to me. If it is during the evening or at night on the street I'm aware of who is in front, is someone behind, why are they walking so fast, what are those men doing on the other side of the road? I try to keep alert and not fall into day-dreams, to be prepared in case I'm about to be attacked physically or verbally. This may sound like paranoia (try wearing a gay badge and then see if it's our paranoia or yours) but such safety precautions are necessary as the incidence of attacks on gay men makes clear¹.

This is not a new experience for gay men, we have always been attacked. I knew this from a very early age. My life at school was a balancing act between not letting it be known I was gay for fear of the consequences and still being open to myself as much as possible - which involved not expressing clearly the gender of those with whom I was having relationships or fantasies about. By the time I was fifteen I led two lives: at school I was a "straightist guy" (I was occasionally bullied by those who saw me as a sissie and were upset by it) who liked drama not football, whilst outside of school I spent hours cruising cottages

looking for and spending time with men like myself. This involved a large amount of self deception and went on until I was 17 when I met an older man who showed me other aspects of the gay scene - though I didn't and still haven't stopped cottaging - and from whom I realised that it was possible to be openly gay with other people who were gay but not outside of that small circle. This awareness was reinforced when he lost his job as a social worker when his boss discovered that he was gay. I knew that the barrier erected by straight society to prevent them knowing about gays was maintained by threats of physical violence and it took me several years before I rejected and challenged this threat and came out. Then and only then did I discover that the dangers of being out are more concrete and easier to deal with than remaining in the closet. Rather than the threats being intangible and heightened by silence they can be faced with a self confidence previously unknown. This is not to say that all is easy especially as attacks on gay people are increasing. For me this awareness is brought home by the fact that two of my friends were attacked within the last year, eleven men I know slightly, an old friend/lover committed suicide last year and society's hatred of gays was a contribution to his despair. With this personal knowledge of how we are put down, discriminated against, oppressed and denied street skills readily develop. The root cause of this street sense is the homophobia which surrounds us.

Cultural and Personal Homophobia

Homophobia has a number of definitions ranging from "the revulsion towards homosexuals and the desire to inflict punishment as retribution" to the "allowance within oneself to the belief that one is able to excise or control gay desire"³. Both are interconnected for we live in a dominant culture of straight patriarchy which is homophobic and expresses this phobia through those who accept its values - it is hardly surprising that those men most homophobic are also those most sexist. It is often said that those most outwardly violent towards gays are those who fear gayness within themselves, whilst this is sometimes true it is also too simplistic. Closeted** gay men whilst often verbally aggressive

about other gays are rarely physically violent towards them, though these men collude with straights to exclude us they do so under the mistaken allure of safety. Not out gay men will participate in the putting down of gay men in order to keep up a "straight" facade. I was once eating a meal with friends of my mother's, towards the end of which one man told an anti-gay joke about where faeries come from. I joined in the laughter forgetting that I was gay or that hours earlier I had said goodbye to my lover in order to be there.

The homophobia engendered by church and state through control in order to maintain dominance gives license to all, including those who are aware of fears of gay desire within and those who are readily violent towards any "minority" group. Racism or sexism not only involves fear of the loss of power but also pleasure in the retention and showing of that power; the same is true of homophobia.

So What Happens

"An organised gang of at least four thugs were reported to be beating up and robbing men on Tooting Common. The police were operating on their own account during the same period, arresting gay men on the Common for importuning"⁴.

The direct effect for gay men is physical violence from individuals or groups who claim to be heterosexual. Homophobia is created and lives on through the family, the media and education - a continuous process of reinforcement to straights that gays are not to be tolerated and to gays that to be gay is awful. If we are aware of this we can fight it. We can fight the learning process which separates men from women as they grow into a "straight" world. We can fight against the attitude that a man's cock makes him superior to women, that the only way in which men can relate is through aggression and competitiveness, that a man showing emotion is a weak man, that men loving men are sick. "Heterosexuals are what they are because they deny the homosexuality that is latent within them, sublimating it and/or converting it to aggression"⁵. But what is it that unlocks this aggression? It is being unable to deal with the reality of men loving each other sexually and enjoying

LESBIANS attending the main social event of the second annual Lesbian Conference in London on April 4 were shattered by scenes of violence unprecedented in the history of the recent British gay movement — even if not in the history of the women's movement. Eye-witnesses told of "brutality" and "a lot of violence".



on Castle Hill

FIVE YOUNG MEN who decided to have an evening 'queerbash'...

One of the youths went behind him and hit him over the head, causing him to fall to the ground. The rest of...

Attackers had fled. Pathologist Arthur Mann said in...

t. Straight men and closeted gay men are so freaked out by the fact of men openly declaring enjoying each other sexually that they will do anything to deny it. I identify as a gay man and openly and proudly acknowledge that I have loving pleasurable sex with other men. An open declaration is important in affirming ourselves and is supportive to each other. Coming Out is the first step in dealing with the violence presented as our due.

What do we do?

That all gay men are at risk is undeniable, but what can we do about it when our homes are entered, the streets unsafe, when we are beaten or killed, when we have little or no help from those who enforce the law. We have several options all of which relate to being openly gay and supportive to each other. If we are "out" and have a network of friends/lovers we can demand that the law acknowledge that we are under attack and pressure agents of the law into doing something about it. Everytime we are attacked this means telling everyone we know, attempting to get media coverage, and using gay lawyers to contact the police.

Individually we can take care not to get into situations which may lead to violence. This caution related to awareness of how and when a situation may become potentially violent and does not imply that we should stop confronting or provoking the straight world, for the skills of provocation may be the very skills necessary to deal with the violence we continually meet.

"... when epithets are hurled at one in the street, it's best to shout epithets back; trying to ignore them with dignity or responding with overt fear seems only to intensify the hostility. Although I am open to correction on this, I have the feeling that the safest response to physical assault is fight back; the bruises one may incur seem to me preferable to the corrosive rage that follows from helplessness. . . ."⁶

Continuing to demand our rights to pace may be seen as initiating conflict but I refuse to accept that hatred levelled at us. We are constantly being attacked by straight society which positively encourages its adherents to destroy us. How would straight men feel if they could often read this:

"Funny fellow, 'Alfred, he thought. Bright, decent, possibly even extraordinary. And there must be other heterosexuals like him — scientists, public figures, teachers, artists. Killing someone like that would certainly be judged a waste. And yet. There's always that and yet. They can't possibly be that good'"⁷.

The original passage uses the word homosexual and expresses an attitude we often encounter, an attitude we must

continue to challenge through presenting positive alternatives to each other.

Collectively we can learn the arts of self defence, which is a practical way of building confidence and abilities. In London two gay self defence groups have been exploring the issues of violence through practical self defence workshops running *** since the beginning of this year which developed out of the discussion groups and stimulated by the work of gay men in Canada. It may appear negative to be organising as a group to counter violence but learning in a group situation gives confidence to deal with attacks when one is alone — the time they most often happen — and the strength to be openly gay on the streets.

What can anti-sexist/profeminist men do?

I expect to give and receive support from lesbians and other gay men. I also expect support from non-gay men (or men who do not identify as gay) involved in anti sexist politics whatever situation I'm in and especially when that situation is potentially dangerous. Non-gay men need to learn an awareness of homophobia from us.

After an Achilles Heel meeting we decided to go for a drink in a local pub. I was wearing a badge with the word gay clearly readable on it. Immediately I was picking up hostile reactions — men staring at me, nudging their friends, talking about me knowing that I could hear them. I became very tense, standing taut, staring them out if I caught a man's eye. I felt very uncomfortable and intimidated. I stayed close to the men I was with. I wondered what they'd do if something happened. Chris held my hand seeing my tension and asked if I wanted to leave. I said that I was feeling threatened by the reactions of the men around us but that it was our space as much as theirs. We continued talking. We finished our drinks and left. Outside on the pavement we all said goodbye, hugging and kissing as usual, at the same time other people from the pub were also leaving and moving past or around us. I was glad that I was travelling home with Chris, two felt safer than one alone.

In this situation I expected these men, my brothers, to be aware of the hostility that was being presented and to be supportive to me. It is important that gay men know that non-gay men sense the hostility that we receive and support us in dealing with it. A clear definition between those who shun gays and those who support us needs to be discernable. Those who shun gays share a number of unstated assumptions of which the most important is that something is wrong when a person diverges from the usual (to their eyes) pattern of existence. Some express their attitude with ugly open hostility, by jibes, insults or physical

attack. Those who support us should work on any doubts or fears they have and be prepared to consider sharing gay experience and openly express their support of us, for homophobia will only fail to exist when straight society sees it as their problem which they must eradicate.

Not all gay men have hair on their chests shave regularly, work often and whilst walking through the streets spit like a virile male to clear the throat of last nights/early morning cum.

Some dream in falsetto naked under sheets curled in foetal position wear eyeshadow and lipgloss leather boots with denim purse lips like movie queens or sprinke sunshine smiles as they pass strangers who think pleasurable of the variety of men.

with thanks to Paul Mariah whose poem 'Misrepresentation' stimulated this one.

- * a cottage is a public lavatory used by gay men to meet for sex either there or elsewhere.
- ** Closeted men are those who acknowledge that they are gay to themselves but not to others.
- *** Please contact Tony Landsberg at 36, Foulden Road, London N16 for up to date information about self defence courses.

1. See CHE report "Attacks on gay people."
2. Society and the Healthy Homosexual by George Weinberg.
3. "Being Gay and Jewish" by Martin Krieger.
4. Gay News, 1/5/1980.
5. "Homosexuality and Liberation — elements of a gay critique" by Mario Mieli.
6. "Gay politics: sixteen propositions for the eighties" by Michael Denny.
7. "Cruising" a violently homophobic novel by Gerald Walker which is also sexist and racist containing examples of every anti-gay attitude I've ever met.

I would like to thank Ronald Grant, Tony Landsberg, Noel Grieg and the Achilles Heel collective for their help, advice, love, support and criticism during the writing of this article.

Martin Humphries

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Gay Legal Advice (GLAD) 01 821 7672.
Icebreakers 01 274 9590

See Gay News for the number of your local Gay Switchboard (NAGS), P.O. Box 449, Brighton, BN1 1HU.

SEXUALITY AND MALE VIOLENCE

Peter Bradbury

*Every woman adores a Fascist,
The boot in the face, the brute
Brute heart of a brute like you.*

— Sylvia Plath

I can think of no culture which does not, in some way, confront the issue of violence: sometimes by eulogising it; sometimes in an attempt to banish it. The west, at least since the advent of Capitalism, has sought to control and channel violence to its own ends, largely through the development of oppressive sciences of a military, or paramilitary kind.

A weighty literature has arisen around the issue, yet only in the past 50 years or so has there been an attempt to discuss violence in the context of sexuality, where it has, nevertheless, an important historical place. Most importantly, the Women's Movement has dealt explicitly with the relationship between sexuality and violence. At the moment, with the world-wide media coverage given to such public displays of violence as the Yorkshire Ripper murders, there is an atmosphere of tension and urgency especially among those who have been, or fear being, victims.

While men inflict violence on each other, and women sometimes initiate, or participate in violence, it is usually the case that in the context of our private lives it is men who are violent and women who are the victims. In the sphere of organised, 'legitimate' violence, for example in war or sports like boxing, violence becomes a contest between men (often with women as the prize). But in life as it is experienced from day to day that is not the case.

This article is an attempt to redress an uneasy balance. For the most part it is women who have made painful attempts at unravelling and understanding what is involved in violence. Men have remained, on the whole, conspicuously silent: not that in our various roles as doctors, psychologists, sociologists, politicians and teachers we haven't spoken and written reams about the phenomenon of violence and frequently acted as though we had some special access to the experience of victims of violence. What we have done is to distance ourselves from violence through professionalism or exclamations of horror, and evade the crucial issue which women cannot confront for us: what it is to be violent, and what that violence means for our existence as men.

I have chosen to concentrate on sexual violence since it is there that there is least understanding. In the argument I am putting forward there is an attempt to establish a crucial link between violence and sexuality. This will involve an outline, first, of the way

in which the historical conditions for the kind of violence we experience at the moment is supplied by the relationship between Patriarchy, the family and the state. Then, I want to concentrate on what I see to be the reason why so many men resort to violence, which resides in a sexual conflict of language and perception at very particular personal levels.

The most recognizable form of sexual violence is rape. But I want to get away from the habit of discussing rape as a singular event and look more at the distressing range of violences which are sexually related and which, it seems to me, make rape not simply a possibility but a logical outcome of what our society generally sees as 'normal' sexual relations. Not only is that the case, but the very act of ascribing normality to particular forms of sexual behaviour — heterosexual fucking — sets up the conditions for violence. The reasons for aggression toward gay men and lesbians are very complex, but in this context I shall see them as stemming from the arrogant reduction of sexuality to the power of the phallus: this allows men a sense of justice in the intrusions they make on homosexuals, yet ironically is tied up in the threat and danger posed by non-heterosexual relationships and behaviour.

While I am convinced that in various forms the entire range of human relationships is sexual, I shall confine my arguments to behaviour which at some point becomes recognizably sexual, involving some form of sensuousness and the expression, however directly, of desire. Similarly, I shall limit the sense in which I understand violence. It can be argued that in subtle ways all kinds of manipulation and control are violent in that they operate against someone's will or against their best interests. But I will be particularly concerned here with acts which, through physical power or verbal coercion, inflict an immediate damage on the victim. That damage may be emotional or mental as well as physical, and may be inflicted through verbal abuse, threat, imprisonment (whether in a state institution or in the home), or physical assault.

Patriarchy, The Family and the State

The history of the capitalist state, the fundamental importance of the family within it, and the new exercise of patriarchal power that has resulted, are important for any discussion of violence and the possibilities of resistance to it. Yet they have also provided a form in which the left has been able to depersonalize its account of violence. Central to my argument is the importance of violence in reproducing, at

grass roots level, the coercive power of patriarchy and capital. To avoid analysis of the individual exercise of such power is to miss the boat entirely. For this reason I have started with a briefly sketched outline of that history before looking at a number of ways in which individualized violence both expresses and generates it.

Since the sixteenth century, the development of capitalist commodity production and its necessary organisation around large stabilized workforces and markets has meant the development of wage labour and a consequent fragmentation of personal and work life. Where once it was possible for the majority of people to live and work together in community based families, sharing to some extent (though not completely) the work involved in producing necessities, capitalist production has made such a structure impossible to maintain. With fewer men in control of the larger scale of productive activity, families have been forced to release members into a segregated workforce for a large period of the day, thus entrenching already existing dominations of women by men and drawing a harder line between their accepted spheres of operation.

Together with this change in the productive life of communities has come the development of professional, scientific institutions and ideologies whose position in the managerial and technological organisation of industry has given them the power to determine what most of us perceive as normal, good, or inevitable. Thus, through filters of education, media, legislation and the sharing of these in private talk, we come to take as our assumed starting point the relationship between work and the family, and the respective roles of men, women and children in it.¹

Patriarchy predates this history, and an extensive discussion would analyse the importance of patriarchy in making such a history possible. Patriarchy is a system of governance by which all men have some stake in determining the lives and histories of the women and children assigned by whatever system to their care. The hierarchy which operates within this structure of governance is thus shared out among the men, rather than including women who are reduced alike to their reproductive and domestic roles. Those women who break out have, at least until the recent advent of the Women's movement, done so on male terms and individually.

The difference which capitalism has made to patriarchy is to take it out of the hands of individual men or communities and place it in the more scientific, professional hands of the state. Men are

still invested with the dominant role within the family, and are encouraged to exercise the power they have developed over the history of our 'civilization'. (A discussion of the nature of this power comes later) Yet this power has been narrowed considerably. State control, say in Britain, has taken over many of the functions once attached to the position of individual patriarch. Education, the public care and welfare of children, taxation, and various forms of legislation around divorce, contraception and so on, are now secularized concerns handled by a professional bureaucracy. To that extent, the state has become the supreme patriarch. The extent to which individual men still exercise their power seems to depend on the intrusive power of the state in a particular society. Under Fascism, in both Germany and Italy, (though with remarkable differences occasioned, e.g. by the dominance in Italy of Catholicism) men exercised their power not as individual patriarchs but as compliant agents of a state crystallised in a single Patriarch: a Hitler or a Mussolini

Throughout the history of capitalism there have been significant periods in which we can see clearly and intensely both the individual and the collective expression of power through violence. For my purposes, the advent of Fascism under Mussolini and Hitler raises questions which I think can help our understanding of violence in the context of sexuality without our falling into the conservative trap of laying the blame on individual pathologies, or into the left-scientific trap of blaming a ruling class conspiracy. In the discussion which follows I am offering not a general analysis of Fascism, but extracting a number of questions which are relevant to my topic.

