Classes of Evil: How the Totalitarianisms of Marxist Thought Gave Birth to Modern Feminism

Neil Lyndon

In Chapter 3 of the author's book No More Sex War*, the origin of modern feminism is traced back to Marxism. It is a forensic, literary excavation of the origins of modern feminism buried in the classical prescriptions of the far Left, revealing the extent to which the thinking of 1960s feminists consciously imitated the class analysis of Marx and Engels.*

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Introduction

Neil Lyndon wrote *No More Sex War: The Failures of Feminism* in 1991. It was published by Sinclair-Stevenson in 1992 (ISBN: 1 85619 191 5). The book was, claimed Lyndon, "the world's first radical critique of feminism from an egalitarian, progressive, non-sexist point of view."

In November 2014, Lyndon included the whole text of that book in a collection of writing on gender from 1990-2010 with the title *Sexual Impolitics: Heresies on sex, gender and feminism* published on Kindle (http://www.amazon.co.uk/Sexual-Impolitics-Heresies-gender-feminism-ebook/dp/B00PBA6ZRQ/ref=sr_1_5?ie=UTF8&qid=1415374927&sr=8-5&keywords=neil+lyndon#reader_B00PBA6ZRQ). Even though 22 years had elapsed, Lyndon said it was the first time his book had appeared as he meant it be read "unexpurgated, unbowdlerised, uncensored".

In the Introduction to *Sexual Impolitics*, Lyndon explains:

Shortly before that book was about to be published, I wrote to all the authors and bodies whose works I had quoted to ask permission for their words to be reproduced in my text. This has been a completely normal, conventional courtesy in the serene process of bringing a book to fruition ever since the introduction of copyright laws. It never varies. The author asks permission: the authors and bodies whose permission is requested *grant that permission.* It is automatically understood, without question, that the entire edifice of civilised discussion and debate depends upon mutual respect for freedom of argument and that, therefore, you wouldn't think of withholding permission to be quoted merely because you might not like the author who is asking for permission or you fear that you might not come out smelling fragrant in the book that is about to be published.

Many authors and bodies observed the convention and granted their permission. Others refused that elementary courtesy. The authors and public bodies that refused permission for their works to be quoted in my book were:

Nell Dunn for *Talking to Women* published by MacGibbon and Kee Ltd

Andrea Dworkin for *Mercy* published by Martin Secker and Warburg

London Rape Crisis Centre for *Sexual Violence: The Reality for Women* published by The Women's Press

Rosalind Miles for *The Rites of Man* published by Grafton Books

Rosalind Miles and Anne Kelleher for BBC2's *Fighting Talk*

Kate Millett for *Sexual Politics* published by Virago

Robin Morgan (ed.) for *Sisterhood is Powerful*

My publisher, Christopher Sinclair-Stevenson, and my agent, Michael Thomas, were flabbergasted by these refusals. They said they had never known anything comparable. Between them, they had about 80 years' experience in publishing yet the only precedents they could bring to mind when permission had been refused were in a handful of cases where a literary estate was in dispute. It had never happened in their experience that a living author had been refused.

Germaine Greer who comes in for repeated keel-haulings in *No More Sex War* gave her consent to be quoted without demur and, when she was asked why, she said "Of course I gave permission. I always do. I hate the copyright laws as much as I hate the libel laws for suppressing freedom of expression."

I wrote a note at the end of the Acknowledgements page in *No More Sex War* thanking Greer for this characteristically muscular and trenchant defiance and said "When she's right, she's very right". Without consultation or discussion, Sinclair-Stevenson's editor deleted that line from the book they published. I am happy to repeat it here.

At the very last minute before it was due to go to press, therefore, I had to rewrite the whole manuscript, deleting every quotation and turning it into the third-person. Thus, for instance, instead of reproducing, verbatim, an exchange in *Talking to Women* (a work of *oral* history, please note) between Nell Dunn and Emma Charlton about how a woman might behave when meeting a man (she would flirt but just to appease him, as a way of looking down on him, to keep him in his place), I had to write the whole passage out, without quotes, as reported speech.

This indefensible abuse of civilized convention diminished the authority of my text, interrupted the flow of the narrative and marred the rhythms of the writing. The work to which I had given years of thought and months of intensively careful composition was mutilated. One of the main reasons I am reproducing the text today, as I wrote it, is to ensure that my book will finally - after more than 20 years – be published as I meant it to be read. Therefore, every one of those quotations for which permission was refused appears in full on the following pages.

This time, I haven't asked for permission; and I shall be doing cartwheels of delight if those authors complain and issue legal proceedings for breach of copyright.

See you in court, ladies.

The extract that follows here is the entire text of Chapter Three of *No More Sex War* which carries the sub-title "Classes of Evil." It is a forensic, literary excavation of the origins of modern feminism buried in the classical prescriptions of the far Left, revealing the extent to which the thinking of 1960s feminists consciously imitated the class analysis of Marx and Engels.

In foregoing passages of the book, Lyndon had established that:

1) Boys and men in the west shared systemic social disadvantages and political inequalities which were universally overlooked and neglected (in reproductive and parental rights; in education; in employment; in medical treatment; in retirement and in death).

2) These transparent inequalities were ignored because modern feminism (dating from the late 1960s) had arrogated to women all concern for inequality by gender. The central propositions of feminism on the nature of patriarchy precluded any possibility that men's inequalities might be recognised (how could inequalities exist for an oppressor class?)

3) The very existence of those inequalities, however, actually exploded the concept of patriarchy: our society could not reasonably be described as patriarchal given the existence, in fact, of those disadvantages and inequalities for men.

4) The false doctrine could, therefore, only be sustained through an unremitting barrage of intolerant spite about men - through the media, through advertising, in the deliberations of legislatures and courts - which portrayed men as the enemies of women, seeing them as barbaric, unsociable, promiscuous, feral in their violence and selfishness. The atmosphere of intolerance amounted to an incubus. The first two chapters of *No More Sex War* gave numerous examples of that incubus and argued that it amounted to systemic prejudice against males in our own time.

Lyndon concluded Chapter Two with the questions: "What is the origin of this universal prejudice? Where and why did it get started? And why has it become so powerful?"

How the Totalitarianisms of Marxist Thought Gave Birth to Modern Feminism

For one class to be the liberating class par excellence, it is essential that another class should be openly the oppressing class. — Karl Marx, *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie Einleitung* 1844

People of my generation and of our times adore themselves.