Fascism and Patriarchy

Under Fascism, the key points of Patriarchy are exaggerated. There is an increase in 'legitimate' institutional violence, organised and sanctioned by the state: men are forced, institutionally and ideologically, not only to accept without struggle the class positions they are thrust into, but to make a determined, enthusiastic ritual of it in the interests of a disciplined sexual and racial supremacy. While women are further isolated in the home through national and familial policy, there is an increase in violent sexual practices. In what appears to be a quasi-mystic brotherhood, men share out the power among themselves. Through a hierarchy of leadership culminating in the heroic figure of the dictator, there is a vicarious satisfaction of pleasure in power which seems to me sensuous as much as it is intellectual and emotional. The massive tyrannies of Hitler or Mussolini are reproduced by men, and exceptionally by a few women, in private form.

Such vicarious pleasure in power is not, I should add, exclusive to states which have gone all the way toward Fascism. The fascination of the case of the Yorkshire Ripper is an interesting phenomenon here: not only has the case allowed men (in and out of the media) to express a paternalistic indignation at the public magnitude of Sutcliffe's violence, but to use the case to disguise our own collusion as well as taking from it whatever vicarious satisfactions are appropriate to our own personal misogynies and desires.

In the context of sexuality, one of the most interesting aspects of Fascism is the way it reveals how willingly and easily men band together in this brotherhood to ritualize and extend the power historically vested in them. This occurs, I should add, in a way which at the same time strengthens and cuts across class structures. To explain this fully would need an analysis of the intricate relationship between class, sex and race which I'm not in a position to give. But I would like, at this stage, to confront a popular position on Fascism and sexuality which seems to me rather dangerous.

It is consistently argued that there is some intrinsic relationship between the political form of Fascism and what has been called 'perverse' sexuality, most notably homosexuality and various forms of sado-masochism. Even in the work of some socialist film makers I admire, like Bertolucci and Liliana Cavani (*The Night Porter*), it is not merely assumed but actually pointed out that men and women with a tendency toward 'perverse' sexual desire develop, under the right conditions, a tendency toward political fascism. In an otherwise excellent film, *1900* (*Novocento*), directed by Bertolucci, there is a crucial scene in which a young fascist man and a woman rape a young boy. Then, with the woman participating on the sidelines with smiles and cries of encouragement, the man takes the boy by the legs and swings him around the room until his head smashes against the stone walls several agonizing and horrific times. It is a powerful scene, disturbing for its illumination of the terrible power of fascism, yet dismaying for its stark, unexplored equation of fascism with 'deviant' sexuality.

The truth in this common position needs to be flushed out. Firstly, we need to disabuse ourselves of the assumption that sexual practice in relation to fascism is somehow present in our biology as though deviance, so defined, were genetically determined. Secondly, we need to efface the positivist ideals against which we measure sexual normalcy and deviation. Sexual violence is no more a part of homosexual practice than it is of heterosexual practice within the family. And thirdly, it needs to be said that the argument developed in the episode from *Novocento* is no more plausible, but also no less dangerous, than the argument

that rape is enacted by men with 'personality' problems giving vent to unfulfilled sexual desires. Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will* is just one of many studies which points out clearly that rape takes place not as an extraordinary event but frequently within the family by men whose sexual life would be regarded by our society as perfectly normal.

It needs to be argued then, that as rape is an extension of male dominated heterosexuality, so the development of patriarchy reaches its most extreme and recognizable (transparent) form in the kind of national Fascism represented by Italy and Germany between the wars. The harnessed violence of that period was legitimised and nationalised by the violence inherent in patriarchy under capitalism at all levels: from the violence of power relations in the family, to that of the language in which heterosexual relations were, and still are, conducted. The extermination of the Jews, which we take as the representative expression of Fascism, can be seen as a eugenics based on a highly selective, reproductive model of sexuality. To commit genocide in the name of such a model does not seem to me extraordinary. It fits neatly with the model of the Holy Family developed by the Catholic Church, and in so far as the programme included homosexuals, it can be seen as a monstrous enactment of the kind of social vilification of homosexuals in so-called democratic societies like Britain and the United States.

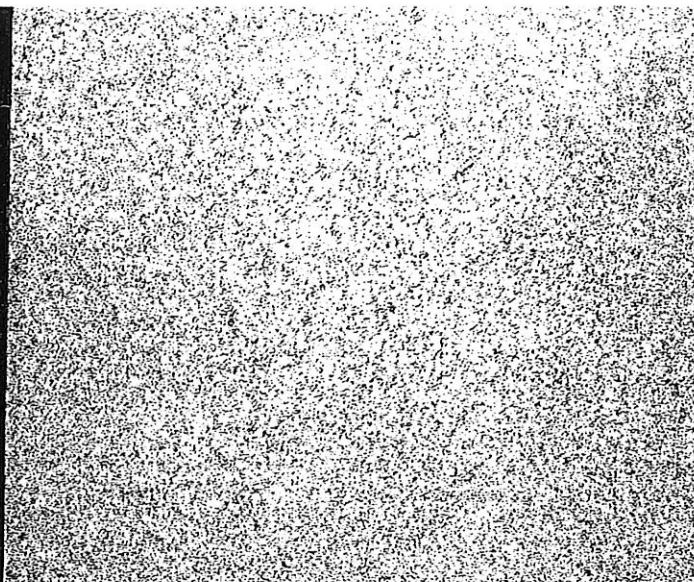
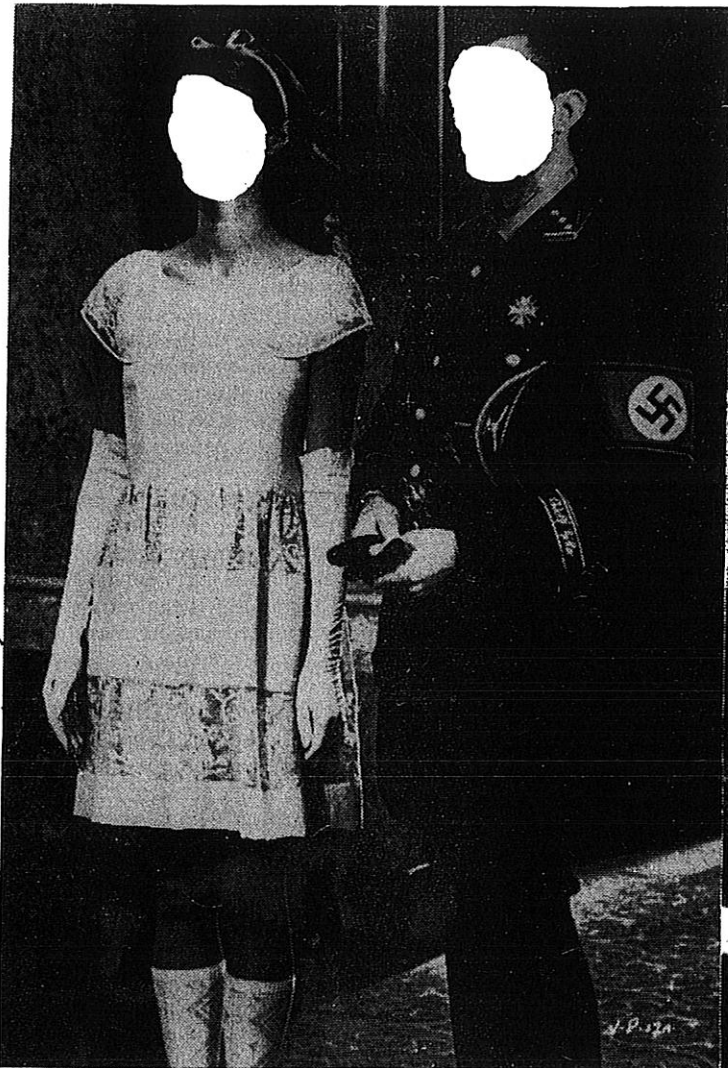
Another important aspect of Fascism is the way in which it sharpens and exaggerates the degree to which women often collude in the violence which assaults both them and others whose sexuality (and in some cases ideas) are regarded as abnormal. For Fascism to triumph as it did in Italy and Germany, women's collusion is necessary. The most compelling argument I have read on this is an article by Maria Antonietta Macciocchi² where she claims that

*The characteristic of Fascist and Nazi genius is their challenge to women on their own ground: they make women both the reproducers of life and guardians of death, without the two terms being contradictory.*³

The position of women, as Macciocchi continues, is enshrined in a "mystical femininity" whose two poles are administration to national and military heroes in the tradition of Florence Nightingale, and a reduction of sexuality to the model of reproduction on which eugenics is based. This means, for Macciocchi, the elimination of a sexual energy for women:

*[Fascism uses] the skeleton of a language or a particular metalanguage to address women. The body of fascist discourse is rigorously chaste, pure, virginal. Its central aim is the death of sexuality.*⁴

While violence, like patriarchy, pre-dates capitalism, it has developed new



expressions and generated new forms of control and channeling. It has also, as I have already mentioned, generated new forms of analysis and explanation. It has been argued, by Sartre and Marcuse among others,⁵ that violence occurs because, as men, we too are victims: of the aggressive alienation of work, of the constant bombardment of our senses and egos by capitalist media (including advertising). Our isolation in the work place and the frustrations and schizophrenia induced by the lack of control that goes with it — so the argument goes — supplies ripe conditions for individual aggression. And — it continues — because we eventually return to the home the most available object of aggression is the woman. Where work becomes scarce (as in Britain now) violence is more readily enacted on other men as well as women, and becomes more of a public show, gang based rather than simply individual. We could add that racial and class tensions also become involved at this point.

Now at one level that is a convincing argument, and one that I would offer limited support. Yet it remains both descriptively evasive and non-explanatory. It doesn't confront the issue of why, after all, it is men on the whole who are violent and women who are the victims of that violence (though, as I have said before, this means neither that women are passive as victims, nor that they don't have the capacity to strike back with their violence). Because to the extent that we are victims, we still hold a power — *as men* — to enact rage and authority on those who have no power, or who have struggled for it against enormous odds. And despite the authority vested in us as men — as husbands, fathers, professionals — we still choose, deliberately or otherwise, to enact that power with the hand, to communicate not in a language of gentleness but in and through the skin.

The Language of Sexual Violence

I am interested in the way we, as individual men, use violence and develop something of a habit of it. In a general sense the will to violence and the enactment of it depend on an inheritance of the dynamics outlined in the last section. But there is still a complex process by which we learn its use and become, according to or against our will, agents of the power of patriarchy. I should stress here that even the most apparently gentle of men need consistently to deal with violence, either their own or that of others, and to recognize that even if we do not ourselves behave violently we bear the threat to women and a variety of minority groups.

How do we learn, in the first place, to speak a language of domination? There are many reasons, some of which can be seen if we look at what happens as we go from birth to what we have learned to call adulthood. The language we speak to our mothers moves, in that time, from the most intimate and sensual — the shared utterances of skin and first speech — to the tyrannical, the instrumental and the dismissive. At some time between birth and, say, 20, we learn to recognize our mothers as servant, nurse, giver of birth — that is, as socially inferior beings from whom, by a process we learn to ignore or disparage, we have somehow sprung. In this conflict between recognition and denial we lose the language of intimacy and the knowledge of our mothers we must once have had. The reality of the woman who gave birth to us and brought us up is reduced in our perceptions to its physicality.

This is the first violence, the severing of intimacy. We learn to identify with the father, real or absent, either through his example and teaching, or through the powerful indoctrinations of the media and education. Ironically, as sons we are in a position both to dominate and to be

dominated. We dominate because, as male children, there is some special status attached to us and our development. We are encouraged to demand from our mothers, and later from other women, the nurturance and physical care that our early helplessness made necessary. We learn quickly that there is no need for us to produce the minutiae of our material or emotional lives: it will be done for us while we get on with the job of becoming men.

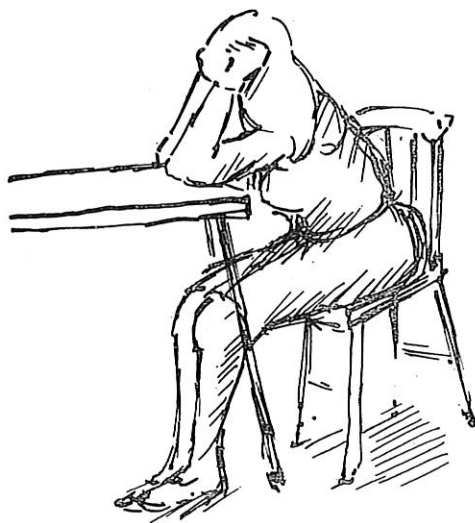
Many of us, I think, become little tyrants in the course of this development. A conflict arises, however, between our sense of the power thus given to us, and the everyday position of the mother in the home. While it is generally the case that discipline is ritualised in the province of the father — that is, we are dealt with when He comes home — the small and seemingly inconsequential disciplines and controls are enacted by the mother, especially at the early stage. While the generalized and dramatic discipline of the father engenders respect and in some cases awe, partly because of his physical presence and partly because of his continual absences from the home, the littler disciplines of the mother come into conflict with our sense of her as servant and nurturer. I can remember early expressions of my own violence being 'caused' in this way by the indignant resentment I felt at being punished by someone who was simply a physical presence and one who, at the same time, was clearly scorned and not respected by my father. Even as an adolescent the bitterness and rage I felt at my father's unjust tyranny of discipline didn't make me as indignant and resentful as my mother's more desperate and less damaging methods of discipline.

It seems to me as well that the father, seeing the naked conflict between the dominating and the being dominated, challenges his own intimacy with the



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mother and sides with the son. This is what happens in the film *Ordinary People*, in which the director takes the side of father and son, seeing them as the 'natural' allies against the mother and eventually forcing her out of the script altogether. That didn't happen in the same way to me, but I recall as I think about it an ongoing struggle in which my father attempted to enlist my support against my mother, usually in terms of my intellectual development. My refusal for a variety of reasons to comply with this engendered its own set of violences, which operated through a kind of rage and fear at the power over me of this distanced, petty man.

The violence we enact first against our mothers is sometimes physical: we push them away, or hit out, or 'terrorise' in our boyish games. Or, as we grow older, it is carried through a look, through silence, or through tone. As we become adults, have girlfriends, lovers, wives, and mates, we have already learnt the habits of violence which, to my mind, become almost so automatic as to be inevitable in some form: whether the violence is enacted on someone else or turned inwards in self-destructiveness, it is still there, part of the abrasive conflict between ourselves and the world.

One way of understanding this I think is to look at the languages of men which precede violence against women and to a certain extent against other men as well: languages which, as I have already discussed with reference to the article

by Macciocchi, reduce women to their physicality while organizing their sexuality around a reproductive or passive model, and release men to determine the range and variety of their own sexuality. I don't, here, mean language merely as the spoken or written word, but as the range of means by which relationships are communicated and articulated. As words are a way of organizing thought and perception, so fucking, for example, is a way of organising desire. If our desire is tied up with the kind of attitudes to women discussed so far then that will become apparent in our fucking. If we are challenged by the woman we desire, then it is inevitable that fucking in some way becomes violent, involving the play of physical power which is the most concrete basis for our domination.

As agents of patriarchy, reproducing it to a greater or lesser degree as individual men, we have developed a language of what I would like to call determinations. This, I should stress, is a language which cuts across class and racial boundaries and is present in educated and illiterate speech alike. The articulate language of academia is just one example, albeit a very powerful one, of this 'language of determinations'. Because it is limited and to a certain extent fossilized, it can be learnt by passing through endurance tests in the development of specialized vocabularies. What I mean is something more basic: it is a language which, on the whole, is removed from the minutiae of private life and which reflects a concern

with broad, assumed categories of behaviour and perception.

Our Daily Needs

We learn such a language during the process discussed earlier of growing into adulthood. But it doesn't stop there. Most of us, as men, have not on the whole *had* to attend to the satisfaction of our daily needs. At work, these are supplied by the employer and frequently administered by women and low-paid workers — especially non-white people — such as tea women, secretaries, and cleaners. This will vary according to class position: bosses have secretaries, workers don't. But the structure of the patriarchal-capitalist work force is such that even the worst paid male workers can be sure that there will be someone, usually a woman, less skilled and less well paid and doing more shit work. If not, then there is the home where our needs are supplied by mothers, wives, girlfriends and daughters. What is most extraordinary is that it is not just a single, narrow set of needs that is satisfied by women, but a majority of them. Our subsistence is supplied, our egos are cosseted either by a tactful woman companion or by some victory in the war for possession of women as objects, our frustrations are soothed and our desire received. Where work and the family, as two separate domains, do not supply these needs they can be obtained from women in other ways. Most significantly, pornography and prostitution have taken on the dual

roles of catering for those who are not 'successful' in the normal domains, and of supplying us with the most plastic, malleable objects of desire. Pornographic images are unreal in the sense that they are filtered technically and structurally to remove the wrinkles. But they change to keep slightly ahead of the current mode of objectification. In *Penthouse*, for example, it is no longer enough that women are portrayed as inviting men to devour and demolish their bodies, but narratives are constructed around individual models to allow a more personalized access to the image. What remains the same is that such images could only be the products of objectification, and cater for a perception in which there is nothing more to women than a physical willingness to be penetrated. The same is to a certain extent true of prostitutes. The difference there is that money and reality intrude and deny the possibility of complete control by men. Out of this, I think, and out of a parallel moral conflict in men engendered by the dual role of women as 'damned whore and god's police', comes the attenuated vulnerability of prostitutes to male violence.

This satisfaction of our ongoing daily needs has, on the whole, given us as men the freedom and opportunity to develop a language which need confront and contain only the truth of our own, self-contained, masculinist world. Our assumptions and perceptions thus become so generalized as to part company with the recurring machinery of daily life. It is frequently pointed out that men are perfectly good at doing things which need some general engineering perceptions, but that the finer details are often missed out. I think that's very true. We need look only as far as the kitchen or child's bedroom to see it in action. I remember being taken aback and mortified when I was looking after children on a daily basis and was pleased with myself for the success I was having in getting them dressed in the morning. The problem was, I kept asking their mother what they should wear, where the socks and knickers and other little things were kept, until she got so pissed off that she pushed me aside and did it herself. It is a question, I think, of men failing to take responsibility for the things we regard as petty but which are primary and essential to life.

The fact that as men we are taught and encouraged to think and feel in generalities means that we demean those areas of production which we see as petty. For the most part, it is women who carry out those functions, and they therefore take on an appropriate status. Those of us who have somehow been forced to recognize the importance of such activities find that the recognition challenges our sense of our own importance so thoroughly that we can frequently become abusive as a result. An example: seeing myself as a writer, I often locked myself away from

the house I was living in to get on with the job of writing, which I valued very highly and expected everyone else to value as well. This meant that childcare, cooking, and cleaning up became the responsibility of those whose work was less important than mine. This is a familiar scenario. What I think is significant is that when I was challenged about my withdrawal, physically and emotionally, I became frustrated and resentful that she did not understand the importance of what I was doing. I also managed to channel guilt into my response, which ended in clenched fists, verbal abuse, and finally my kicking a hole in the kitchen door. I suspect that in various ways the same kind of violent response has been experienced by most men.

'Nagging'

The most common experience of such a response is to what we have learned to call nagging. Nagging is insistence. Yet as men at work or in education we live daily with many forms of insistence to which our response is different. Why is it, then, that when it is women in the home who insist that we recognize a need or that we do something really useful, we often respond in rage or assault? One reason is that what is being insisted on frequently confronts us with what we want to evade, thus forcing us to consider or act on something which alters our sense of ourselves. Another is because it denies the harmony, agreement and collusion on which our authority and importance are based. What makes it irritating to the point of violence is that this is a truth coming from nowhere, from beneath us. The supposed invisibility of its source has changed, and we are confronted with what we do not wish to accept. Thus, for those of us involved in alienated work situations, the expected language of comfort and ego-building has altered and become a language nearing truths that are threatening in both their sense and their delivery.

Because women are understood in terms of their reproductive function, their domestic position, and their physicality, it is in those terms that the phallic power of male sexuality is expressed in penetration. Because they operate for us in the physical domain, it is women's bodies we penetrate. When we can't penetrate women's minds we deny their importance, evade their questioning, and relegate them to petty categories. For the most part this works, and over the centuries women have been forced to comply by developing languages of their own which we call 'intuition', 'gossip' and so on. It is when that language threatens to move out of our control, or challenges our understanding and authority, that we become violent. Because it is only through abuse, assault and battering, that we can establish and maintain the dominance which supplies us with our sense of ourselves.

Similarly, when women begin to assert their own sexuality, especially if that does

not involve a dominant position for the man, the response is frequently automatic violence (though sometimes it is organised as in gang rape). Attacks on lesbian women, on prostitutes and women who appear aggressive in some way (for example, academics) seem to me the result of this kind of reaction. A combination of phallic arrogance and threat is involved. In the more frequent cases of rape within the family, for example, the threat may not be there but the arrogance is, on top of the assumption because a girl or a woman is no more than her body, it doesn't really matter.

Given the reality of violence, it has become the habit to explain it away as a legitimate response to nagging, or an urgency of desire. Were I to explain it that way to a judge and jury at the Old Bailey I would probably, on recent evidence, get away with it. Where the extent of violence becomes intolerable, as in the case of the Yorkshire Ripper murders, we either reduce the question to one of "individual psychosis" and thus evade our own complicity, or fall back upon our position as "protectors". Much of the public urgency surrounding the Ripper investigation was the indignant response to the threat Sutcliffe posed to other men's women. Indirectly, the same response made it possible for prosecuting council Sir Michael Havers to make a moral distinction between the prostitutes and the murder of women who were girlfriends or daughters.

Much of what needs to be done is being done now. Women are organising perhaps more than they have ever done before to resist and combat the proliferation of sexual violence. But rather than retreating into silence, men need to come out now with attempts at getting to the bottom of why we resort to violence, and doing something about it at that level. Pious moralism is more dangerous even than silence. This article, while making no claims to being exhaustive, is an attempt to move the discussion of violence on to our ground, where we can make some sort of contribution to understanding and resistance.

Peter Bradbury

Notes:

1. Two accounts of this history that I have found useful and absorbing are Ann Foreman, *Femininity as Alienation*, London, Pluto, 1977; and Eli Zaretsky, *Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life*, NY, 1976.
2. Marie-Antonietta Macciocchi, "Female Sexuality in Fascist Ideology", *Feminist Review*, 1, 1979.
3. *Ibid.*, p.69.
4. *Ibid.*, p.75.
5. See Herbert Marcuse, "Aggressiveness in Advanced Industrial Society", in *Negations*, London, 1968; and Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, London, 1974.

THE POLITICS OF NON-VIOLENCE

Peace and love, or revolution? How often I've been caught in this dilemma when discussing social change! I can neither ignore the arguments that so many revolutions have led to escalating violence and the power changing hands from one group to another nor, on the other side, can I ignore the reality that there are always people who are oppressed, denied their rights, homeless or starving. Such a discussion always seems to polarise the arguments as though we either need peace and love or revolution.

Linked to this dilemma is the one about personal change or political change. My initial involvement in left-wing politics — opposition to nukes and uranium mining in Australia — was a frustrating experience. Particularly in large meetings I found it so hard to say what I wanted in the way I wanted, and I often ended up silent and feeling frustrated and angry. Only more recently have I begun to realise the extent to which traditional left-wing activity is male defined. And that everybody has something to contribute, whether it is ideas, experiences or questions. At mass demonstrations the organisers often treated us like sheep, and it has seemed that my presence has only been important for the numbers. When it came to the crunch, say in a confrontation with the police, even though I was scared I knew I was supposed to act tough. Sometimes I saw myself as a failed radical, and as a reaction I gravitated towards the personal growth movement. After a little trans-actional analysis and some effectiveness training, I started thinking more about consciousness raising. I helped to form a men's group, where we supported each other in the changes that we as individuals were trying to make in our lives. Although the personal growth movement has helped to change my life, it has never been enough. I don't want my life split into *either* personal growth, *or* political activity; *either* getting more in touch with feelings, *or* being out in the streets campaigning. Through non-violent politics I can see the beginnings of another way, a way which involves some sort of synthesis of the two . . . a way of living the revolution as well as waging it.

Civil Disobedience and Arrest

My initial involvement with non-violence was at a day-long workshop in Philadelphia preparing for an anti-nuclear demonstration that involved civil disobedience. It was planned to close down the Stock Exchange in New York for the day on the 50th anniversary of the Crash. Meeting the expected violence of the police with a non-violent response seemed to be an appropriate tactic. At the workshop we formed an affinity group and we agreed to stick together as long as possible at the demonstration. We talked about arrest and some of us —

myself included — chose a support role — i.e. to contact solicitors and arrange bail etc. — while others of us decided that we were prepared to be arrested. For the first time I could actually talk about being scared of arrest. We also talked about violence; we did role plays on how we could respond to provocation by the police and how we could cope with agent-provocateurs. I learnt that touching someone who is angry is asking for trouble, while talking to them can help to defuse their anger. On the day of the action we failed to close the Stock Exchange, simply because there were not enough of us. About one thousand people were arrested. But in other ways it was a great success. There was no violence at all, except from the police, who provoked us several times by repeatedly hitting us, tearing apart linked arms. When somebody was arrested every-



one would chant "The whole world is watching!", which made the police very self-conscious. We got a lot of good publicity. I felt the action only worked because of the preparatory work we had done and because of our shared assumptions about violence. Throughout the action it was most reassuring to know that I was not an isolated individual; I could feel the strength and support of the affinity group.

Since then I have become involved in the albeit small non-violence movement in Britain. From initially seeing non-violence as a tactic, my ideas have now broadened out to include the issues of conflict resolution, sexism, lifestyles and social change. I've learnt a lot about group dynamics, and ways to encourage participation in groups; many of the tools and techniques that we use have evolved from elsewhere — the Quakers, feminists, co-counselling. As a man I find it really good to be able to work for

social change without compromising my anti-sexist politics. I feel integrated into the non-violent movement. I can live my politics — or try to — and avoid some of the compromises that have to be made in the more traditional areas of political activity.

The Myth That Violence "Works"

Instead of answering the question 'Does non-violence really work?', I'd like to question the almost universally held belief that somehow violence "works". Violence is the traditional method of resolving conflict in patriarchal society, conflicts that range from fist fights to all-out wars between nation states. (Nuclear weapons are the final 'technological solution' while 'mutually assured destruction' is a policy built on an escalating threat of violence.) From the authoritarian structure of the family we have the 'them against us' of father-against-son model of conflict resolution. Our history classes at school were full of the history of wars. And yet we are usually blind to the fact that violence often fails to achieve its objectives; that violence 'solutions' result in winners and losers; that violent revolutions have too often resulted in only the guns changing hands; that the changes that come from violent methods need to be maintained by some form of coercion; and at a personal level, men fighting men reinforces a hard ruthlessness and masculinity. As men against sexism we need to learn new ways of resolving conflicts, ways that aren't based on the patriarchal values of our fathers.

This leads on to a fundamental principle of non-violence; that our methods of creating social change need to be consistent with our ends. The way we confront patriarchy needs to contain the seeds of our post-patriarchal society. (It would be inconsistent to use violence and say 'I am going to be gentle after the revolution'.) And the ways we wage conflict need to be developed; being angry while giving the reassurance that we don't mean to kill; being open to and understanding of our opponents, while being determined to find solutions that include us all.

There are no blueprints for a non-violent revolution. But it seems clear that any struggle *against* existing power structures must also include a struggle *for* new social relationships. Ending all forms of domination is both about not co-operating with existing power structures, and about reclaiming control of our own lives. The struggle against nuclear power is also the struggle for safe and renewable sources of energy controlled by the community. As men we are struggling against patriarchy as well as learning to live and act in new ways; we are creating a new men's culture.

Hugh MacPherson

Photo: Kevin Lee



MACHISMO - POLITICS

Reagan and El Salvador



In his brilliant essay in 'The Male Machine'¹ called 'Viet Nam and the Cult of Toughness in Foreign Policy', Marc Fasteau traces through U.S. Presidents Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon and their policymakers the tendency to make their foreign policy in accordance with a strong personal desire or need to be seen as 'tough'. Fasteau details his amazement at the lack of real evidence, even for the reasons publically given, for the early involvement of the U.S. in Viet Nam, and claims, partly by analysing the language and the reported remarks of the Presidents, that such personal concepts as "tests of will" played an enormous part in the decisions that were made.

"The test of will seemed at most an end in itself rather than a means to a political end". Of Vietnam, Kennedy said "We have a problem trying to make our power credible, and Vietnam looks like the place". West Berlin he called "the greatest testing place of Western courage and will", and of the U.S. intervention of Cambodia, Nixon

said, "It is not our power but our will and character that are being tested tonight . . . When I have to face an international crisis, I have what it takes". Fasteau regards Johnson the most overt in his conscious association of aggressive foreign policy with his own sexuality; witness his remark following the bombing of targets inside North Vietnam: "I didn't just screw Ho Chi Minh, I cut his pecker off."

Men "live out their masculinity" the world over. Patriarchy. When one of those men happens to be a ruler/President of the U.S., the power he wields means that, by some crazy mathematics, the smallest twitch of his insecurity can lead directly to the deaths of thousands of men, women and children. And the expectation of most of his brothers is that he should act precisely like that.

"Power accrued to the 'can-do' men, men whose mastery took the form of visible action, not those who expressed doubts . . . To answer 'Nothing. to the question 'What can be done about disagreeable development X?' was passive, the

mark of a loser and a weakling." Towards the end of the essay Fasteau writes:

"We may even avoid . . . Vietnams of the future. But the lesson of enduring value — the lesson that our policy is in danger of being pushed in stupid, costly and dangerous directions by the cult of toughness — has not and will not be learned from public debate which does not focus critically on the existence and influence of the biases created by the masculine ideal."

In 1977 I travelled through Central America, staying a week in San Salvador. My knowledge of Latin American politics was scarcely deeper than the stereotypical western view of this collection of crazy little countries always having revolutions and coups in between harvests and hurricanes. I was on my way to Peru to look at ruins and mountains. The week I was in San Salvador General Romero had just faked another election win. Various opposition groups were "generously allowed" to hold a week-end-long mass meeting in one of the central squares of the city on the condition that they dispersed by midnight on Sunday. I was amazed at strangers coming up to me, an obvious foreigner, saying "please take our story out of El Salvador, it's impossible to tell the world what's happening here"; and in cafes coming over, telling how desperate people were, no chance of a living wage even if you have got a job; and so much fear. At midnight the meeting was still there. Tanks appeared from the side streets; some 70 people were shot there and then, the entire centre of the city sealed off again, and further hundreds killed over the next few days.

Since then, I have followed, and felt a lot closer to events there, and in Central America generally.

But I felt what I am sure many post-war Europeans have felt at their first experience of the activities of extreme fascist, militaristic regimes, so helpless, and scared, in the face of their violence. And later, safely back in England, comparatively safe at least as a middle class, straight, white man, sometimes I couldn't help thinking how peripheral, trivial were our concerns, politically and in the Men's Movement. Hadn't some Latin American women, at the International conference and in articles in the press recently said that feminism as we know it was a largely irrelevant luxury when you are fighting for your survival?

Apart from a few statements of fact the press cuttings which follow in rough chronological order contain what people have said, rather than editorial or interpretative material². The parallels between what Fasteau talks about in relation to Vietnam and previous U.S. Presidents, and Reagan, Haig and co. and El Salvador are clear even down to the ludicrous 'evidence' story. Indeed the wide opposition which is now manifest in Congress and in the country to any major military involvement in El Salvador and the growing alarm at the brutality employed by the regime, spectacular even by Latin American standards yet sanctioned by the U.S. government, throws Reagan's investment in El Salvador into awful relief. Despite the great differences between the situation in El Salvador and Vietnam, Reagan's foreign policy stance underlines Fasteau's thesis in a particularly graphic and alarming way.

16.2.81 *Central American Representatives of Joint Commission of FMLF and FDR*³:
"The trouble with the U.S. decision makers is that they believe the propaganda they themselves have invented, and then design policy on the basis of those myths."

18.2.81 'In a briefing to Congressional leaders in Washington, the Secretary of State, General Haig said there was "hard evidence" that left-wing guerrillas in El Salvador were receiving arms from Cuba, Ethiopia and Vietnam.'

23.2.81 'Mr. Haig told Allied ambassadors in Washington that the United States "will not remain passive in the face of this Communist challenge . . . and it's time that Cuba and the other nations that seek to subvert other countries wake up to the fact that we have a new Administration, a new national resolve, and we will

take the steps that are needed to keep the peace any place in the world — and that includes El Salvador . . . We believe in all sincerity we have no alternative but to act to prevent forces hostile to the U.S. and the West from overthrowing a government on our doorstep, particularly when that government offers the best hope of progress towards moderate democracy."