We congratulate ourselves upon our accomplishments, our poise and our understanding. We boast about our incomes ("who'd have believed you could get this rich this quick?" as one said in *The Big Chill*), our educated skills with restaurant menus and with opera house programmes. We know our movies, our records, our books and our way around. We greet each other with the post-HIV hug, loving and enduring, as "survivors". We are old veterans from the trenches, out on the other side of the combat lines, grizzled, wearied but still in one piece; and looking good.

My question to my contemporaries is this: if we are such delightful people - audacious, clever, educated, literate, loving and hip - how have we brought a totalitarian evil into being among us? Can we possibly be as culpably gullible, as vulnerable to authoritarian barbarities as any of those immediate ancestors to whom we thought ourselves so superior by enlightenment and understanding?

I reckon so. The feminist incubus of poisonous intolerance and of totalitarian prejudices which has gathered in the atmosphere between the sexes is our creation. We blew it up, gave it shape and released it. We are responsible for its existence and its effects.

Future generations, I imagine, will be astonished to read their history books in school and see that, in the last quarter of the Twentieth century, a generation in the north-west of the planet, in the richest and most advanced countries of the world, took leave of its educated, liberal-minded wits.

Think what we have done.

Consider the intrinsic claims of the feminist propositions to which we have consented and which we see repeated every day in our popular culture:

1) That one half of humanity (men) was inferior, by genetic composition and by natural disposition to the other half

2) That the inferior half held the superior half in subjection through the use of economic power and brute force

3) And that the superior female half was obliged to fight a war of liberation on class lines to emancipate itself from the oppressions inflicted by men and the patriarchal system they enjoyed and supported.

Reading those paragraphs, feminists and their apologists and fellow-travellers would say that their beliefs had been grotesquely caricatured. Feminism, they would probably say, has developed so far and has taken so many different but connected forms that it cannot be discussed as if it was a single body of belief and attitude which can be reduced to elementary, cardinal propositions. Feminism doesn't speak with one vice[1], they would say (though you will never hear any individual feminist decline to speak on behalf of feminism on the grounds that her own voice was inadequate to the task).

I have often heard those responses. They always strike me as being evasive, as dodges and fudges, forestalling argument.

If we cannot agree basic terms of definition, we are prevented from arguing further over interpretations: that seems to be part of the purpose of those feminists who refuse to agree that common characteristics, purposes and beliefs can be drawn from all strands and forms of feminism.

They don't want argument.

There are others, of course, men and women, who say that men have no business at all to discuss feminism and its terms. They say that this subject is, by its nature, exclusively women's concern.

Those bastards can get off at the next halt. They are saying that the exclusive right to set the terms of argument - and, indeed, to conduct the argument - about the social and political relations of men and women belongs to a particular group of women who are attached to a set of shared assumptions (which assumptions are supposed to be incontestable). Fuck off.

Despite the evasions, dodges and fudges of the contemporary sisters, there must be connecting characteristics between the various forms and styles of feminism, otherwise they could not be grouped together under that umbrella term and the word "feminism" would have no meaning.

In truth, it isn't at all difficult to find and express a common denominator for all the forms of modern feminism.

Here is my best offer.

The common denominator is the belief that women share interests which are distinct from men's and that those interests can best be advanced by women acting collectively. Surely that much can be agreed? No variety of thought or style of attitude could be termed feminist unless it involved these presumptions.

It is tricky to go further; but the consequent assumption of all feminisms which proceeds from the first point is that women's particular interests are and always have been at odds with the interests of men. Most feminists would go further still and claim that men must and invariably will act collectively in defence of their own interests to resist the claims and the advances of women. It amounts to a universal article of feminist belief that women have had to struggle against a political system organised by and for men to achieve freedoms and rights both as a collectivity and as individuals. Many, possibly most, feminists would claim, as triumphs of this struggle, the changes which have occurred in the position of women in the West, especially their emergence as wage and salary earners in the commercial life of the West. You hear these claims repeated every day, as unquestionable axioms and articles of faith.

Each of these presumptions, I want to argue, is false. They are false in logic, false in their assessments of social change and its consequences, false in the deductions and conclusions to which they lead.

If you take the point of view I am going to advance, the glories of modern feminism transmute into that filthy incubus. If you look my way into the bottom of the feminist approach, rooting out its origins in the social history of the West and in the writings and reflections of modern feminists, you will not find there a set of humane and loving principles discerned with noble intelligence and applied with all the finest distinctions of literacy and judgment, to the advancement of civilisation. What you will discover is a mess of pseudo-Marxist crudities, swirling in a pot of terror, cooking up in an oven of unprecedented social change. You find blind panic disguised as clear-eyed militancy; you find rank selfishness disguised as philanthropy; and you find sophistries of base prejudice disguised as political sophistication. Step this way.

Everybody agrees that modern feminism, as distinct from the feminisms of the Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries, took its origins in the New Left of America and Europe in the second half of the Sixties. There is no argument about that.[2]

If you comb through the histories of the feminist movement you will find arguments and shades of opinion on the precise degree of influence of one leftist groupuscule or faction against another. Was the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) more influential than the Communist Party? Did the Trots or the hippies first seize upon the ideas? Where stood Rosa Luxembourg or the Witch collective?

If questions like that hold a fascination for you, there is much interest to be found in the library stacks of that history. But the questions need not detain us here. We can agree, since there is no dispute, that modern feminism emerged from that New Left which was largely composed of student radicals.

The question of much greater fascination for me - one which I would love to explore in writing both as an account of those times and of my own life — is to ask: why did so many of the concerns, protests and disenchantments of the young take focus during the Sixties in the political philosophies and terms of expression of the Old (Marxist-Leninist) Left?

Why did those CND-ers, Civil Rights' marchers, campus malcontents, anti-war protestors, Sorbonne wall-daubers turn in waves and droves to the political analysis of nineteenth-century philosophers and to a world-view whose most powerful advocates were the corrupt old Stalinists in Swiss suits and Italian shoes who occupied the Kremlin?

Here is a question of profound personal, political and historical interest; and I would love to go into it with all my heart. But, again, it is not a question which advances the purposes of this chapter and this discussion. We can agree that it happened. The fact that it happened is not in question.

I cannot resist making an aside on this point: I believe that the radical young of the Sixties turned to Marx and to the Old Left *faute de mieux*. Ignored and despised by the political establishment of the time, by Harold Wilson and his Cabinet as much as by De Gaulle, Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, there was no place for us within the orthodox system.

The opposition between the young and the rest was so absolute on issues such as the Bomb, the Vietnam war, civil rights and "rock culture" — the two sides being mutually uncomprehending and unaccommodating — that we had no place to go but East and no system of belief by which to recognise and organise ourselves other than the certainties offered by the old uncles Karl and Fred. The only other alternative, it is illuminating to remember, was Islam - a path chosen by many black American revolutionaries but one which was not open to the rest of us.]