The Americans are leaning on evidence drawn from guerrilla documents captured over the past few weeks. These, they maintain, show plainly the extent outside countries' involvement in the supply and shipment of arms to the people's revolutionary army.

Ex-El Salvador Army Captain, now joined the FMLN⁴, speaking of his experience of the Army: "beheading and sexual mutilation were standard procedures".

4.3.81 'Mr Haig views the conflict in El Salvador as a test of U.S. will.'

6.3.81 'In Washington, the row about American policy in El Salvador continued with claims that Cuban and Russian "interference" there had become a test of President Reagan's resolve.'

5.3.81 Lord Carrington: "I think that President Reagan had no alternative, in the light of what is happening and the subversion by the Soviet Union and Cuba, to support the present Salvadorian Government."

7.3.81 Reagan: "The situation here, you might say, is in our front yard . . . It isn't just El Salvador. What we are doing is going to the aid of a Government that asked for help against guerrillas and terrorists . . . who aren't just aiming at El Salvador but who are aiming at the whole of Central and South America, I'm sure, eventually North America."

By aiding the defence forces, the U.S. was "Helping forces which are keeping human rights in El Salvador."



March 81 '8000 Salvadoran refugees attempted for two days to cross the River Lempa . . . while the Salvadoran Air Force dropped bombs and strafed them, and the Army fired mortar shells and machine guns.'

FDR/FMLN representative in France:

" . . . repression without precedent like that of Sumpul near the Honduran border, where pregnant women were mutilated, raped, and their foetuses removed from the wombs with machetes."

12.3.81 'The U.S. yesterday declined to support the appointment of a special U.N. investigator into human rights violations in El Salvador, after the U.N. Human Rights Commission called for an end to the supply of arms to the country . . .'

April 1981 *Bulletin of El Salvador Solidarity Campaign*:⁵
'Over 1500 children, women and old people were fleeing towards the Honduran border to escape from

'cleaning operations' by the Salvadoran army around San Francisco Gotera . . . They had take refuge in caves . . . The army received reports of people hiding in caves and without warning filled them with poisonous gas. Those who tried to escape from the cave were killed by artillery fire . . . There were no survivors . . .

Reagan: "Those who say we are in a time when there are no heroes, they just don't know where to look."

27.4.81 'Government forces have massacred 13,000 people in one year.'

El Salvador Commission on Human Rights:

"We do not know what the chemicals are that do this to the skin, but it strips it all off. There is a body of a young woman, her torso dressed in a bright patch-work T-shirt, the flesh on her face stripped to the skull" . . . Decapitated bodies, children, students, trucks full, lorryloads, breasts cut off, eye balls shot out, explosive bullets entering through the chest and exiting through the head, and always the tell-tale signs of the security forces, thumbs tied behind the victims' backs with nylon rope. Anything vile you might ever imagine could happen to a human body . . ."

May 81. Spare Rib. Miriam Galdemez, FDR representative in Europe:

"Nobody has seen any Russian sub-machine guns or tanks in El Salvador but they have seen plenty of U.S. ones . . . Tons of military arms that are being used to kill the people. Green Beret paratroopers who are already inside the country. We are also fighting U.S. imperialism, which has dominated our country and backed the oligarchy, because the oligarchy does its dirty work. What people don't know is that the U.S. has been intervening in El Salvador for years training army officers in techniques of counter insurgency; spying; imposing programmes of population control; sterilising women without their consent; dumping dangerous drugs which kill us. Many things. Had it not been for the U.S. my people would have been at the door of their liberation many years before now."

El Salvador Solidarity Campaign Bulletin:

James Cheek, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs: "We have never maintained that this government (El Salvador) has broad-based popular support . . . it is not looking for popular support." Salvador Army officer: "If it took the slaughter of 32,000 in 1932 to quell the revolt, and if it takes the slaughter of 100,000 today, so be it."⁶

15.6.81 Noam Chomsky:

"The cold war . . . a marvellous device by means of which the domestic population could be mobilised in support of aggressive and interventionist policies under the threat of the superpower enemy . . . It is a very unstable system and could blow up at any time. But planners of both sides are willing to accept this risk for the utility of being able, in the case of the U.S., to control its Grand Area, and of the Soviet Union, its minor Grand Area."

9.6.81 'The document on which the State Department relied to persuade Allied leaders to back American policy in El Salvador was yesterday described by its principal author as "misleading" and "overembellished".'

El Salvador Solidarity Campaign bulletin:

' . . . a leaked draft document from the CIA's Foreign Assessment Centre concludes "the evidence (see 18.2, 23.2.81 etc) is murky at best and at times there is none". However the CIA's own report may never see the light of day. Defence Secretary Caspar Weinberger and CIA director William Casey are "asking" the team to change their conclusions. Philip Agee, former CIA agent analysing the reported

documents "captured" from the guerrillas which the U.S. based their international media campaign on foreign involvement in El Salvador (except their own) has stated they are complete fabrications.'

To look at the question of U.S. policymakers' decisions from Fasteau's angle in this way is not of course to present a total picture of the overall process. For one thing it overlooks the extraordinary hypocrisy whereby they seek to divert attention from the massive U.S. military aid to the regime in El Salvador, by affecting horror about, and pouring condemnation on any supposed or actual flow of arms to the guerrillas from elsewhere. (It makes little difference which.) It also concentrates, in the manner of most of the U.K. press coverage, from which many of the cuttings above are taken, on the rottenness of the Junta and the stance of the U.S., rather than on the strengths of the FMLN itself, the powerful involvement of women in all aspects of their struggle, the support for its ideas throughout the Salvador society. These last are anyway of little concern to Reagan, who sees them mainly as representing this thing out there he feels he has to fight.

Also, as Fasteau describes, it is characteristic that this aggressive posturing shows itself mainly in foreign, rather than domestic policy. Not even a U.S. President could afford electorally to gamble in such a way in the field of home issues. There is perhaps an analogy to be drawn here by taking the 'masculine' imagery further: Reagan needs his support at home at all costs, to stay where he is. Away from home he can be aggressive and disgusting in his affairs on the side with this or that little number. Reagan keep your prick out of El Salvador.

And everywhere else.

Nor does this piece intend to claim that U.S. Presidents and secretaries of state have a monopoly on such motivations in foreign policy. It does exhibit itself peculiarly blatantly in them because of the premium placed at the heart of American life on tough maleness. The "winning" of the West. The appalling irony of Reagan's past(?) career, acting cowboys. But the covering of personal insecurities through aggressive political action is worldwide, not least in the arms race and in the whole question of nuclear "defence".

To see this process, and to see it reinforced by the expectations of masses of people, is to have no option but to put male sexual politics at its most vital in a place very much more central to world affairs than it has so far occupied. It's precisely because political action is largely defined by, measured by such supposed qualities as decisiveness, courage, will, that so many world leaders, male and quasi-male have wrought such havoc for so long on the poor and oppressed, on women and all of us. If non-sexist men together could grow to exert influence politically, (as women, and in some areas gays, have in the U.S.) by supporting feminist politicians, and encouraging any hint in male politicians of a rejection of the traditional ways of operating, misusing trust and power, abusing opponents, macho posturing, then there will be a change.

Tom Weld

Notes:

1. Marc Fasteau, 'The Male Machine' Dell Publishing Co., New York, 1975.
2. All quotes from 'The Guardian' or 'The Sunday Times' except where otherwise indicated.
3. FMLF and FDR; FMLF - anglicised initials of FMLN, see note 4. FDR - Democratic Revolutionary Front, now part of the FMLN.
4. FMLN; Faribundo Marti Liberation Front, see note 6.
5. El Salvador Solidarity Campaign, 29 Islington Park Street, London, N.1.
6. 1932 was the year of the peasant rebellion lead by Faribundo Marti. It was suppressed, with 32,000 deaths, by the military government which seized power in 1931 and has remained in one form or another ever since. The FMLN is named in honour of the peasant leader.

A SIMPLE SHIFT

The blood forms colour in the light
neck, clothed in red wool
turns maroon in despair
as the knife cleaves
jaggedly through skin, bone and life.
The pleasure of watching the shimmering arc
catch and glance in the light
becomes pained distress as steel slices.

I bleed
images of running out
pouring streams haunting dreams
kaleidoscopes of colour
returning always returning
to the scarlet becoming maroon
in a change of light
A simple shift

Martin Humphries

Movement

Ever darkening the landscape of our thought
Are the realities of our everyday lives
The tightening of pressure
The awareness of how little we have done
The politics of those in power
Breaking through our imagined movements.

July 1980

to you

i tried to say what i felt
clumsily it lies on the page
small, stark, unreal
conveying — i hope —
what i feel

writing is so hard
lightly the meanings change
from head to hand

how much more
could i show you
but no it's not to be
this letter must convey it all
i hope it does.

Being in a crowded room

The walls of this place
weep with tears
voices never ceasing
sounds which carry and splinter
whilst those unperturbed
in fragile tranquility
continue never ceasing
for fear of the silence.

Martin Humphries

SCARY MAN

Deeper than the heart of this blue night,
my dear,
I thrust and plunge,
velvet bruises cupped in my hands, torn
roses at my feet.
I penetrate
and swim about,
arrow in your veins,
peaked mountain under the breast.
Bitter with your stillness
I plough your nature for my seed
searching for new angles.
I am the transgressor,
riding the waves.
To be the other
that is my power,
and my prison;
but it has its satisfactions
and momentary escapes.

Andy Metcalf
3 September 1980

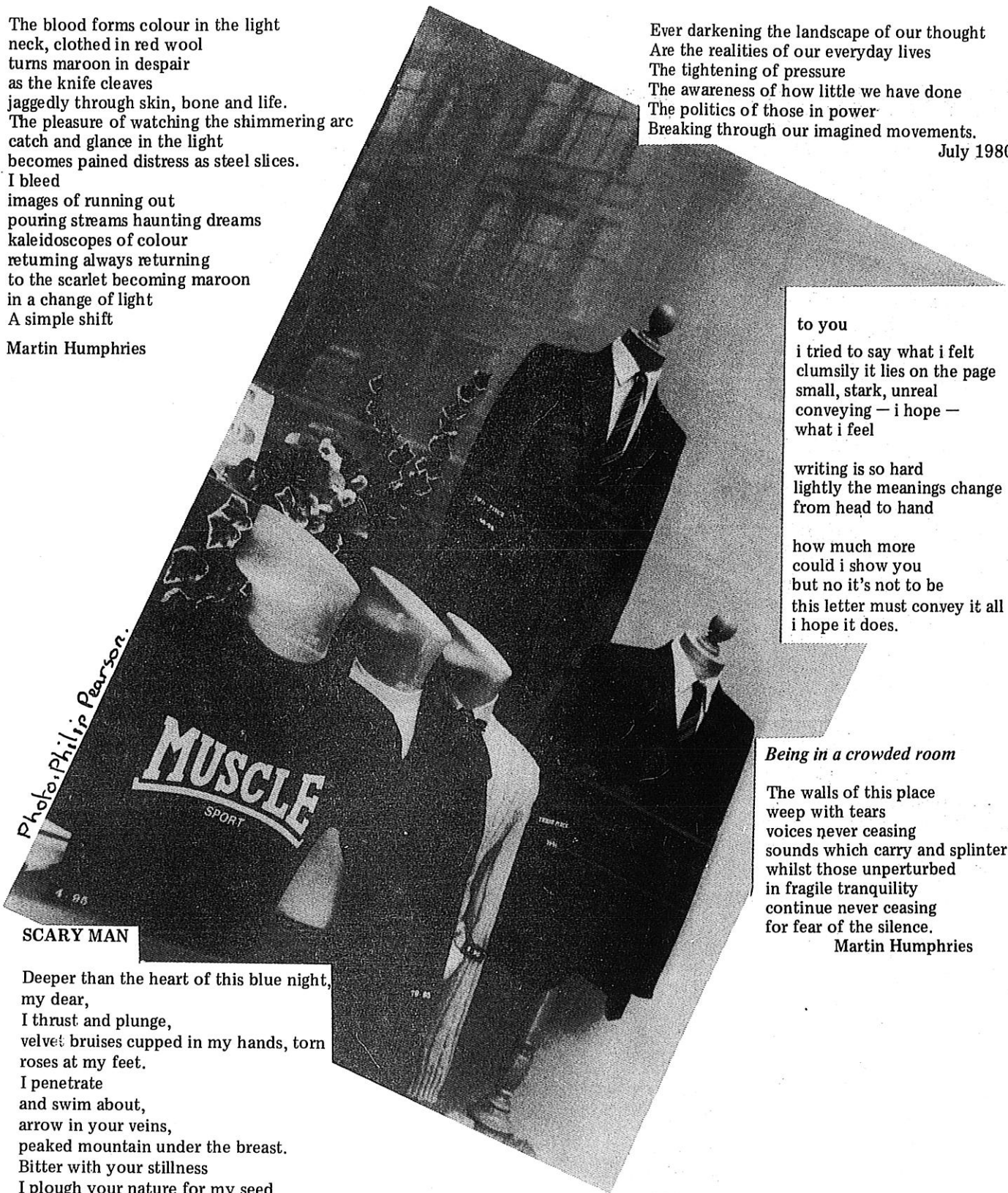
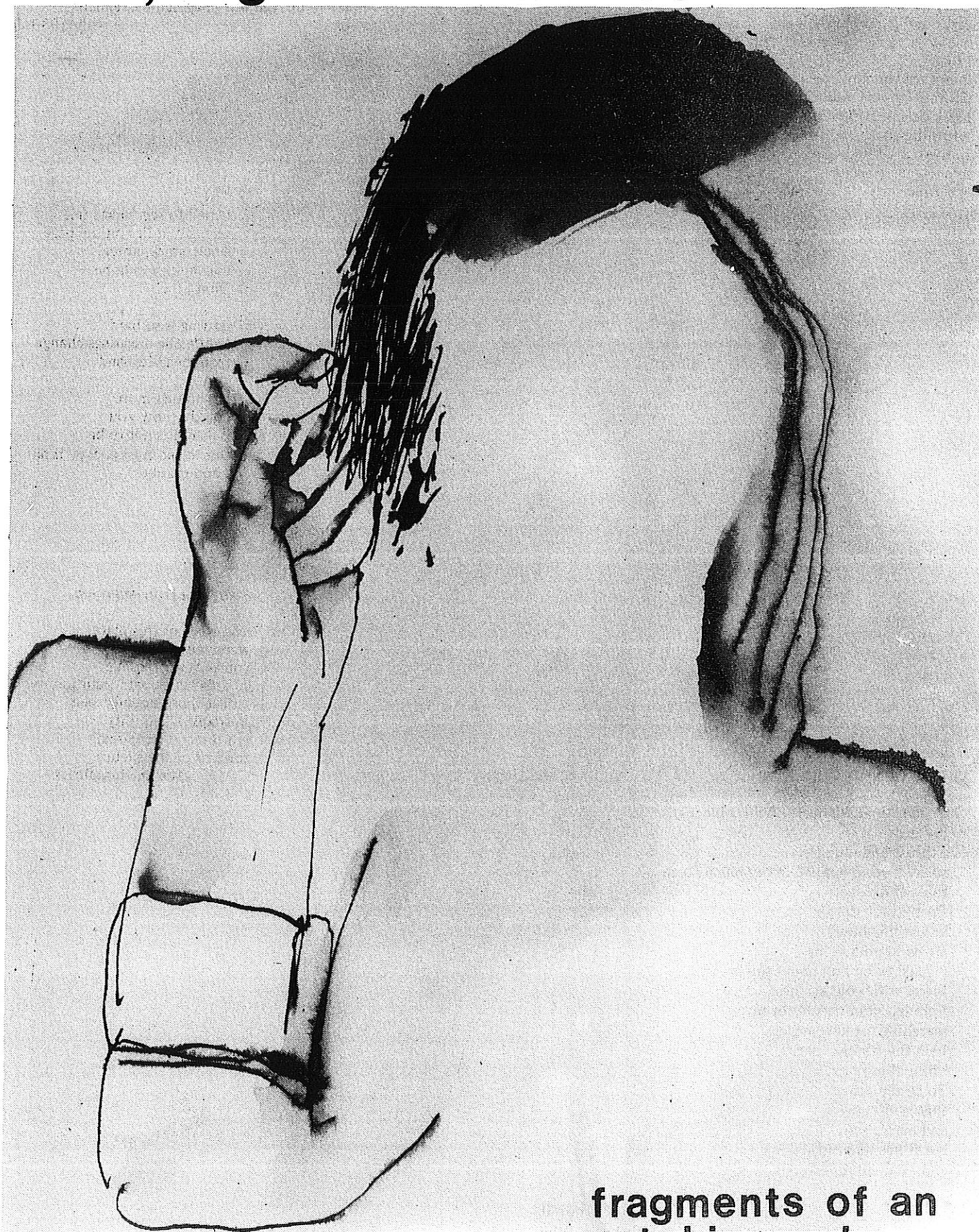


Photo: Philip Pearson.

love, anger and violence



Tom Weld

fragments of an
autobiography

writing this felt like diving into a pool full of deep, dark and light places right down. When I was out of breath I burst to the surface gasping and after a rest dived down into it all again. This pool was sometimes a simple image of my work. Other times it felt bloody, flesh-torn and raw. I needed a place where I could see; I felt so exposed that I could only be a while in there.