The greatest problem of political philosophy for those new adherents of Old Left attitudes was to find a class enemy.

Revolutionary Marxism doesn't make any sense unless the woes and deprivations of groups and classes of individuals can be explained by the operation of the class interests of those who take material and social advantage of them.

Marx himself was thoroughly explicit on this point. Even after 125 years, the clarity of his totalitarian declarations was to exert a gripping influence on the minds of the young Westerners who were groping for some systematic account of their own alienations and discontents.

Marx said, "For one class to represent the whole of society, another class must concentrate in itself all the evils of society, a particular class must embody and represent a general obstacle and limitation. A particular social sphere must be regarded as the *notorious crime* of the whole society, so that emancipation from this sphere appears as a general emancipation. For one class to be the liberating class par excellence, it is essential that another class should be openly the oppressing class" (my italics.

He went on to say "A class must be formed which has radical chains, a class in civil society which is not a class of civil society, a class which is the dissolution of all classes, a sphere of society which has a universal character because its sufferings are universal, and which does not claim a particular redress because the wrong which is done to it is not a particular wrong but wrong in general." [Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie Einleitung 1844.]

Here is the origin of class war, that pernicious diagnosis that has poisoned politics and social life in throughout the world for nearly two centuries. Could any formulation be more totalitarian in its classifications? You're either with us or you're against us. You're either part of the problem or you're part of the solution. All that crude, absolutist, tribal bollocks that has been integral to leftist attitudes and beliefs since the French Revolution.

By a singular account (mine) the entire history of the Marxist Left in the last 150 years can, narrowly, be interpreted as a quest for the identification of these opposing classes - the class, on the one side, which embodied "the notorious crime of the whole society" and which was "openly the oppressing class"; and, on the other side, for the class "which is the dissolution of all classes, a sphere of society which has a universal character because its sufferings are universal".

Marx's original analysis identified these classes in economic terms and he construed the industrial proletariat as being the "class which is the dissolution of all classes". With less clarity, finality and certainty, he identified the "bourgeoisie" as being the class which embodied the notorious crime.

It is worth looking back briefly on Marx's own difficulties in applying his approach to his own time: those difficulties had become fatal to the analysis as a whole by the time the young radicals of the 1960s tried to apply it.

Marx identified "three great classes of modern society based on the capitalist mode of production". They were wage-labourers, capitalists and landowners - the "three great social groups whose components, the individual members, live from wages, profit and rent respectively, that is from the utilization of their labour power, capital and -landed property."

Marx acknowledged that, even in Victorian England where these "great social groups" were readily visible and broadly distinguishable "intermediate and transitional strata obscure the class boundaries". The working class, dependent upon wage-labour and lacking possession of any other form of

capital or of land-ownership was, indeed, obvious in its identity. As a class, it truly did comprise the "mass" of the people, both in the cities and in the countryside. The existence of this class and the economic circumstances and limitations its members shared were commonly agreed and accepted by all sorts of observers, analysts and commentators. It was not necessary to be a Marxist to subscribe to that common view.

Beyond that consensus, however, lay perplexing complications of analysis and identification, chiefly in the difficulties of pinning down the economic powers and position of members of the "bourgeoisie" who might, simultaneously, appear to be members of more than one class.

A doctor might have nothing to sell but his labour power; but his circumstances could not readily be matched with those of a factory worker, especially if that worker owned property or had inherited capital.

Members of landowning families might be personally impoverished, might be dependent upon their wage-labour as government officials. Were they to be described as members of the bourgeoisie if they lived in rented property and accumulated no capital to bequeath to their children? How could the peasant farmer or kulak be described as capitalist or landowner when the sum of his possessions and "stored-up labour" amounted to a donkey and a hectare of land?

These "intermediate and transitional strata" did present taxing difficulties for Marxists who were looking for an enemy class to oppose and to vanquish.

Marx had said that the general emancipation of society depended upon "a certain class" which "is felt and recognized as the general representative of society. Its aims and interests must genuinely be the aims and interests of society itself, of which it becomes in fact the social head and heart." The "certain class" was the industrial proletariat, whose existence everybody could agree. The problem for Marx and his followers who sought practical applications of his theories was to identify and extirpate the enemy class, the embodiment of "the notorious crime".

That effort was more easily done with conviction than said or written with persuasive plausibility. It gave specious reason to many of the most loathsome and diabolical episodes of savagery in this century. Stalin's massacre of the kulaks and his forced deportations of millions of his opponents to labour camps and to death were accounted for and rationalised on the grounds that those individuals were members of the enemy class. The same totalitarian logic was given by Mao Tse-Tung to explain and to justify the hounding and murder of professional and semi-professional people in the Cultural Revolution. The same barbaric lines of reasoning were given by the Khmer Rouge when they force-marched the inhabitants of Cambodian cities into their killing fields.

Philosophical distinctions presented no obstacle: the tyrants bludgeoned through the "intermediate and transitional strata" which Marx had acknowledged, hacking and shooting a path of expedience through those complications in truth which blurred distinctions of class and might frustrate the application of Marx's theory.

By the late 1960s in the West, those complications in truth had become thoroughly disorientating for all would-be followers of Marx. The difficulty now was not simply to identify the enemy class. Still more taxing was the task of naming the class of heroes whose "aims and interests must genuinely be the aims and interests of society itself, of which it becomes in fact the social head and heart."

The industrial proletariat, so readily identifiable in the nineteenth century, had extensively decomposed by the middle of the twentieth century. High-paid workers who had stored-up capital in freehold property, insurance policies, pension funds and shareholdings could not convincingly be portrayed as members of a class whose deprivations have "a universal character because its sufferings are universal".

Who, in any case, was the proletarian? A dentist's receptionist could be said to have her hands on the means of production only in the most remote and negligible senses. Her financial standing would put her closer to the factory worker than the dentist; but should she be described as a member of the factory worker's class rather than the dentist's - in whose class she would probably prefer to see herself?

Beyond these complications lay the bewildering changes in the technology of industrial production which had, themselves, obscured divisions of class between workers and managers. In car factories, for instance, it was already happening in the 1960s that foremen and even line-managers were expected to share some of the tasks and all of the working conditions of their subordinates. Meanwhile, traditional heavy industries which employed legions of proletarians were entering a visible decline in output and numbers of employees; and, simultaneously, the industries of media production, financial services and sales were calling for ever greater numbers of highly-qualified workers whose salaries and other forms of remuneration were making them into a new class of capitalists.

How to make sense of it all? How could the old axioms of the whiskery uncles be applied to this baffling variety of change and still emerge as the eternal verities and fixed horizons of political landscape for which the young were yearning?

In the early years of the 1960s, when young people in the West first began to edge Leftwards, the old shibboleths were trotted out anew with, frequently, comical or grotesque results. I remember that when I first came across members of the Young Communist League in Salisbury in 1963, when I became a 16 year-old local official of CND, they tried to tell me, in all solemnity, that the Berlin Wall had been erected to keep out the hordes of starving Westerners who wanted to break into the East. I remember, too, the venomous disapprobation of those comrades when I started stepping out with the glamorous daughter of a local publican. To their way of thinking, they told me, I had made a fatally compromising connection with the bourgeois enemy.

The confusions and ideological strangulations of those hopelessly muddled Wiltshire youngsters came out of grander difficulties of abstract thought which were also occupying the minds of bigger thinkers across the West. Herbert Marcuse was one of the first political philosophers of the time to recognise that modern Marxism must respond to an imperative need and adjust its class perspectives.

Marcuse, Ernest Mandel and others argued that, following the disintegration of an industrial proletariat and the blurring of other classical lines of distinction, a new class had to be identified which should be the "class which is the dissolution of all classes". New skins were needed for the old whine.

Marcuse and Mandel saw the promise of this new class in the immense body of students in institutions of higher learning all across the West. In the second half of the Sixties, many of the more florid and unconvincing effusions of campus radicals took their diction and their style of reasoning from Marcuse's vision.

The idea that the London School of Economics and other centres of learning might become "Red Foci", in the style of Maoist and Cuban guerrillas proceeded from Marcuse's apothegms. It may have been a potty notion but, at least, it was grand in vision and grandiloquent in expression. The least noble effort to apply this style of thought came, to my mind, when Cambridge contemporaries of mine declared that it was a revolutionary act to complain about the quality of the food they were served in their dining-halls.

While the Marxist bottle of theories with its Marcusian cork was bobbing around more or less harmlessly on the seas of student radicalism, it was also lifted as a Molotov cocktail in a far more dramatic theatre of the political world.

Around 1966-7, led by Stokeley Carmichael and Eldridge Cleaver, the idea first got put about that a class division existed between blacks and whites in America, giving rise, in theory, to a revolutionary prospectus in the headquarters of capitalism and at the centre of the liberal world.

Here, for sure, was a potent and compelling application of the old paint. "The notorious crime of the whole society" of the United States was, in lurid and incontestable shades, the second-class citizenship of coloured peoples. The segregations of blacks and the denial of their political rights, the scale of their poverty and extent of their deprivations made a perfect picture for political enlargement. For a brief moment in 1967-8, it was easy to see the blacks as the Black Panthers wished to describe them, as "a sphere of society which has a universal character because its sufferings are universal". The snag, as ever in this approach, was to find and define the villain. Which class of individuals in the United States could be named as being "openly the oppressing class"? Who was to blame? Who was the enemy?

The enemy, came the answer, is within our selves, not merely a limb of the body politic but an essential component of our very own being. The enemy is "white culture" and whites are, by birth, agents of that culture. It followed that the enemy, honky reader, is your self. Thus spake Eldridge Cleaver and Huey Newton, LeRoi Jones and, to some degree, James Baldwin.

The Black Power movement of the later Sixties was the first overtly Marxist movement of the modern West to express the claim that an ineradicable evil could inhere to groups of individuals who had nothing in common but their birth. Seizing the bludgeons and cleavers of totalitarianism, they carved their way through the problem of "transitional strata" in the enemy class by saying that it didn't matter what you thought, said or did as an individual: if you were born white you were, ir-

redeemably and unalterably, a member of the oppressor class. You were, by your birth and existence, guilty of the notorious crime and, it followed in the mind of Eldridge Cleaver and some others, any black might revenge himself for that general ill by assaulting you individually.

It was - need it be said? - a monstrous and wicked perversion, an insidious, corrupting and pernicious falsification and falsehood.

Nonetheless and to the eternal shame and disgrace of the nincompoop generation of love and peace, the falsification was enthusiastically accepted: the perversion was given place; it took hold and, with consequences which have done much to spoil our lives and to inhibit our powers, it held.

It is a puzzle now, 25 years later [1991], to account for the impact of that Black Power casuistry, to explain the instantaneous collapse of liberal principle and desire among the white Westerners who endorsed that totalitarian hokum. Why was it found to be so compelling among young liberals who had devoted their energies and their passions to the elimination of disadvantages for blacks and of the brutal and hateful prejudice with which they were surrounded? Why were those educated young whites so willing to declare themselves guilty? Why were they so eager to see themselves as the enemy?

These are, again, questions which contain the most absorbing interest to my mind; but they are, I regret, off the chart of this book and its purposes. If you know the history of that period, you must agree that the Black Power propositions were advanced and were embraced. If that history has passed you by and if you want to check it out, you will find hundreds of books and documents which give its records. You might like, for instance, to look at the writings of Carl Oglesby, Angela Davis and Dotson Rader. Look, especially, at Tom Wolfe's essay "Radical Chic: That Party at Lenny's".

As briefly as I can, I want to offer the suggestion that young whites were eager to see themselves as the enemy because the proposition drew and set the limits on an accessible and comprehensible political universe. Part of the appeal of the Black Power sophistry lay in its implicit claim, soon to be extracted and paraded on placards, that the political realities of the outer world could be discerned in the inner life of the individual and in his or her personal relationships with others.

That outer world was infinitely unmanageable, implacably impervious to protest and to reason. The universally shared feelings and desires of the young were, visibly, held in contempt. It simply did not make any difference to, for instance, the conduct of the war in Vietnam how many hundreds of thousands of the young demonstrated their opposition in the capital cities of the West. Argument over the manufacture and deployment of nuclear weapons made not a jot of difference to the policies which decreed their manufacture and deployment.

In the shining city on the hill of Western democracy, Presidents and presidential candidates were being rubbed out in the most suspicious circumstances, suggesting conspiracy conducted at the highest levels of government, and those murders were being hosed away from public attention from a faucet of official bullshit and lies.

In these aspects of political life and in all others, the young had no power at all to influence the counsels of the elders. They were ignored. It is enormously revealing to see, for instance, that the condensed edition of Richard Crossman's diaries of the deliberations of Harold Wilson's Cabinets 1964-70 record, throughout that period of massive disaffections among the young, only one brief discussion of unrest in British universities. That discussion took place in March 1970 and the Cabinet agreed that Vice-Chancellors should be stiffened by government support in their duty to root out troublemakers.