An Introduction

I wrote out a sequence of small histories about me and love and anger and violence, and I felt swamped by the volume of memories and confused in attempts to analyse and conclude. I resisted writing. The resistance I felt consisted of, on the one hand, a judgement which said all violence against women is bad, is wrong, is awful — big heavy judgement. On the other hand, another judgement surfaced which said — I should understand my process completely before I write about it, before I do anything about it at all, I should have a total understanding of what it is about, where I have learned to be this way in my life, how to change and what to do about it in the world. I was bound up between these opposing judgements.

In the middle was I; I feel anger towards women, I've had a lot of anger that I have projected out onto women in general and specifically. Part of the way that anger has manifested itself has been in violent, in murderous rage. Sometimes some of this has crept into my relations with women — most of the time, its totality has surfaced only during my work in Gestalt therapy.*

I don't have answers which solve this issue for you or for the world: all I can say is that I can make a choice about what I do with my violence. I can choose whether or not to project it and inflict it on women. I can choose to recognise when I am angry and to identify what it is I am really angry about.

So, for me it's OK to feel anger and it's OK to feel violent — it's what I do with those feelings that matters.

*As I wrote this I began to go tense in my abdomen, just below my diaphragm — I was a little frightened to write that last statement. So, message to myself, it's OK to be me. I can't be anybody else now. I can just look at my process, work on it** and understand how I am and allow myself to change. I can't do anything else.*

I can start by saying I feel confused and sometimes paralysed — from this, by listening to myself, I can realise that I confuse myself, that I get swamped by memories, thoughts and judgements. I realise that if I focus on what I feel now, I need not be confused; I can recognise that I feel all the things I have begun talking about, I can throw out the judgements and get on with the changing.

A thought about public action against violence against women: it feels dodgy mentioning it because it is so easy to take a position, to be coming from the "all violence against women is bad" judgement and therefore I must "make a stand" against it. I could do this and feel "I'm against violence against women", but the question of my own potential for violence remains.

Some of my Process

I talked with my lover, Peggy, at a moment when I felt totally stuck and unable to write any more. I realised that in writing about past relationships I was stirring stuff in me that wasn't yet finished. I had reached another point of change and was resisting.

My strongest feeling — once I let go of the need to write — was that I'd been tricked. That I haven't ever had enough love — not only was I short-changed but the bank was robbed. Somewhere I didn't get love — I felt hard and angry about this. In gestalt therapy I relived my birth:

"I was late being born. Labour was very hard work for my mother who had been unwell. I felt stuck in the birth canal for a while as my mother stopped pushing — I twisted and turned, feeling the struggle and nobody there to help me. I was stuck. Threatened forceps delivery, Mum made a last effort and I was born. She was too exhausted to hold me for long and I was placed away from her in a cot by a radiator."

As I spoke about this, I realised the rage I feel. Peggy asked me, had I looked at what my mother's life experience was. I hadn't. I felt this as a further pressure; not from Peggy but from in me. I stayed with the consciousness of my rage before looking out of myself.

I feel tricked. The rape fantasy (see below) and the information around my birth are parts of my truth. I am also carrying a lot more that pushes up hard to the surface and meets my resistance. It sits there. As part of working through that resistance I wrote this, in fantasy, to my mother:

*"Dear Mum,
Rage sits in me saying, 'fuck you, fuck you, fuck you' and then into 'I want to fuck you' — over and over again. This goes first to individual women I've known and then to you. It just sits there and I have judged it as bad, nasty stuff and locked it away. Then comes in my sneaking five-year-old voice — 'If I can put that stuff away underneath the me that I show to the world, I'll get love and caring from you, from any woman I am with — you, or she, won't know what I really feel.' A big sneer, nasty and exaggerated, has come across my face. I'm not going to give away my last power to you. I'm going to hold onto it, it feels like all I have left. You suck me dry, like there's an umbilical cord in reverse — you have somehow got me to look after you and by not showing me your anger, made it unsafe for me to show mine.*

But it will out. I snipe at you. I criticise you for not taking care of yourself, for your naive politics, for not being aware of stress in your body, for not expressing yourself; then, when you do, you're wrong.

Actually, as I relate out to you now, I know you too are loaded with anger from your life that you decided not to show. It seeps out of you too. You judged your anger as bad — you experienced unresolved anger and bitterness in your family and were determined not to give your children the same environment. So I never learned about anger.

You carried your anger about being left at home with us, about Dad being out at work or meetings — union and CP. You had all sorts of earlier stuff — girl/woman in a sexist Jewish family: were you loved by your father? Some poverty, anti-semitism, Nazism, relations in the camps.

I know this a bit now and I still feel you trapped me — you got me and you're still getting at me. Still telling me you love me and I'm not sure what it is you do feel. I listen to you and I don't know. As much as you hid your anger, so I picked it up from you, I felt it anyway. I haven't trusted your love for me. Now, as I grew up with anger around me unspoken and unnamed, I often imagine people are angry with me when they are not. When I do get angry with you or with other women, I punish myself because of course 'you are so vulnerable and need so much protection'.

Mum, I can write now because I have discovered a lot of what is in me. Now I can feel more for you and see a few of my games but it's still hard, and all the above still has a hold on me and I'm still not ready yet to forgive you."

How have I reached some of this knowledge?

In talking to my mother (in fantasy) in gestalt therapy, I have moved between "I hate you" and "hold me" and "I'll do whatever you want" and "poor, poor me".

In one session, my anger at a lover turned into an acted-out rape of her. I was "fucking" and beating this large cushion.

The anger went away from her to being against all women and then onto my mother. I finally went through all the rage and became very small and wanting to be held. ("I want to fuck you/I want you to fuck me/I want you to love me".) In my imagination, I became five years old.

When I was ten I was left out of trips to the woods near my school with a girl who showed her knickers to groups of boys. I was asked once and refused. I was interested but scared.

Between the ages of eleven and twelve, I had a sexual relationship with a boy of the same age as me. We masturbated each other in a tent in his garden, in woods, but never in my house. He asked me to go and see some girls with him and his friends and talked about kissing with them. I didn't want to. I wasn't interested in "that". I was afraid. It wasn't long after this that I moved from Ilford to Stevenage with my family. He came once to see me — sex was the same, in some woods and fields in the sun.

It was during his visit that we played in a park with swings and slides and a girl stuck two fingers up at us, and poked a finger in and out between them. We talked from a distance. This was exciting. When we returned home and my mother asked what we had been doing, I said "Throwing mud up the slide". I had felt guilty, lied and got told off for what I said I'd done!

When I was thirteen, in the third year at my secondary school, I talked with a friend in the classroom about "chucking" girlfriends. I said I would never do that. The statement underneath that for me is I would never let go voluntarily, I wouldn't say goodbye.

Between the ages of thirteen and fourteen, I began to have more contact with girls. I went to a Church of England youth club — kissing would be in a dark side passage. I was clumsy and nervous and instantly dependent and wary of rejection. I was already on the road to "falling in love". Told off and banned by an angry father for "getting his daughter home late", I wrote an obsequious, apologetic letter. I was shirked for this and still not allowed to see her again.

At fifteen, I had intercourse for the first time. In a darkened room, I orgasmed almost on coming into Jane. She said I may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb so we made love again — I was no "better" that time and didn't orgasm. Jane had pursued me at school. This was my first love affair — before, I'd just had fantasies fenced by fear and gaucheness.

I am seventeen. I went for a walk with Jane. She was in my class at school. I had fallen in love with her. I felt high and often full of wonder with her and then pain and incompleteness when away from her. I planned, purchased (bottom-drawer) and fantasised my way into a married future — children, security, for ever, etc.

I remember the excitement of seeing her half-naked for the first time — we were in a wood together. I felt admiration and amazement. I had no doubts about having what "we" wanted. I don't remember feeling that she and I were separate and distinct. "We" were the one feeling that I felt and she reinforced that for me. I didn't think or question what happened very much, if at all.

We would fuck in the hallway of her parents' council house whilst they watched TV six feet away. I would come very quickly — "was it nice?". I didn't know anything about a woman's sexuality then. The being in her was enough. Now I know — then there was nothing else, no information for her or for me. She seemed excited by our discovery and adventure. We would fuck in an armchair in the kitchen after Sunday tea — the danger of her parents breaking from Sunday Night at the London Palladium made it all the more urgent and fun.

I went to Scotland for three weeks and she wrote to me at every youth hostel — I wrote back. Long, long love letters. That's how it was, or so I thought.

One day, we were walking along a main road through the centre of our town; woods on either side. We were by a stile that had to be crossed en route to her house. In some way she'd told me that she wanted to end our relationship. I remember feeling numb, feeling a heavy shock like a blow to my head and abdomen. I turned towards her, she was on my left, and began strangling her. I remember the power of my hands around her throat, my total rage at her rejection of me. She went backwards — she was hurt. I stopped. As she got over her fear and choking, I apologised again and again, saying I was just frightened and I couldn't stand it if she left. I was desperate.

What her process was after that I don't really know. We stayed together. I don't remember talking about it with her.

A friend, Martin Humphries, read this and was horrified by the time we stayed together after that — it was about 1½ years. At the time I had little self-knowledge; I blocked my attack on Jane right out as something unpleasant. I suppose I didn't question because at the time I secretly enjoyed the violence for the power I had to get what I wanted, and be in control of the woman I was getting it from. I won that time.

An End

At the point where this writing began to flow together, I had a sense of victory and a sexual urge. I masturbated using pornography to turn on. The pictures that worked for me were those where the man was being fucked by the woman — yet behind my flicking for these pages, was a search for those photos in which women were being "taken" by the man and being passive, being fucked.

I came safely with no retaliation from the objects "who" excited me — I was still translating my feeling of power in my work into a way of scoring over women, of beating them; the undercurrent of violence was still there. This is all a very deep game and it caught me again.

The End

All this leads me back to the beginning of this article and how, for me, it is not enough to take a simplistic, rigid position against violence against women — our own violence as men will out so long as we repress and seek to forget "it" and the pasts from which we come.

It is also not enough for me to stay constantly in trauma — that also leads to dysfunction; I could remain locked in an inner, exhaustive and confusing turmoil. For me "An End" expressed a point of transition. Here I am aware of how I function at the moment in relationship with the world, and particularly with women. With that awareness I can choose to change, and in changing, act on the world.

Cris Nickolay

* Explanatory Note on Gestalt Therapy:

Gestalt is an experiential and therapeutic learning framework developed by Fritz Perls. It is concerned with enlivening the whole person, encouraging integration of body, feelings, intellect and intuition.

The focus of attention in this work is on the minute-to-minute process of the individual and the purpose of the techniques used is to heighten awareness of that process, so that the person "working" comes to recognise and take responsibility for how she or he is living.

Dreams, body posture, breathing, guided fantasy, talking, in fantasy, to a person and then switching to discover how you imagine "they" feel towards you — all these are used to increase self-awareness.

Internal conflicts, including those left over from the past, are made explicit, thus releasing locked-in energy and allowing personal choice rather than conditioned, patterned response.

Gestalt centres upon taking responsibility. The form for this can either be one to one with a facilitator or by oneself.

** "Work on it" — see above.

who we are

Photo by Marcia Banton - oval House.



The Creches against Sexism collective developed out of the London Men's Centre collective, when the Centre closed. The London Men's Centre started after the London region men's conference in 1978, and held open meetings weekly. The four of us (Danny, Graham, Malcolm and Misha) started taking part at different times during its first year, and became members of the collective which ran the Centre. We were feeling tired with this and when the Centre lost its home and we could not find another suitable one, we decided to use our energies in other ways. There had been frequent requests by feminists to the Centre for men to take care of the children when women were at conferences. We had been organising this, and decided that continuing this activity was of particular value. So we four regrouped as the Creches against Sexism collective. We have organised one or more creches a month, ranging from two to sixty children. We have a list of about fifty helpers, who are willing to work in creches from time to time, but have not worked out a good way of getting the right number of helpers for an event — sometimes only members of the collective have turned up.

About the time we formed we had been hearing that some feminists wanted men to contribute money to feminist causes. We talked about this and decided that we would contribute a proportion of our income regularly. We give about £100 a month between us, going partly to creche equipment and general outreach but mostly to feminist causes. In the last year we have given over £700 to feminist groups (details elsewhere in Achilles Heel; some of this money came from donations to us) and have spent over £400 on childcare and £196 on outreach (mailing, advertising, etc).

We produce a bulletin every three months (sent to our creche helpers and available free at various meetings), and have held two public meetings on 'How men can act against sexism'. Members of our collective have been opening speakers at college and other groups meeting to discuss sexism. We produce self-adhesive stickers ("Men say NO to sexist ads" and "Men say NO to male violence" — 20p a sheet of 12, or £1-20 for ten sheets, postage included).

We regard it as important for our collective meetings to have time to talk about personal matters as well as organising our public activities. We would like there to be time for general consciousness-raising and consciousness-sharing, but usually

— CRECHES AGAINST SEXISM (LONDON)

find this is crowded out by talk about very immediate concerns.

We would like to see other anti-sexist men's groups engaging in public as well as private activity, and we would like groups that do so to write about their activities (in Achilles Heel or the anti-sexist men's newsletter and elsewhere) to encourage other anti-sexist men to act publicly.

If you want to get in touch with us write to *Creches Against Sexism, c/o 316 Upper Street, London N1.*

CASH AGAINST SEXISM

Money is always urgently needed to support feminist campaigns and activities. Men's average earnings are very much greater than women's, and feminists are now asking men for financial support of their activities.

You can give money directly to women's centres, rape crisis centres or women's aid groups (contact addresses can usually be found in community newspapers or shops) or to groups making appeals for money in Spare Rib, Peace News, Time Out, etc. Or you could ask feminist friends for their opinions on whom to give to. This is the best way to make a donation.

Alternatively you can make a regular payment to Creches Against Sexism (London). If all men reading this bulletin gave us £1 a week (or £5 a month) we would be able to make very many more donations to feminist projects than we can at present. Below is a list of donations already made. These amounts would have been a lot smaller were it not for the generous contributions we receive from other anti-sexist men. Many thanks to all those who've sent us money and Bankers Orders.

All donations made to us will be paid in full to feminist groups, as expenses (purchase of equipment for creches and the production and mailing of the bulletin, etc) are covered by the regular contributions made by the members of the CAS collective. We each contribute between 5% and 3% (depending on our individual circumstances) of our monthly take-home pay. Between us the members of the CAS collective contribute £100 a month into the CAS kitty.

We have been thinking about ways in which the decisions on how the money is distributed could be shared or handed over to women and would welcome suggestions from women on how this could be done.

Please help us help feminist projects by filling in the Banker's Order form (on letters page)

CAS (London) has given £786 in the last seven months to feminist projects. This has included the following amounts—

- £212: To women in Leeds for printing and distribution of leaflets against male violence against women. These leaflets contain the 'Poem to Jaqueline Hill'—the 13th woman killed by the Yorkshire rapist.
- £125: Towards the cost of a telephone answering machine for the Liverpool Rape Crisis Centre
- £50: To the conference in Leeds on Sexual Violence Against Women.
- £100: To London Women Against Violence Against Women.
- £50: To the Tampon Action Group. This group is combating Toxic Shock Syndrome — a violent, sometimes fatal illness, which is caused by super-absorbant tampons and is being ignored by the multinational companies which make money out of tampons.
- £442: To the National Lesbian Conference.
- £50: To help the feminist band JAM TODAY towards the cost of producing their first LP, on the feminist, non-commercial record-label Stropo Cow Records. A lot more money is needed.



TED — a short story
by Paul Morrison

It was a wet October evening. There were eleven men gathered in the hall to plan the forthcoming conference. We huddled together in a ring of chairs near the foot of the stage, and listened to the rain drumming on the tin roof. It was an old community hall near Kings Cross. We had chosen to meet there because it was central, and because one of the men, Dennis, had free access to the building.