In retrospect, it is astounding that Labour politicians who prided themselves, above all, on their management of dissent in the party should have been so blind to the consequences for their own party of a mass defection of their own natural supporters among the educated young. But that's how it was, both in Britain and elsewhere. We know that Lyndon Johnson was thoroughly mystified by the militancy and the passions of the young Americans (mostly natural Democrats) who bellowed their opposition to the war in Vietnam over the garden rails of the White House. We know that he and De Gaulle were able to comprehend those passions and the demonstrations they ignited only as evidence that a Red plot was being spread throughout the West. Otherwise, the young made simply no sense to their leaders.

The cardinal tenets of Black Power made the outer world comprehensible, if not manageable, within personal and domestic life. When the Panthers said that their objective was "bringing the war back home", they offered young whites a prospectus of political action within a theatre where their powers were visible and from which they could not be excluded: the family and its psychological life.

The slogan "the personal is political" is broadly assumed, these days, to have been invented by modern feminists, by whom it has certainly been appropriated (see Rosalind Miles above). It was not so. The slogan was drawn from Black Power apothegms which described the origins and the intrinsic powers of racialism within the psychological and family lives of white Americans.

The Panthers set off a spark of unreason which instantaneously caught fire across boundaries of sense and across cultures. It was on the lips of Berlin students at the barricades and it was current among the Parisian Situationists of 1968 some moments before "the notorious crime" committed against women as a whole was identified.

The first time I heard a young radical express the idea that it would be a revolutionary act (and, therefore, in accordance with a desirable theory) to kill your own parents was in October 1968 in Cambridge.

The speaker was a boy, the son of a powerful senior executive in the advertising company J. Walter Thompson. He and a group of his friends were pleased to call themselves The Bash Street Kids. Under the influence of a lot of LSD and other psychotropic drugs, their political interests and concerns had reduced to the aching vibrations within a bursting cranium. Since the "personal was political" it followed that "it's all inside your head, man."

Madness lay that way: we gaily tripped out along the path, declaring en route that madness itself was the only sane response to an insane world.

Gripping as they were, the analytical propositions of Black Power were limited by the special conditions and circumstances of blacks. Those conditions could not convincingly be represented - however hard the imagination of the radical young tried to see them as such - as "a sphere of society which has a universal character because its sufferings are universal". The sufferings of the blacks were - at length it had to be admitted — particular to themselves rather than universal to the whole of "bourgeois society". Blacks were excluded, segregated, refused admission to the institutions of state and to all but the most menial and slavish work. We - the young whites - were not. It may have been fun to see ourselves through the clouds of ganja and the thump of soul sharing the universal conditions of the blacks; but it had to be recognised (not least because they told us so) that their particular deprivations and ills were their own special inheritance.

Given this limitation and prohibition, the bogus diktats of old Uncle Karl were discarded on the wayside of American society so far as the plight of the coloured peoples was concerned. Anyhow, the radical young had discovered a much more exciting use and focus for those rusty old blunderbusses.

They were immediately picked up, dusted off and redirected, with infinitely greater power and conviction, as the philosophical and analytical tools and weapons of the Women's Liberation movement.

In *Sexual Politics*, first published in 1969, Kate Millett[3] wrote: " In America, recent events have forced us to acknowledge at last that the relationship between the races is indeed a political one which involves the general control of one collectivity, defined by birth, over another collectivity, also defined by birth. Groups who rule by birthright are fast disappearing, yet there remains one ancient and universal scheme for the domination of one birth group by another - the scheme that prevails in the area of sex. The study of racism has convinced us that a truly political state of affairs operates between the races to perpetuate a series of oppressive circumstances. The subordinated group has inadequate redress through existing political institutions, and is deterred thereby from organizing into conventional political struggle and opposition. Quite in the same manner, a disinterested examination of our system of sexual relationships must point out that the situation between the sexes now, and throughout history, is a case of that phenomenon Max Weber described as *herrschaft*, a relationship of dominance and subordination. What goes largely unexamined, often unacknowledged (yet is institutionalised nonetheless) in our social order, is the birthright priority whereby males rule females. Through this system a most ingenious form of 'interior colonization' has been achieved.

It is one which tends moreover to be sturdier than any form of segregation, and more rigorous than class stratification, more uniform, certainly more enduring. However muted its present appearance may be, sexual dominion obtains nevertheless as perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power."

This statement can be taken as the *locus classicus* of modern feminism. It confirms what I have been trying to argue and to show: that the presumptions of the New Left as to the circumstances of blacks jumped the rails and were applied, as articles of canon law, to the circumstances of women.

The long wander of the Marxist Left through the institutions and societies of the modern West, in search of the class which would be the head and heart of society, the class which would be the dissolution of all classes, had culminated in the definition of "the birthright priority whereby males rule females". The lost tribe had found its Israel and its new Moses. The totalitarian classifications of the old nineteenth-century big beards had, with a vengeance, come back to roost at home, in the bosom of the family. Karl, meet Kate: Kate, this is Karl: you two were meant for each other.

Kate Millett's diction, in this passage, is unmistakably that of a Marxian of the old school. To speak of "a disinterested examination of our system of sexual relationship" is to employ the rhetorical devices of doctrinaire Marxists in all generations (Who says the examination is "disinterested"? How do we know that there is "a system of sexual relationship"? On who's say-so are we to take these terms for granted?)

The last sentences of the passage contain an almost eerily accurate reflection of Marx's original prescription. He had called for the formation of a class which could be "a sphere of society which has a universal character because its sufferings are universal, and which does not claim a particular redress because the wrong which is done to it is not a particular wrong but wrong in qeneral."

Millett answers this call with "a most ingenious form of 'interior colonization' ...more rigorous than class stratification" and one which supplies "perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power."

The essential articles of Kate Millett's opinions swept the Western world. Nothing in our time matches the speed and breadth of the intellectual movement she initiated. Never in our lifetime has a prescriptive analysis - composed in pseudo-academic terms for the sake of a doctoral thesis - caught fire so ferociously in the minds of a general public across international and continental frontiers. Within months after publication of *Sexual Politics*, Millett's point of view and her specific terms had entered the *lingua franca* of a host of writers in America and Europe and had been accepted, as commonplaces of conversation and observation, by the vast horde of malcontented young radicals across the West.

Heaps of examples can be given of this spread of universal assumptions. My table, at this moment, is supporting 13 texts from that period which overflow on every page with the presumption that Kate Millett and the women she inspired had identified a classical and eternal verity and a dynamic point of departure for a revolutionary prospectus. Let me put my hands on a few of them, just to sketch that scene. In her 1969 essay "On American Feminism", Shulamith Firestone described the aim of the new feminism as being "Overthrow of the oldest, most rigid caste/class system in existence, the class system based on sex — a system consolidated over thousands of years, lending the archetypal male and female roles an undeserved legitimacy and seeming permanence." She also spoke of the new feminism as being the "dawn of a long struggle to break free from the oppressive power structures set up by nature and reinforced by man."

In 1970, in the compilation *Sisterhood is Powerful*, Roxanne Dunbar contributed an essay called "Female Liberation as the basis for social revolution".

Her first words were:

The present female liberation movement must be viewed within the context of international social revolution and within the context of the long struggle by women for nominal legal rights.

She went on to say: "Black people in America and Vietnamese people have exposed the basic weakness of the system of white, Western dominance which we live under...Black Americans and Vietnamese have taught, most importantly, that there is a distinction between the consciousness of the oppressor and the consciousness of the oppressed."

In 1969, Margaret Benston contributed to Monthly Review an article called "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation". She wrote:

The 'woman question' is generally ignored in analyses of the class structure of society. This is so because, on the one hand, classes are generally defined by their relation to the means of production and, on the other hand, women are not supposed to have any unique relation to the means of production...In arguing that the roots of the secondary status of women are in fact economic, it can be shown that women as a group do indeed have a definite relation to the means of production and that this is different from that of men...If this special relation of women to production is accepted, the analysis of the situation of women fits naturally into a class analysis of society.

To complete this set of darts, let's turn to that trusty old quiver, that repository of all that is most contemptibly ego-serving, malignant, posturing and false in the canons of modern feminism, the thoughts and words of Dr Greer.

In her Summary, which was the prelude to *The Female Eunuch* (first published in 1970) Germaine Greer predicted that "the most telling criticisms" [of her work] will come from my sisters of the left, the Maoists, the Trots, the IS [International Socialists], the SDS, because of my fantasy that it might be possible to leap the steps of revolution and arrive somehow at liberty and communism without strategy or revolutionary discipline. But if women are the true proletariat, the truly oppressed majority, the revolution can only be drawn nearer by their withdrawal of support for the capitalist system."

Ah, Dr Greer: the Lord love you; where should we have been without you? Yours is the Gibraltar of cant from which we can take our bearings to steer through the straits of this argument.

If it is true that "women are the true proletariat, the truly oppressed majority" then all the nightmare excesses, the poisonous hostilities and vicious aggressions of the last 20 years may be excused, even if they cannot be fully justified. Self-evidently the victims of oppression, especially if they are in the majority, cannot be expected to act kindly towards their oppressors, to show tolerance, restraint and goodwill. If their distinct and justifiable interests are thwarted by a class of oppressors who employ totalitarian means to continue and sustain their power, who can object if the oppressed

revolt violently in the advancement of their interests? The sympathies of all right-thinking people must, incontestably and by the rules of natural justice, lie with the oppressed.

In the oft-quoted words of Robin Morgan (editor of *Sisterhood is Powerful* and Ms Magazine): "I feel that "man-hating" is an honorable and viable political act, that the oppressed have a right to class-hatred against the class that is oppressing them."

But what if - let the question germinate - what if it is not true that women are the proletariat? What are we to make of those violent effusions, those hectoring marching songs and rallying cries, if – give way to the doubt - it may not be true that women are the truly oppressed majority? Never were; never have been; never could be? Then what?

Let's inch our way towards those questions. This is a perilous course of navigation, heavily mined with fiendish, submerged devices. The clearest way through to an open Atlantic of argument is to keep your right eye on that Gibraltar of doctoral cant and your left eye on the sure contours of that list of disadvantages which I assembled in the Prologue. Remember, always, that we have seen that institutionalised disadvantages for men are widespread in the formal patterns of domestic and family life in Britain. We have agreed - have we not? - that a society which includes such disadvantages cannot be named a patriarchy. Now let's train our sights on the enemy at hand, while steering for the distant but clear horizon.

In the paragraphs of *Sexual Politics* which follow immediately after her identification of the *herrschaft* between men and women, Kate Millett gave the particular context for that general relationship. An order of sexual dominion obtains, she said: " . . . because our society, like all other historical civilizations, is a patriarchy. The fact is evident at once if one recalls that the military, industry, technology, universities, science, political office and finance - in short, every avenue of power within the society, including the coercive force of the police - is entirely in male hands. As the essence of politics is power, such realizations cannot fail to carry impact."

We may agree that the essence of politics is power. Sure. We may not disagree for an instant that, at the time when Millett was writing and still, largely, today "every avenue of power...is in male hands". No contest. The point of argument and division arrives in the last words of the paragraph. What is and should be the impact of those realizations? Do they truly mean what they mean in Millett's mind - that our society, like all other historical civilizations, is a patriarchy?

"Patriarchal government", Millett tells us, is "the institution whereby that half of the population which is female is controlled by that half which is male". The institution (is it that?) operates, she says, on two principles: "Male shall dominate female, elder male shall dominate younger". These points add up to the depiction of a system of control and of oppression which is purposeful, willed, deliberate and intentionally inflicted by males upon females .

According to Millett and to all of the disciples who have followed her down the decades, the direction of every avenue of power was and - to the extent that it remains - is in male hands because that's the way men wish, choose, require and compel our societies to take their shape and exercise their powers.

"Patriarchy" thus became "the notorious crime" prescribed by Marx. Throughout all the writings of the early New Left feminists, emancipation from the sphere of patriarchy, to borrow Marx's terms again, was represented as a means to bring about a general emancipation.

Germaine Greer was always characteristically emphatic and concise on this general perspective and the specific terms of antagonism it involved. "If women liberate themselves," she wrote, "they will perforce liberate their oppressors". In a number of places throughout her writings in the early Seventies, she openly declared war. "Men are the enemy" she said on page 297 of *The Female Eunuch*. "Men are the enemy," she wrote again in an essay published in February 1970. "They know it — at least they know that there is a sex war on, an unusually cold one." The justification for this belligerence was held, *per se*, to be the existence of patriarchy. A syllogism of the most brutal (and one may say, anti-Marxist, anti-historical) illogic was the casus belli and gave shape to the rules of engagement.

f all power was in the hands of males it must follow that males had chosen to exert those powers over women: therefore it followed, further, that women were obliged to wage war against men and their system of power in order to obtain for themselves their due and just share of powers both political and economic.

The war of liberation to obtain those powers would, necessarily, involve the defeat of the oppressive system and a general emancipation.