We helped ourselves to coffee or tea in plastic cups, and sat around, edgily. Some men knew one another and were chatting. Others hunched in their seats and read the material that Dennis had provided, gathered from previous conferences. We were responding to a leaflet, sent round to men's groups in London, proposing the formation of a men's conference organising group. It was London's turn.

I knew the two men there who had written it, Dan and Clive, from a large collective house in West London. Another man I recognised from a Yoga class years back. I wasn't sure if he recognised me, and we hadn't yet had a moment to exchange glances. I picked up familiar fragments from the murmured conversations around me.

Suddenly they were interrupted. "Let's get the bloody thing started then, shall we? I've got a warm fire to get home to. Who's going to chair this meeting?"

A ripple of relief ran through the room at the fact that someone had taken an initiative. He was the oldest man there, by at least twenty years. Most of us were in our late '20s or early '30s.

"Do we really need a chairperson, Ted?", said a man on his left.

"Yes", said another man.

"No."

"There's a lot to get through."

"Let's not get stuck in these bloody arguments," said Ted, definitively. "Why don't you two kick off, since you called the meeting, and if we need a body to keep it all together we can always find one later, right?"

"Right."

The question was settled.

I had never met Ted before, though I had heard his name mentioned a number of times. He was a lecturer in Physics at a distinguished London college. He had been in a men's group in South London for several years. His voice was loud. He was short and tough-looking. Jewish. He might have driven a taxi. His hair was close-cropped, almost crew-cut, dark and greying at the temples. He continued to take command of the meeting, to move it forward and to press for practical conclusions.

He suggested that we introduce ourselves in turn, and explain what had brought us to the meeting. One by one, the men in the room described their particular isolation, and their support and commitment for the conference. For my own part I was keen on the idea, but the pressure of other commitments made me doubtful about how much time I could personally put in. The enthusiasm of these men seemed to let me off the hook, and I resolved not to come to any more meetings.

The last to speak was Ted.

"I am very, very committed to this conference," he said.

"It's about time men in men's groups stopped being so timid about themselves, and were prepared to put themselves on the line. If we think we've got something to say for ourselves, then

for God's sake let's say it. Why do we always pussyfoot around?" He addressed this question to the man next to him, who shrugged and smiled weakly. Everyone felt there was something in what Ted was saying — the tentativeness, almost coyness — of anti-sexist men could begin to cloy, but. . .

"I'll tell you what," Ted said. "Just to get the ball rolling. . . I would personally be prepared to front the money for the conference. Whatever we need to get things moving. Up to say, eight hundred. I want it back again in the end of course. So we'd better not produce a flop. But that's my . . . commitment."

"That's great, Ted."

"Thanks, Ted. That's terrific." Our gratitude echoed round the hall.

"Right then. Let's get down to business," said Ted. "Let's see what everybody else can do."

I left the meeting early, explaining my decision and the reasons for it. I pushed through the double-swing door leaving an animated knot of men rattling away under Ted's chairmanship.

The rain had thinned to a fine drizzle. Even as I stepped out into the darkness, I could hear Ted's voice, booming away inside. "A venue. I want a list of suggestions for venues. Who's going to take it on? Come on now, don't be shy."

I continued to hear about the conference from time to time through Dennis. The date had been put forward. From February, when it was originally planned, to April. They had difficulty finding a suitable building. Then it was postponed again because the new date clashed with an important women's conference, for which a number of men were organising a crèche. I didn't worry. Conferences were always postponed. Dennis dropped out of the organising group through pressure of work and I didn't hear anything for a while.

Then the leaflet came, addressed to our men's group, duplicated on yellow paper.

DO WE WANT A CONFERENCE OR NOT????

If we don't get more support from other men against sexism in London in the next few weeks, the national men's conference planned for July 8/9 *will not happen*. Where are you all? Or is the truth that you really don't care, that women are right when they say we prefer our privileges to getting off our arses and *doing something* about sexism. There will be a meeting to decide whether or not to go ahead on . . .

After a brief and tantalising burst of spring weather, April had turned cold. The hall was freezing as we huddled once more at the foot of the drab stage.

Ted was there, but apart from that I recognised scarcely anyone from the original meeting. Only a serious-faced man called Philip. And Dan and Clive from West London who I knew had left the organising group some time back and who now, like me, were responding to the call.

Altogether fifteen men.

The atmosphere was tense.

"Well it's good to see you all here," said Ted. "Where were you all before, one might ask, when this select group" — he nodded to Philip and another man on his left — "came here week after week to sort out your bloody conference for you?"

There was an aggressive silence.

"What's to be done, Ted?", one man asked.

"Don't ask me", said Ted. "Just because I've laid out £350.00 already on this venture which I stand to lose if the thing folds doesn't mean I know everything." He turned to Philip.

Philip, tall and gaunt proceeded to list all the tasks still outstanding. Ted intervened from time to time to correct him.

The question of publicity came up.

"We thought we'd put ads in *Socialist Worker*, *Socialist Challenge*, *Morning Star*, *Peace News* . . ."

"I don't remember that," said Ted. "I don't remember anyone mentioning *Socialist Worker*."

"Well, we just said Left Press, I was . . ."

"For God's sake we don't want a conference full of those sectarian hoodlums, do we? Do we have to put ads in those papers? I would rather spend the money on an ad in the *Guardian*. Or *The Times*. Reach some ordinary men."

Philip started to amend his list.

Suddenly Clive interrupted. "You can't do that." He had been fidgety and restless for the past half-hour. Now his face was white and drawn, he was so agitated he could scarcely squeeze the words out.

"You can't change it just like that," he said. "Not without a discussion. You can't just exclude all those people."

"I'm not 'excluding' them," Ted said, "If they want to come they'll come. But I won't have us putting ads in their papers. I don't want them to send their professional cadre along to enter this 'movement' of ours and manipulate it for their own ends. Believe me, I've seen it happen too many times before."

There was a murmur of disagreement from several men around the room.

"Look," said Ted emphatically. "This is not up for discussion. It's too damn late for discussion. If you wanted to come and talk about the way this conference should be set up, you should have been fifteen, twenty meetings ago. We've only got six weeks now, we want people who'll *do* things, not another bloody talking shop."

Clive shook his long hair emphatically.

"What happened to you then?" said Ted. "You were here at the beginning. Then you evaporate. Now the winter is over you are out of hibernation again, is that what it is? Well some of us have had enough."

Clive drew a breath.

"Look Ted, we appreciate how much you and Philip and . . . is it Dave? . . . have done, and how hard you've worked. That's really important and I don't want to under-rate it. But . . . well, I think the reason some of us left the group was because we didn't particularly enjoy the way things were being done, being decided . . ."

Ted bridled. "Is that meant to be directed at me? You left because you didn't like the way I act?"

"Well, yes . . . no . . . not altogether . . ."

"We might as well call a spade a spade around here."

"OK, maybe I am then."

"Did anybody else feel that? Were you all sitting there nurturing silent resentment at me?" He looked round the room.

Philip spoke up, his face flushed.

"Ted's got a lot at stake in this conference. It's his money we've been spending. He's done a lot. More than anyone. I don't see the point of raising all this."

"Thank you, Philip, but an accusation has been made. I am concerned not to let it go. If anyone has got anything else to say, let's hear it. We believe in 'letting the shit out', don't we."

There was an icy silence in the room. Ted waited for the next blow like a wounded bear ready to strike back. Then a man spoke up, a man I hadn't properly noticed before. He had kept his head bowed, so that his face always disappeared into his beard. He spoke without aggression, almost tenderly.

"To my shame, I was only at one other meeting, Ted, but in that one as well as this, you did do most of the talking. Not all of it, by any means. But a fairsize chunk."

Ted didn't know how to answer for a while.

"If other people want to talk, it's up to them to talk. You think I like having to do all the work?"

"I don't know."

Ted got up from his seat. "If you want me to drop out, I'll drop out, OK? You fellows carry on."

"Sit down, Ted."

"We didn't tell you to drop out."

"We should have spoken up."

Ted hovered for a moment, then was pulled back into his chair. Philip spoke up. "Shall we get back to the agenda?"

"What did we decide about the ads in *Socialist Worker*?"

"Let's talk about it."

"I think we should put them in. I know people in those groups who might be interested."

"I used to be one for a start. You can't cut yourself off from the rest of the left like that. Not with a government like this in power."

"Who's going to do it?"

Ted spoke little for the rest of the evening.

I only went to one more meeting. I knew a couple of men who did folksongs on sexual-political themes and I wanted to recommend them for the conference entertainment. It was a fine May evening, and the newly-constituted organising group — though slightly smaller than it had been a fortnight earlier — was in good spirits.

Ted was beginning to recover his volubility, though still relatively muted and ill-at-ease. He shook his head scornfully at one decision that went against him. "You wait and see," his look said. "If you want to screw it up it's up to you. Don't say I didn't warn you."

But on the whole he accepted his backbench role without demur.

Lists of people offering accommodation were being drawn up. Dennis offered the hall for men to sleep in as an emergency stopgap. Representations from a group of gay men about the structure of the conference were discussed. There was an argument about whether to pay some unemployed men to wash and clear up, to defray the costs of their travel, or whether to make both the responsibility of the conference as a whole. Advance registrations were even higher than hoped for.

Ted left the meeting early, saying he had to get home. After the group broke up I left the building and wandered the backstreets a while, enjoying the fine evening, and not yet feeling ready to return home.

I chose a quiet-looking pub in a side street, and went in for a pint or two to take me to closing-time. As I approached the bar I noticed Ted sitting on his own in the corner, a light and bitter on the table in front of him. I took my drink over and sat down.

He seemed ambivalent about seeing me. Wary, as though I might attack him.

"Hello Ted," I said.

"Hello", he said. "I never got your name properly."

I told him my name, and then we chatted about children for a while. He had two 'grown-up' children. His daughter was just finishing University.

"My best critic," he said. "Strongest feminist in the family. She's the only who *really* keeps me on my toes."

He was separated from his wife. "You lot are pretty young," he said. "I don't mean to be ageist. You've got a lot to go through."

I asked him what he thought about what had happened in the meetings.

"You're naive," he said. "Too nice. One day you are all going to be shot."

Was he referring to our decision to put adverts in certain left papers?

"Of course I am," he said. "You don't know those people like I do. They will use anybody. Anything. They have forgotten what life means any more. Maybe they once knew, there must have been some spark that brought them into the revolutionary movement. But now . . ."

"That might be true of a few of the leadership," I thought. "But even they must have changed. And the others, the rank

and file . . ."

"What power do they have? You are too trustful. I have seen these groups make and break little campaigns and movements like ours. Always in the end their only concern is for themselves and their organisation."

"Surely the Trotskyists had opposed the Stalinists on precisely these grounds."

"They grew up in that atmosphere. Intrigues and plots. Fearing Stalin's bullets. They opposed Stalin, but they were politicians first and foremost. In such an atmosphere they forgot how to live for themselves. They had nothing to put in his place. In this country most people who left the party, left active politics altogether. Or joined the Labour Party, or were active in trade union, CND, campaign work. But these . . . zealots; these party . . . mummies. When they left, they couldn't stand to take that nosedive into obscurity. They had to set up their own little parties. They still had to be right, still had to have all the answers. They saw it in terms of a 'purification' of Lenin's party. They didn't see that it was the party itself that created the problem."

I fetched another light and bitter from the bar.

Where had Ted been during all this, I asked.

"I left the party in 1956. After twenty years a member. I joined the Young Communists as a boy, in the '30s. To fight fascism."

"I was never a leading member. But I paid my dues. Went on the marches, demonstrations. After the war they valued my work as a physicist. I was never subject to a lot of pressure to be active."

"In the 1960s I joined the Trotskyists. They courted me. Old CP people, like myself. But they had left a lot earlier. When Stalin made his pact with Hitler. Now they lived to fight the Stalinists. The greatest hold they had over people was guilt. To stop even a successful man like me believing in myself. In my own ideas. Trotsky they tried to turn into another deity, like Stalin, whose authority they could invoke to enforce their power . . . tough men."

Ted's hand was shaking. The knuckles white around the beer-glass.

"Like the Stalinists, they became geniuses at manipulation," he said. "Brilliant in the art of maintaining their authority through psychological blackmail."

"There are differences between the groups," I said. "And more independent socialists around. It's not so easy to take over a campaign any more, even if they wanted to."

Ted shrugged his shoulders.

"Maybe I had the worst of it," he said.

Someone had turned up the jukebox in the other bar, and Ted leaned close to me so I could hear what he was saying.

"They used to talk piously about the families who suffered when a man took a wage-cut. Or went on the dole. But did they give a shit for any of *our* families? No. For a time I used to speak at public meetings. Two or three a week. All over Britain. I thought it was for the socialist movement, but really it was for the party. I never saw enough of my kids when they were growing up."

He pondered a bit.

"Not all their fault, though. I have to take responsibility for that."

"Even if they had any interest in our movement," I said, "and I'm sure they haven't — it's way beneath them — I'd love to see them trying to manipulate it. How could they? It would be like trying to make a wedding-cake out of rice pudding. It's soggy, but irresistible."

Ted smiled. "I should ask you to lay odds," he said. "But I won't." I got up and picked up my glass.

"See you at the conference," I said.

"I suppose so," said Ted. "I'm not sure I should show my face. Do you think it will be a success?"

The warmth of the evening air struck me as I pulled open the door. "What was your name again?", Ted was shouting after me.

Letters

MEN AGAINST SEXISM

'Meetings with remarkable men' — is this a description of the mens movement? I want to discuss my fears about Men Against Sexism.

The sense of urgency in which I write this letter has come about with the realization that the 'Movement' is already promoting a specific discourse within sexual politics. This discourse seems centred around a particular interpretation of 'the personal is political'. The interpretation seems to encourage the mistaken belief that personal anecdote alone can constitute political theory. Hence any personal statement seems to have equal weight and significance just so long as it comes from an anti-sexist man! For example as an 'anti-sexist man' I may be able to see that sexism is oppressive, however that doesn't mean I can then turn this realization into a political tactic. Especially if I can only cope with the realisation in terms of 'my oppression' or even in terms of my oppressing. This leaves me with a personal politics that offers a new kind of individualism rather than a new kind of collective struggle.

MAS has established a particular form or style of confrontation with patriarchy. The confrontations are inward, individualistic, and self-centred; but seemingly 'justified' when situated in MAS discourse. This is clearly seen in the bulk of the poetry, which worryingly seems to attract little comment. See for example Bobby Pickering's closing poem of the last Anti-Sexist Mens. newsletter — this poem seems to me to be so arrogant and wrong headed! More importantly MAS seems likely to continue to overemphasize and disfigure this particular form of personal struggle unless it can generate critical theories that can deal with certain broad concepts (i.e. the State, ideology, culture etc.). If it cannot generate theory the dialectics of sexual politics will be crippled within the movement.

We surely need to search for theory not retreat at its mention so that all we have left is a politics that can only have one expression (i.e. the individual). I am not saying it is always possible to separate the structural and the individual oppressive and oppressing experience of Capitalist patriarchy. But we must be aware that it is equally important for us to work on theories of the State as it is to work on theories of our boyhoods. Both are expressions of patriarchy. The theory I look towards MAS

to generate is not the 'Grand Theory' feared by some, it is rather a working flexible tool for understanding patriarchy.

Such a theory would have certain implications, not the least of which would be in terms of our practice! If the MAS movement could confront patriarchy in a powerful and collective way it would no longer be easily privatized, or individualistic, elitist or marginalized. It could go public. This would mean anti-sexist men openly challenging sexism and genuinely offering solidarity to feminists. It seems to me that we 'remarkable anti-sexist men' have only so far showed that we have emotions — there may well be more combative times ahead. Surely though it would be this sort of collective struggle that could offer us the chance to nurture NEW strengths.

Recently at the 'Beyond the Fragments' conference the Red Rag morning workshop challenged the assumption that the conference had a shared definition of patriarchy. Fears that you can't get beyond fragments unless you understand why they exist were similarly expressed during the whole day. Since my involvement with MAS (ex-membership of a group and two conferences) I have hoped that the mens movement would offer a place for critical discussion, friendship and solidarity. Best expressed for me I suppose within the history of libertarian Marxism. These hopes were slightly reawakened in me at the conference by feminist friends and comrades, but it remains the responsibility of anti-sexist men to work through a theory of patriarchy AND come to terms with what it means for their daily practice.