The presumption that men chose to operate a system of powers which excluded and took advantage of women is the common coin of modern feminism. It is, in fact, the *sine qua non* of the movement which has been, beyond compare, the most influential and demanding force in our times. The presumption can be seen to run beneath the entire literary landscape of modern feminism. It stretches from Eva Figes and her book *Patriarchal Attitudes* (published in 1970) to Naomi Wolfe and her book *The Beauty Myth* (published in 1990). It leads from the measured, pseudo-scientific terms of Juliet Mitchell in her late-1960s writings in the New Left Review to the spit-flecked ravings of the gauleiter Julie Burchill in her journalistic columns today. It is the common denominator of the psychotic denunciations of Valerie Solanas in *The SCUM Manifesto* (published 1968) and of the self-contented vanities of Kate Saunders in her book *Revenge* (published 1990).

Throughout all those writings - and, I suggest, in all the casual and conversational terms by which men are universally described and derided today - runs the presumption that a political system of "patriarchy" is conducted as an elective conspiracy of men for the purposes of sustaining their own powers.

What, the reader must ask, is wrong with the idea?

Self-evidently, women have never, until the present day, been admitted as equals - either in numbers or in powers - in the institutions of modern societies. Even today, it is obvious that women who seek advancement in those institutions face considerable difficulties (I shall want to consider them).

It is beyond argument or dispute to say that all post-nomadic societies have confined women in one form or another of domestic ghetto, usually without material rewards or rights. Nobody can deny - why should they want to? - that in all Western societies down to the present age, political and economic powers, honours and distinctions, titles, perks and pride of ownership have been the sole property of men.

What, then, is the argument? Where is the dispute? If all those points can be so readily conceded, it must appear that the feminist case wins by a walkover. We agree that men have had power and that women have had none. If that division of powers does not describe a patriarchy, what on earth is it?

It is not a patriarchy.

Remember, always: IT IS NOT A PATRIARCHY

The presumptions of Kate Millett and her cohort run along a fault of logic and a rift of sense as wide, deep and potentially destructive as the San Andreas fault. A tremor of scepticism will touch it off and then the citadels of dogma erected by the feminist orthodoxy all along the way may slide into a Pacific of impassive history.

Let me apply the first gentle touch by asking what might have made the post-war generation of women so special that they were able to discern and to vanquish a universal system of oppression to which hundreds of millions of their forebears, in all ages and generations, had submitted? What made them so clever and their sisters through all eternity so dumb?

This is not an original question. It has occupied the minds of many feminist writers and they have produced screeds of answers. One of their answers is to say that women had never, before the post-war era, been educated in great numbers in universities and other institutes of higher learning. Women, goes this answer, had been denied the intellectual apparatus and the tools of analysis by which they might comprehend the wider workings and the true nature of their particular and individual oppressions. This answer seems to imply that you've got to have a post-graduate degree in sociology to realise when you're being screwed.
Another answer, sometimes given by the same people who advance the first explanation, is that women, in all ages, did resist the oppressions of patriarchy but the history of that resistance has been, until lately, kept secret.

In its efforts to establish and to vindicate that history of struggle, the women's movement has created an entire industry of scholarship, both in publishing and in academia. Across the Western world, all the Centres of Women's Studies that have come into being have taken their *raison d'etre* from the claim that women had a particular history of their own which women themselves should be entitled to explore and to expand on their own terms.

I want to tear into that specious claim in detail in later pages but, for the moment, let me say that even if it were true that women's particular consciousness and their special history of rebellion had been suppressed by patriarchal powers, it is still rather peculiar that women in all ages down to the nineteenth century should have done so little to protest about or, in organised movements, to

resist those oppressive powers. I mean, 5000 years is quite a long stretch of suffering under the notorious crime without it being universally acknowledged and resisted, wouldn't you say? What, I ask again, was so special about Western women in the Sixties? What was the difference between them and all their ancestors in all times? Allowing for the smart-aleckry of the previous teasings, let me ask this question in all seriousness.

Was there, in the lives of women before 1965, any simple reason - natural, given, intrinsic to their lives and independent of the operations of political institutions - why they could not participate in public life on equal terms with men? Kindly ask yourself further: what changes occurred in the lives of women in the West in the years 1965-70 to remove any obstacle which had previously prevented or inhibited their emergence into public and commercial life on equal terms with men?

Answers: 1. The Pill and 2. Abortion by dilation and vacuum curettage.

The reason why men had all the powers and women had none in all Western societies until the late nineteenth century was that women could not, with any degree of certainty other than by total abstention, control their fertility.

The reason why women were enabled, in the mid-1960s, to emerge from the confinements of their domestic ghetto was that, at precisely that date and for the first time in all of human history, women were provided with a technology which gave them infallible control over their fertility.

What the feminists chose to call "patriarchy" was, in all its expressions (including romantic love and men's systems of clubs and honours) nothing more than a set of social relations and conventions which arose from, expressed and refined a division between men and women which was, until the 1960s, essential, natural and ineradicable. Yes, it did happen that a culture emerged from that division in which the powers of men were celebrated, in which they were widely believed to be superior, in which women and children were defined by law and custom as the property of men. Yes, indeed.

But the reason was not, essentially and primarily, that men invented that culture to suit themselves and to keep women down. The reason was that if women were to have babies, if the tribe was to reproduce, a system of concessions was required which allowed for the cardinal uncertainties of women to know when they might become pregnant and for how many years they might be suckling infants. Marriage, itself, was instituted as one such concession (see the marriage ceremony in the *Book of Common Prayer*).

I will argue, throughout the remainder of this book, that all the social institutions and conventions which had defined the relative positions and roles of men and women had been determined by that cardinal uncertainty. Unless they were unmarried or wholly chaste within marriage, individual women could not be admitted to social life outside the family on equal terms with men.

This wasn't a matter of choice: it simply wasn't possible.

Societies, I will say, had been so extensively organised to accommodate those concessions and the particular needs of pregnant and suckling women that the opportunities they afforded women for activity in the society beyond the family - even for those women who were chaste - were, necessarily, limited and few in number. Until the introduction of abortion techniques by the safe, quick and barely fallible method of dilation and vacuum curettage, pregnant women had never been able to determine,' without risk to their lives, whether or not they would carry a baby to term. This incapacity, again, ruled women out for admission to forms of social life outside the family on equal terms with men. I will argue that the introduction of this technology and of the technology of contraception were essential to the labour requirements of modern market economies and that they were falsely, perversely perceived as a vital weapon of liberation in the "sex war" women were required to wage against patriarchy.

The introduction of these inventions and technological innovations marked a division in human affairs which was without precedent. The few years, less than half a decade, in which they became freely available to a broad public throughout the West were a watershed in history more dynamic and divisive than the invention of the Spinning Jenny or the introduction of the steam engine. Those brief years were a moment of history more directly influential in the lives of all individuals than the moment when the geniuses of Los Alamos exploded their first device of nuclear fission. Nothing which went before, in determining the circumstances of women and the general state of relations between men and women need, necessarily, be true for those future circumstances and relations after the introduction of infallible contraception and safe and quick abortion.

The introduction of the pill and of safe abortion has, it goes without saying, occupied a great deal of attention from feminists and has been the subject of much argument and disagreement. Even so, it is very striking that the historical importance of these inventions has not been considered among the central propositions of feminism.

No feminist author, as far as I know, has taken the view that it was the contraceptive revolution rather than the consciousness of women, charged with militancy, which changed everything.. On the contrary, those inventions have been seen as side-issues.

Parts of Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* were first published in magazines in 1963 and the book emerged as a whole in immediately following years. By that time, the existence of the Pill was well-known, even though it was not yet seen as an invention which would rapidly transform all personal and social relations between men and women and would confound, disrupt or overturn all the expectations, traditions and conventions by which they had been accustomed to see themselves and each other. Yet the word "contraception" does not appear anywhere in the index of *The Feminine Mystique*. "Planned Parenthood" gets one entry, in the first pages of the first chapter (where the author muses over the sudden increase in births in America in the Fifties). "Birth Control", similarly, appears once only; and that in the Epilogue, which was not written and published until 1973.

Betty Friedan takes it as axiomatic that women have "a right" to demand effective contraception and easy abortion. She speaks, as many of her successors were to speak, as if the facilities of contraception and abortion might be withheld from women as ways of keeping them in their place and might only be prised from the ungiving society by women wielding the crowbars of their feminist consciousness. In other words, Friedan implies that the impetus towards change for women came from the desires of women, rising as a collectivity, rather than - as I see it - that those desires and, indeed, that rising were initiated and facilitated by the technology, without which they could not exist.

Friedan says:

"Society had to be restructured so that women, who happen to be the people who give birth, could make a human, responsible choice whether or not - and when - to have children and not be barred thereby from participating in society in their own right." This passage thrums with presumptions which I shall want to question further (such as "why would anybody think that having a job equals 'participating in society in their own right'?"); but I am interested, for the moment, solely in Friedan's view that "society had to be restructured", through the provision of contraceptive and abortion technology, to afford women that right.

This is the established view of the feminist orthodoxy, that women had to battle to get the benefits of the contraceptive revolution as an intrinsic, but not fundamental, element of their general war of liberation. It was, in their book, a small pocket of conflict on the long front line of emancipation. As Sheila Rowbotham put it, in her history of feminism entitled *The Past is Before Us* (published 1989):

"In the course of the struggle for the freedom to separate sexuality from giving birth, the abortion campaign involved challenging laws and the structures and practices of medicine, technology and science."

Of all feminist authors and commentators, only Shulamith Firestone and Juliet Mitchell (so far as I know) took the view that the contraceptive revolution, in and of itself, fundamentally altered the position of women.

Sheila Rowbotham herself quoted from Juliet Mitchell's 1966 article "Women: The Longest Revolution", where Mitchell had said: " Once childbearing becomes totally voluntary, its significance is fundamentally altered...The fact of overwhelming importance is that easily available contraception threatens to dissociate sexual from reproductive experience - which all contemporary bourgeois ideology tries to make inseparable, as the *raison d'etre* of the family."

Sheila Rowbotham wrote a line of commentary upon these views which I take to be the prevailing feminist opinion. She said, "In practice, the development of contraceptive technology was to be less transformative than Juliet Mitchell envisaged."

Well, I suppose it depends what you call transformative.

Whatever that word may mean, I think it must apply to the development of that contraceptive technology as it arrived in the 1960s.

What would we have thought if we had been told in the 1950s, while we were still young, that, an invention would be introduced which allowed any woman to have sex with any man she chose without risk of pregnancy? What would we have thought if we had realised that this invention led automatically to the possibility that women could go to work on equal terms with men and that men could take equal responsibility and power in the home? How would we have viewed the future if it had struck us that this invention made redundant all the laws and taboos, the conventions and the courtliness by which all societies had tried to ensure that the father of a woman's child should recognise the child as his own? All the wooing, the yearning and the romance; all the paraphenalia of infatuation, the promises, the pinning and the ringing? All the particular confinements of women, the ring-fences of convention which secured them in sexless suburbia - their hobbling shoes, their hairdos and their nail-paintings - all blown away? All the guilt and shame and public approbrium which went with a premature loss of virginity or an enthusiastic taste for adultery - all irrelevant, pointless, unnecessary, gone for good and forever?

I think we might have called those visions "transformative".

If we had known it was coming, would we have been happy to know that ours would be the generation to whom it would fall to see and implement that profound, traumatising, unprecedented transformation?

Or might we have been daunted just a little, wishing that this could happen to somebody else instead, that we might just hold up these changes for a while, deny their "transformative" powers at least until the hormonal riotings of our own youth had quietened down a little?

It fell, of course, chiefly to women to bear this weight of change: not all women; just a very big group. Women who were over the age of 40 in 1965 were largely exempted from the changes which were just about to break upon the world. Women born after 1970 would enter a world which had already adjusted very broadly to the convulsive changes which had occurred.

But there was a particular class of women, born around the time of the Second World War, who were caught slap-bang in the middle of the seachange. Their unavoidable, historic task and responsibility was to negotiate personal and social change on a scale that no women in the entire history of human beings had ever had to face.

No wonder a lot of them funked it. No wonder they tried to erect an ideological Berlin Wall which would restrain and deny change. No wonder they created an hysterical dogma to keep men in their place and women in theirs, even while it was advanced as a prospectus for revolutionary change by which individuals might be released from the imprisonment of sexual stereotypes.

The people who were to compose and advance this contradictory ideology had already shown themselves capable of believing anything, no matter how nonsensical it might be. Among them, in fact and in truth, were those young nitwits from Salisbury who, a decade before, had told me that the Berlin Wall was erected to keep out the hordes of Westerners who were clamouring to get into the socialist dream state. Now, erecting their own wall and parading their banners upon it, they were going to say that reaction was change, that the tyranny of sexual stereotyping (the one they chose to approve) was emancipation and that hate was love.

Orwell might have called it *Sisterspeak*.

Endnotes

[1] That was meant to be "voice". The mis-typing is purely fortuitous

[2] Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* both date from earlier years but the words "Women's Liberation" had not been uttered before the rise of the radical student movement; and the word "feminism" had slipped out of use altogether since the 1930s. Both Friedan and De Beauvoir had been Stalinist Marxists.

[3] Another former Stalinist Marxist

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