At the moment I feel what I see in MAS is dominated by unashamed self-indulgence, 'self-growth', self-congratulation or self-effacement (both of which can provide new kinds of male stance), life-stylism (which marginalizes anti-sexism), fetishized male childcare and a kind of theory phobia! All of these are seemingly upheld by the MAS version of personal politics. For MAS 'the personal is political' seems to give credence to any uttering of any man who claims to be anti-sexist, however uninteresting or just plain confused it may be. We seem to have achieved some sort of credibility we don't deserve by 'discovering' the existence of patriarchy.

Any mens' movement that will be able to contribute to the building of an 'historic bloc' (see Gramsci — he really is a useful

theorist) must be able to generate the apparatus to produce critical theory. A theory that will involve the individual, sexuality the state, technology etc. etc. and that is constituted and reconstituted by the dialectics of the movement.

I hope that men who consider themselves socialists or marxists and anti-sexists will either strive to provide the initiative in the present movement or set about building a new movement altogether.

In solidarity —
Rob Imesen
Newcastle-Under-Lyme

FEEDBACK

Dear Achilles Heel,

This is a note of appreciation and feedback. You can see from this that I'm really glad AH exists. I do appreciate it as a forum for the expression of the many issues and dilemmas of the men's equivalent, or is it compliment, of the women's movement. It's also very reassuring to find in it some of the same problems and experiences that I myself have thought about.

I found the Men and work issue interesting and thought-provoking, if somewhat heavy going. I did like the historical perspective in the introductory article, and also the airing of many fears and frustrations I also feel in sexist situations.

Here I would like to examine a bit further some of the issues raised in Tony's piece about his work in an Advice Bureau. They are quite similar in many ways to my own situation as a community worker on a council estate in North Paddington. I would sum them up as 'dilemmas of a workaholic'.

Where you are doing a job you believe in and which is fairly enjoyable, it's very difficult not to spend all hours of the day and night doing it, or worrying about it. In my case it is compounded by my lack of experience and my need to prove to myself and others that I can do this kind of work. This is one reason for working so hard, yet at the heart of it is a lot of immaturity, personal insecurity, and self-doubt. Perhaps working all hours god sends is not the best way of coming to terms with these.

Equally, as Tony says, working in this way means you have little time to develop other aspects of yourself. I find it's a way of not facing up to some aspects of myself, especially my feelings and emotions. On countless occasions I've been depressed, hurt, or annoyed and rather than face up to how I feel, I've got on with the

next piece of work to be done. In this way feelings become more and more repressed and their expression more and more difficult. Isn't this the classic way men's feelings have always been repressed.

If we make no effort to come to terms with workaholism it is a killer, mentally if not physically. It's very easy for workaholic men to spend so much time working that their wives and girlfriends are left to do all the housework and child-rearing. Work issues also become increasingly obsessive. I sometimes lose sleep over things I haven't done at work, and at parties and the like I sometimes feel I can talk about nothing else. In short, I become a bore. At other times I become so lethargic and apathetic that it is difficult to summon the energy to do anything — perhaps that's my body's way of saying "enough!" If unchecked I suppose workaholism leads to heart attacks and stomach ulcers — those plagues of the middle-aged executive.

So workaholism is nothing to be proud of. Yet in a 'welfare' job like mine, or any work that is genuinely worthwhile, being committed to it is surely not so terrible. I often pride myself that I do care about the people on this estate and the appalling conditions they often have to put up with. I suppose it's a matter of striking a balance between caring on the one hand and not being too engrossed on the other. Sounds like yet another wishy washy compromise!

Workaholics can be women as well as men, with some of the same effects. But I think it's easier for men to get caught in the trap because of the many cultural and economic barriers still in existence to 'career' women. Men more than women are also socialised to believe that it is in their work and nowhere else that they prove themselves.

The solutions to the problems of workaholicism are compelling and clear. The women's movement has long been demanding that men take an equal share in domestic work and child-rearing, and that the community should share in both. But I think it's also important for us men to be aware of the real dangers of workaholism, and not to use it as a way of avoiding ourselves, our feelings, and our sexism. For me that has been one of the real benefits of the men's group I've been in. It has been an opportunity to explore and come to terms with myself and the effect my work is having on me. Indeed I'm hoping that what I've said here will be something we'll talk about at our next meeting!

Hugh Dennis
London W10

SCOLD'S BRIDLE

Dear Achilles Heel,

I was shocked by Dave's use of the words "scold's bridle" in his letter in AH4. I later realised that he was responding to a woman's use of the same words which I had found acceptable. However, women can freely use words which men should only use if they show an understanding of the words' meaning. If we treat men's violence to women as trivial (in the way men so often regard rape as trivial) we are ourselves continued the oppression. We need to be aware of the reality behind the words we use so casually. The word "scold" refers to women, and "scold's bridle" refers to something done to women. These facts should have warned Dave that he was not referring to a somewhat forceful, perhaps even amusing, way of telling people to be quiet.

A look at an encyclopaedia tells us the sickening facts about this instrument of torture. The Encyclopaedia Britannica says "In its earliest form the bridle or scold's bridle consisted of a hoop head-piece of iron, opening by hinges at the side so as to enclose the head, with a flat piece of iron projecting inwards so as to fit into the mouth and press the tongue down. Later it was made, by a multiplication of hoops, more like a cage, the front forming a mask of iron with holes for mouth, nose and eyes. Sometimes the mouth-piece was armed with a short spike. With this on her head the offending woman was marched through the streets or chained to be gazed at by passers. It was still in use as late as 1856."

Danny Cohen

FATHERS AND SONS

Dear Brothers,

I am presently planning a book (of interviews mostly) on the subject of 'Fathers and Sons' in order to provide some much needed material on men's perceptions, and experiences, of these two roles.

I should be happy to hear from readers of 'Achilles Heel' on their experiences in the roles of son and father, on 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' relationships with their own fathers and sons, on the influences they regard their fathers as having had on their lives and personalities and influences they see themselves having on their sons.

Anyone inclined to write to me on these so far much neglected subjects can be wholly assured of confidentiality, a sensitive reception and, in due course, an answer. They can also derive some satisfaction from knowing that they'll be contributing to work which aims to help change existing attitudes towards men's role in our culture.

With very many thanks for your magazine and my best wishes for your continued success in working for a society free from the oppression of sexism.

Love and peace,
Charles Neal,
15a Denbigh Place,
London SW1

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REVIEWS

THEATRE

"THE GORGEOUS AND THE DAMNED" by New Heart at the Oval House

"Good times and bum times I've seen them all and my dear I'm still here, I got through all of last year And I'm still here".

A Jewess leaving Berlin in the late 1930's; a drag queen discarding one style of drag for another by changing into the uniform of the brownshirts; a government servant denying his love; a writer leaving the country to be creative in a 'freer' atmosphere; a lesbian confronting men; a soft impassioned plea for the freedom of the lark; lesbian romance in a Paris cafe; and around the corner advance officers of the state with riot shields firmly held.

The 1920s, 1933-45, the '50s, '60-68, 1980 and now.

Lucy in the sky with diamonds, Strawberry fields forever, the fool on the hill, Benares with the sea blue, so blue, Pirate Jenny, that old Bilbao moon and Night and Day reveal in the roaring traffic's boom, in the silence of lonely rooms stories of our lives.

In this space of memories,

bundles of pink blankets obscuring the images of the party remains, the record comes to the end as the performers emerge marked out for export to show that "good times and bum times though they seen them all they're still here" and what a pleasure it was to see you.

This cabaret/theatre piece affirms the continuing struggle of gays to overcome fear and survive. It marks out in song and scene moments of our despair and hope, the escape and survival of some — not always with grace and honesty but survival nonetheless — and death of others. Changing masks in the thirties, destroyed hopes but not destroyed lives, fear of exposure in the fifties and now, the hopes of the sixties which brought us 'lillians' and the bars and clubs we retreat to now; reminders of our audacity in listening to jazz from the downstairs bar whilst making love; awareness of the dangers we risk when openly expressing our yearnings to physically love each other. This, the reality of our lives was told through visual and verbal metaphors, songs which we reclaim as our own, through feathers, blankets and champagne, through language of our own making and episodes of our lives.

The show works on many levels and in me evoked memories unsoftened by time, at times a bitterness and anger swept over me at the recognition of experience, at others my heart was filled with pleasure and pride. My spine tingled during the songs as I was swept into the exploration of my/our history. The show is a brilliantly performed, highly entertaining cabaret within which is contained an expose of the inconsistencies, complications and ironies of time. A weaving of lives through successive generations builds into questioning our experience as well as restating its values.

The Gorgeous and the Damned was collectively written by New Heart "who are" (to quote from their programme) "concerned now that Gay Sweatshop is out of action due to Arts Council cuts with maintaining a core group of performers who will produce work not just in London, but tour within these islands and on the continent. Years of hard work by many people have built up a network of contacts and audiences; from our experience we know that this work is a necessary and integral part of the gay political and cultural network. Our lines of communication are few (some publications, phone lines, con-

ferences) and full time touring theatre is part of our telegraph system. We are determined to maintain these links and ensure that the current economic and social climate does not inhibit or damage what has been built up. Hence, despite subsidy cuts and recession, New Heart. Yet we can only embark on our Autumn tour if we continue to receive donations and support from audiences."

This, their first show, is a contribution not only to gay theatre but also the gay movement. It is entertaining and disturbing, sharp, savage and loving, a musical theatre piece which delves into our hearts to proclaim that despite all we are still here and will continue to fight for the freedom of the lark.

New Heart will be performing "The Gorgeous and the Damned" at the following venues and I would recommend everyone, gay or non-gay, to see and support the work of this highly skilled company:

August 20th to 23rd Melkweg, Amsterdam.

August 30th Durham Gay Fest.

September 14th to 19th Theatre-space, London.

Martin Humphries

REVIEWS

FILM

GREGORY'S GIRL

Directed by Bill Forsyth

A low budget, second movie by Bill Forsyth whose first, 'That Sinking Feeling', also deserves to be seen.

Gregory of the title is a gangling, acne prone, adolescent student at a 'progressive comprehensive' somewhere in Scotland. He lives with his parents and younger (at least in years) sister in a council house on what looks like an award winning estate in an award winning new town.

The plot hinges on first loves — Gregory's in particular. She has taken his place in the school's non-award winning football team; he falls completely and one-sidedly in love. So completely that he fails to notice his letraset environment or even that he's eating dog biscuits and Primula for breakfast.

What is particularly refreshing is the emphasis on useful shifts in male/female stereotypes and an equality of status for the various characters. Unusually it is possible to feel empathy for, and a delight in, the portrayal of the male characters. Positive male images are rare in mass circulation movies and these guys at least are shown to have feelings and doubts.

Hard ideological scrutiny seems out of place in such a delightful comedy. All concerned, cast, makers and backers deserve much encouragement and they unconditionally get the Achilles Heel Merit Award for escapist-but-who-cares, low technology, spot-on humour.

As a (now deceased) London guide used to say: Recommended.
Mel Cairns

BOOKS

MAN MADE LANGUAGE.

Dale Spender. RKP. London 1980. £4.95.

In 1978 at a Politics of Education Conference in London, 32 women and 5 men discussed sexism and education. Dale Spender taped the discussion, and found that not only had these anti-sexist men talked for over 50% of the time but that "it was men who determined what the topic would be. They did the interrupting and they insisted that the discussion get back to the point: their point. There is no doubt in my mind that in this context at least... it was the five males and not the thirty-two females who were defining the parameters of the talk. I suspect that neither the women nor the men were conscious of this." (p47).

Dale Spender takes a critical look at language research, analyses how male power is reproduced through language, and examines the ways men control conversation. It makes for gripping reading — especially the first half. The book covers a wide range of subjects, looking at the construction of women's silence

construction of women's silence around such areas as childbirth, and at the different ways men and women conceptualise the world and talk about it. It contains an interesting discussion on male tunnel vision — the inability of many men to understand what women are talking about because their view of the world is based on a grossly oversimplified mono-dimensional reality. Dale Spender says both sexes have been crippled by a sexual division of language/meaning: "Women have been deprived of the full use of their voice, but men may have denied themselves the full use of their vision." (p97)

I found Man Made Language both interesting and stimulating. It challenged a lot of my preconceptions, and deepened my understanding of the structures of male power in this society.

Andy Metcalf

THE NEW MALE by Herb Goldberg, Signet Books 1979.

This is a book which at first appears to be very helpful to men who feel the need for change, in response to the challenge of women's liberation. But in reality, although some of it may well be useful to some men, it is, like the author's earlier book 'The Hazards of Being Male' (1976), anti-woman and anti-monogamy. It has not the least spark of political insight and is totally psychologistic. Observe these quotes:

"The portrayal of the man as top-dog exploiter living a privileged existence and the woman as victim is a lopsided, black-and-white interpretation of the age-old gender dance... The price [women] have paid is no greater than for men, who have paid the price of masculinity with their emotions, expressiveness, capacity for intimacy, passivity, dependency, vulnerability and so on."

Goldberg castigates Gloria Steinem and Susan Brownmiller for being excessively man-hating.

"until now, for many men the message of feminism has simply been that he has been a 'bad boy', who must stop being a chauvinist."

"The sexist ways women behave towards men and the ways women reinforce male sexist behaviour has not been focussed on and dealt with."

"Women's liberation must not be allowed to mean for men accommodation to her new image."

As a rider to these attacks Goldberg gives grudging approval to feminism as being of some, small, benefit to the 'new male'.

"Perhaps the single most valuable contribution of feminism has been the way it has chipped away at men's fantasies about women."

What he advocates for men is not men's groups but "buddyship". This comes out more fully in the earlier book:

"Buddyship is the deepest of male-male interactions. Buddyships which have already endured crises, have rich dimensions that generally cannot exist even in the deepest male-female relationships... Female jealousy, and

resentment over a buddyship may also reflect her awareness that its roots may be deeper, because the relationship has more room for freedom, is less possessive, and does not have the components of jealousy and role rigidity that often exists in male-female relationships." (The Hazards of Being Male.)

On the whole, I find this author much more offensive than helpful. His books, because they are so obviously male-oriented, and because they do contain some helpful remarks on men's therapy and men's consciousness, are dangerously seductive to men, and may take them away from any proper appreciation of the political aspects of feminism.

Nowhere in either of these books is there any awareness that we live in a patriarchal culture, where women are systematically and continuously put down and degraded by men. Nowhere is there any appreciation of the economic oppression of women by men. Nowhere is there anything about the political powerlessness of women and their systematic exclusion from positions of power and control. Nowhere is there any sense that women might be driven almost crazy by the outpouring of anti-woman books, magazines and newspapers — of which this book is just one more example itself.

John Rowan

FROM THE GAY MEN'S PRESS

The Gay Men's Press have, I'm proud to say, developed into a publishing house offering challenging, entertaining and informative material about gay experience and thought. In this review I wish to look at 'The Spiral Path' by David Fernbach and briefly mention some other recent publications.

'The Spiral Path' by David Fernbach (£3.95p) is subtitled "a gay contribution to human survival"; this is very apt for the book is one of the most important pieces of writing by a gay man on the present world situation and of the possibilities for change. The book is intended not as an authoritative text but as a stimulus for discussion and an encouragement for involvement and action within the fields of feminism, ecology and gay politics. "Just as important as anything written is the constant process of informal discussion." David Fernbach presents a cogently argued view of directions to be explored based on a clear analysis of history which may enable us to "steer ourselves towards that 'omega point' of transcendence which we can see as our necessary goal". He argues "that the crisis which makes possible and necessary the advance to a communist society is a global contradiction between scientific technology and the system of social relations based on violence, its present form being the twin threats of nuclear war and ecological catastrophe" and that "the feminist and gay liberation movements also have a special contribution to make, by working to erode the masculine specialisation in violence that underpins class society, the state,

and the endemic warfare between states".

The importance of this book lies in its clarifying the area we need to look at (gender/war/pollution/capitalism) and positing alternatives to them which present a way-ahead for us to continue exploring. I do not claim on one reading to fully understand or agree with all the points made but I found the book exciting and challenging in its rich exploration of communism seeing "the best way to approach the possibilities and problems of an advance towards communism" through examining "the elements out of which Marx and Engels constructed their model of communist transition and seeing what change is needed to bring them up to date" for "what is at stake, if we fail to move forward to communism, is the very future of our species and our planet".

I hope that this contribution will be discussed and read by many, and through the hope that it gives, will be an element which enables us to "transform the common life by substituting the bond of personal affection and compassion for the monetary, legal and other external ties which now control and confine society" (from 'The Intermediate Sex' by Edward Carpenter).

* * *

Through a new arrangement Gay Men's Press are acting as distributors for titles from Alyson Publications Inc., not otherwise published in this country. The first three Alyson titles available are:

Young, Gay and Proud! (£1.50)
This contains practical advice for young lesbians and gay men on coming out at school; telling your parents; gays and health; sex; meeting other gays etc. It is a delightfully upfront book but I felt disappointed that it had not been anglicised for it would be of even more use in this country had it been translated into an English context. This said, it is a very positive book which demystifies the gay experience for old and young.

Pink Triangles: Radical Perspectives on Gay Liberation. (Ed. by Pam Mitchell. £2.95)
A book which relates to "Homo-sexuality: Power and Politics" edited by the Gay Left Collective in that it is a series of wide-ranging essays written by women and men involved in radical sexual politics. Like the Gay Left book it is an important, provocative and highly readable contribution to the writings of gay liberation.

Reflections of a Rock Lobster by Aaron Frickle (£2.50)
This delightful autobiography of a young man growing up gay who fought and won the right to take his (male) date to his high school graduation dance is written with openness and candour and made me proud and glad to be gay.

* * * Martin Humphries

All of these books are available by mail order (please include 25p for postage and packing on each copy) from Gay Men's Press, 27 Priory Avenue, London N8 7RN Tel: 01 348 2669.

REVIEWS

SLUMP CITY: The Politics of Mass Unemployment. Andrew Friend & Andy Metcalf, Pluto Press, 1981.

The official 'crisis of the inner city', birth date some time in the mid to late sixties, has provoked an enormous literature aimed at identifying, analysing and arresting the decline of inner city employment (identified as white, male and skilled manual) and the interrelated fragmentation of the working class communities whose labour is now redundant.

What struck me about 'Slump City' is that it is the first analysis that I have read that brings together the many strands of this amorphous debate and gives them shape and urgency as a matter of crucial concern for socialists. What is also striking is that this is no dry, abstract tract in the style often perpetrated in the name of marxism, but an analysis in the best possible sense, with an overall coherence giving space and meaning to the lives of those suffering the consequences of 'inner city decline'.

The authors' thesis locates this decline within that of British capitalism as a whole. With the traditional local economies dispersed by the relocation strategies of industry, and employment possibilities further constrained by the recession and trends in office employment (enter the micro chip) the inner city areas are now inhabited by increasing numbers of people 'surplus' to the requirements of capitalism.

The strategies adopted by the Labour party — technocratic and dependent to a depressing degree on the small business card — have consistently re-emphasised the gulf between the traditional perspectives and organisation of the labour movement and the inhabitants of the inner city; excluded from or alienated by it because of unemployment, race, or as recipients of the rundown services of an exhausted welfare state — often a combination of these. The policies of the Thatcher government have fallen particularly hard on the inner city at the same time as exploiting these divisions.

Within all of this the family, that 'shock absorber of capitalism' is creaking with the strain. The testimony of the single parent women is the starkest part of the whole book for me for its mixture of despair and resilience. The authors add the significant rider that 'for some women even a life (on a dump estate) comes as a respite from the violence they experienced at men's hands before'.

Recent events in Brixton and Toxteth have shown that for some — predominantly young, male and black — the endless pressure of inner city life has reached its limits. The authors' proposal that 'new alliances and new unities' be created to challenge this pressure by uniting those isolated into resistance has taken on a new urgency as the state prepares its mixture of phoney employment programmes and hard-line policing to control those it would otherwise rather forget. A good book.

Andy Moye

Below we include an interview with the authors about the book and the ways they worked on it together; the problems they encountered with writing it, how they resolved these, and what they gained from the experience.

Q: How did the book originate?

AF: *We first started sometime in 1975, so it's been a long time in the making. Both of us had been members of a group of people who lived in Brixton discussing things each of us had been writing, in order to get some feedback on the stuff that was being written in isolation. The common experience we shared was of living in a squatted street and working in different local campaigns — and in particular local housing campaigns.*

Q: How was the book originally conceived?

AF: *When we began we wanted it to be a mixture of the history of the area we lived in, the different class experiences of people living there, and an analysis of how we all came to be there — of the forces which create a place like Brixton. We were interested in the routes by which individuals came to live in the area, whether they were white squatters or west Indians. We wanted to try to understand how the city worked, and what the rules were which controlled this vast mass of humanity. And that meant trying to capture both individual experience with all its accidents and relating that to the big sweeps of economic and political change. At this point we were very attracted to John Berger's book *The Seventh Man*, about migrant workers in Europe. When we got funding to continue the research we decided to work in a larger group with two photographers, and an interviewer in order to combine in a montage interviews, fiction, historical analysis and photographs so that we could capture what was going on in the area. However five years later, what we've actually produced is a book without photos or fiction, but which still retains some interview material. The book is more conventional than we originally intended.*

Q: Why do you think that happened?

AM: *One very obvious reason was the economics of publishing — paperbooks with photographs were too expensive to produce, unless the publishers did enormous print runs. As the economic crisis has deepened, it has been getting harder and harder to get into print — and publishers have become more conservative about what a book should be, how it should read etc. For us though, the main reason was that once we wanted to try and understand how big cities work, we were immediately confronted by our ignorance of urban studies, economics and social theory. Neither of us were working in an academic situation, so we only had each other to try our ideas out on. The drawbacks of that isolation from academia is that you can't shortcut the enormous literature around the subjects we were researching by drawing on someone else's knowledge; the*

*advantage we've experienced is the freedom to develop new ideas without the crushing weight of orthodoxy surrounding you all the time. One of the books which had a very formative effect on our work was Ernest Mandel's *Late Capitalism* — as we were beginning to understand the extent of economic crisis in the big cities in Britain and the USA, his ideas about the ways capital produces and reproduces development and underdevelopment both geographically between regions, cities and nations and in the creation of cyclical crisis seemed particularly relevant. But checking out these ideas — seeing whether they had relevance to the inner city crisis — involved a huge amount of work.*

Q: What have been the problems and satisfactions about writing something with someone else for such a long time.

AF: *Once we'd thrown out the early ideas of montage and started to try and develop some coherent ideas about what was happening to the big cities, we entered into a much longer period of work than we originally intended. This involved financial insecurity, personal isolation, and a sense that maybe we'd bitten off more than we could chew. In this situation our relationship got tilted towards keeping the work going — both of us became each other's bosses. And I do think at time we've resented each other's attempts to make the other keep to deadlines, or re-do stuff when we've felt thoroughly tired of it. For a period of about two years there have been points when we've both felt crazy, and when there were conflicts between us which had a lot of emotional force. But the fact that we got through them has led to the satisfaction of actually finishing a book together — a book that we believe has something important to say. This book is a joint product and I know I could never have done anything remotely like it by myself.*

AM: *I think one of the interesting things that has happened over the last five years has been the fact that there's been a reversal of roles between us. When we first started, I'd been politically active for quite a long time, and had more in my mind the marxist tradition — what you could and couldn't say — the whole notion of correctness. But over the time span you are the one who's got dug into Marxism more, and I've become more and more turned off by the dead language it's conducted in. I think that reversal has helped us deal with the competitive feelings we have had to the other.*

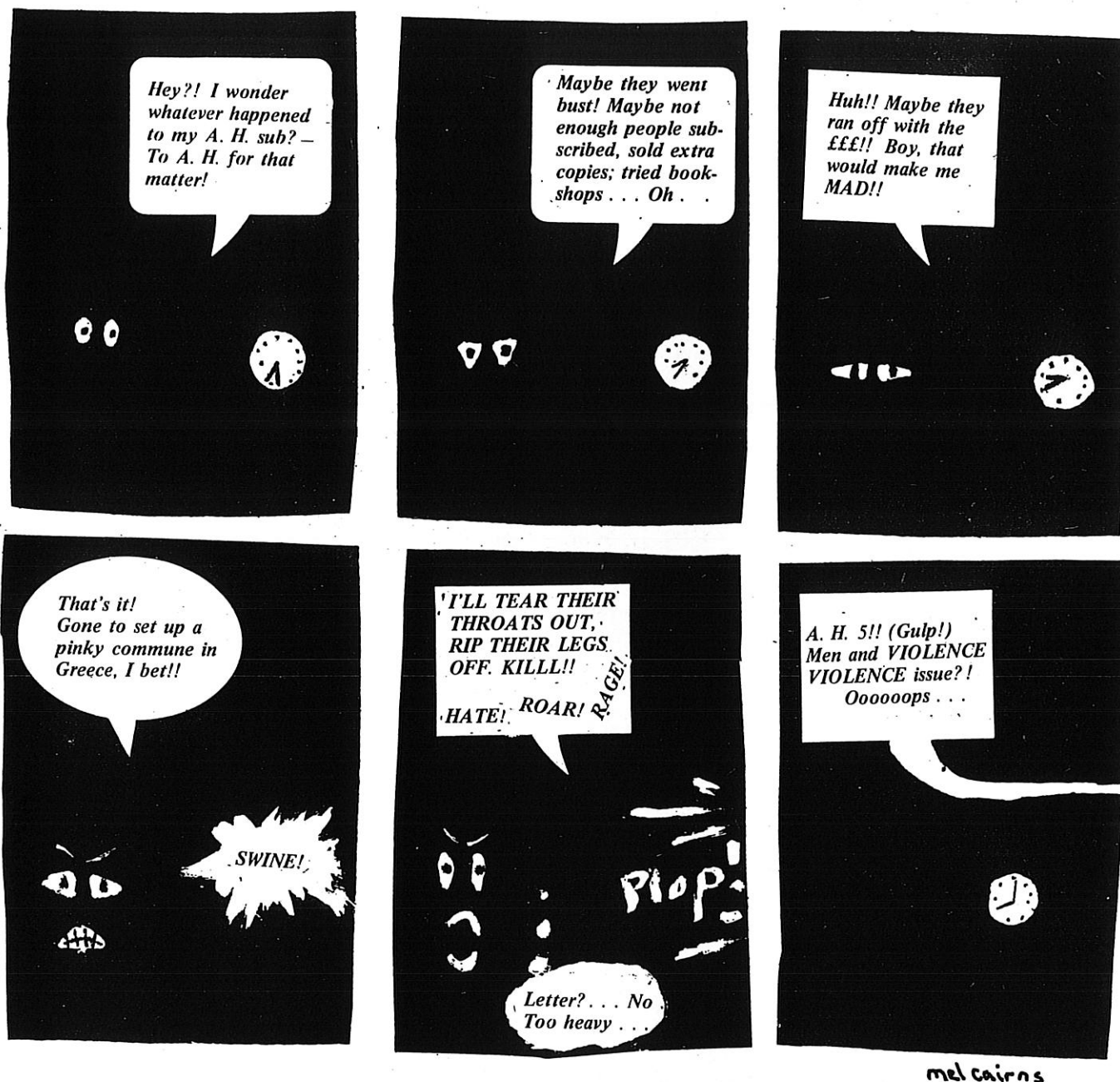
Q: What do you think of the way the labour process has worked between us?

AF: *There are two aspects to that — the first involves the number of drafts, false starts, and rewrites which we've done. Looking back on it it all seems quite inefficient but I think it stemmed from the way in which we started to get into subjects which we knew little of at the beginning and we had to absorb the work of others, be derivative, then cut it out. The other thing about the process of writing which is general*

to other forms of creative work is that it is very individualising and isolating. One of the positive things about working together is that it does counteract that to some extent.

AM: *Towards the middle period of the work — I began to see that we were developing a complementary way of working — that, for example, my tendency to think in a more discursive, less analytic way was offset and channelled by your more rigorous mind. But for that to happen we had to work through our competitive feelings towards one another — we had to accept that we didn't have to be equally proficient at everything. At this point each of us were responsible for different chapters — one of us would do the research from a loose outline, then write a plan for the chapter. That plan would change in discussion. The other one would take the first draft away when it was written and come back with ideas of improving it. One of the interesting things we found was that the key ideas of a chapter would emerge incidentally in the process of writing it. The act of writing was itself a way of coming to understand the material. But we found that it's often quite hard for the person who's written the first draft to understand the importance of the ideas he's expressed — and how that requires the chapter to have a different shape. So in a sense we've worked as a team of writer and editor. And getting something good out of that process has been rewarding and enjoyable. But it's also meant confronting our feelings of ownership about something we've written. I've quite often felt that I don't want my piece tampered with. *Slump City* is not a collective product in the sense that we each know an equal amount about London's economy, the regional question, or the state of the family — but it is collective in the sense that we've discussed, argued about, and changed virtually everything that each of us has written. I think one of the biggest satisfactions has been that, despite the rows we've had, despite the resentments, by and large we have acknowledged the emotional aspects of working together. And because we've done that, we've managed to keep both a working relationship and a friendship.*

Andrew Friend & Andy Metcalf



mel cairns

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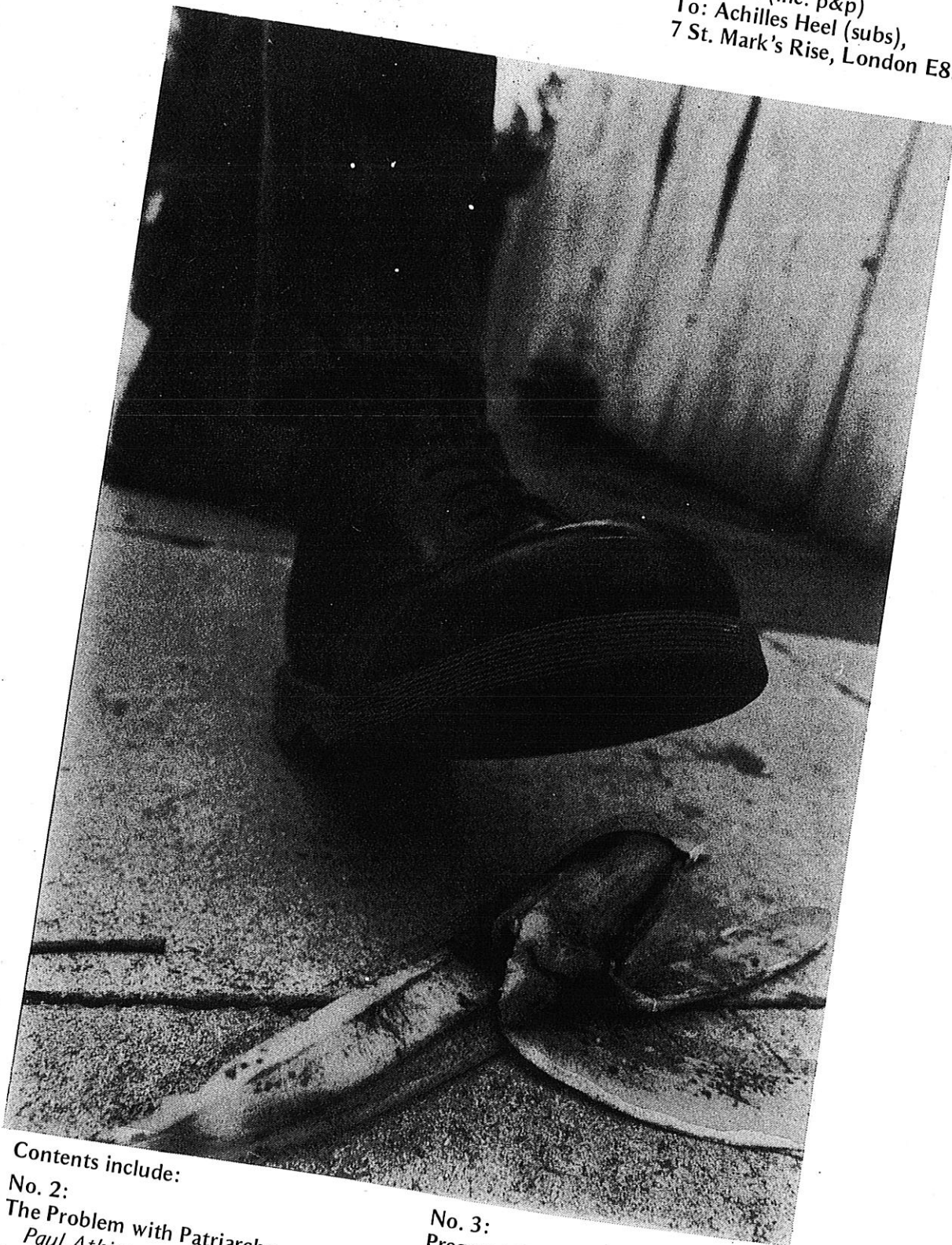
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