

With that real self, with that consciousness, we begin a revolution to end the imposition of all coercive identifications, and to achieve maximum autonomy in human expression.

Notes

- 1 Purportedly, this was a term used against lesbians to prevent them from becoming a major part of the women's rights movement sponsored by NOW. The Radicalesbians took the term as their own and made it an empowering part of their drive to be included in feminist organizations of the time.
- 2 Karla Jay, *Tales of the Lavender Menace: A Memoir of Liberation* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).
- 3 Radicalesbians, "The Woman-Identified Woman" (Pittsburgh, PA: Know, Inc., 1970).

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Manifesto

Female Revolt (Rivolta Femminile)

Rome, Italy

July 1970



Rivolta Femminile manifesto pamphlet.

The transmission of life, respect for life, awareness of life are intense experiences for woman and values that she claims as her own.

Italy has a history of feminism dating back to the fifteenth-century works of Christine de Pizan (including her 1405 *Book of the City of Ladies*) and the nineteenth-century journal *La Donna* (Woman), which covered international feminist news. Rivolta Femminile was established in Rome and Milan in 1970, while Feminist Struggle (Lotta Femminista) began in 1971.

Student and worker activism marked this period in Italy, which influenced the forms feminism took there. Yasmin Ergas remarks, "[T]he basic tenets of the New Left's ideology (especially its egalitarian antiauthoritarianism and anti-institutionalism) played an important role in undermining the legitimacy of the rules of the game by which women had apparently been placed in a subordinate position within these organizations. . . . The formation of collectives and the adoption of consciousness-raising techniques generated closely-knit female networks."¹ The Left, rather than the Church, helped shaped Italian feminism of the era. "As in

France, in Italy women started denouncing the pervasive sexism of the new Left and began thinking that one outlet from oppression was the development of a personal consciousness of female oppression.”² That development is seen in Rivolta Femminile’s Manifesto,³ which the group posted in the streets of Milan and Rome.

The feminism in this document emphasizes difference more than sameness, views domestic labor as reproducing the capitalist workforce, blasts the myth of equality, and “emphasize[s] the separation between gender as a social construction and sex as a biological foundation as a means to unveil the cultural and political discourses that legitimate discrimination.” Put (relatively) succinctly, “[F]eminists theorized that the oppression of women does not result from socio-economic determinants only, nor can it be affected by means of juridical struggles alone. More radically, subordination is about structures of meaning and power played out at the level of the symbolic.”⁴ That argument explains the focus in the Manifesto on not defining women in relation to men, an idea also raised by the Radicalesbians. Feminists must reject the multiple myths, images, institutions, and ideologies that have contributed to women’s subordination. It is a mammoth task, but necessary given that “[c]ivilization had despised us as inferior, the church has called us sex, psychoanalysis has betrayed us, Marxism has sold us to hypothetical revolution.”

Shortly after its founding, Rivolta Femminile opened its own publishing house, Scritti di Rivolta Femminile. In fact, the group has exercised influence primarily through their publications, especially those of founder Carla Lonzi, rather than through direct action. The group published a second Manifesto in 1977.

Manifesto

Will women always be divided one from another? Will they never be a single body?

Olympe de Gouges, 1791

Woman must not be defined in relation to man. This awareness is the foundation of both our struggle and our liberty.

Man is not the model to hold up for the process of woman’s self-discovery.

Woman is the other in relation to man. Man is the other in relation to woman.

Equality is an ideological attempt to subject woman even further.

The identification of woman with man means annulling the ultimate means of liberation.

Liberation for woman does not mean accepting the life man leads, because it is unlivable; on the contrary, it means expressing her own sense of existence.

Woman as subject does not reject man as subject but she rejects him as an absolute role. In society she rejects him as an authoritarian role.

Up until now the myth that the one complements the other has been used by man to justify his own power.

Women are persuaded from infancy not to take decisions and depend on a “capable” and “responsible” person: father, husband, brother.

The image with which man has interpreted woman has been his own invention.

Virginity, chastity, fidelity are not virtues; but bonds on which to build and to maintain the institution of the family. Honour is its consequent repressive codification.

In marriage, the woman, deprived of her name, loses her identity, signifying the transfer of property which has taken place between her father and the husband.

She who gives birth is unable to give her name to her children: the woman's right has been coveted by others whose privilege it had become.

We are forced to reclaim as our own the issue of a natural fact.

We identify marriage as the institution that has subordinated woman to male destiny. We are against marriage.

Divorce is a welding of marriages which actually reinforces the institution.

The transmission of life, respect for life, awareness of life are intense experiences for woman and values that she claims as her own.

Woman's first reason for resentment against society lies in being forced to face maternity as a dilemma.

We denounce the unnatural nature of a maternity paid for at the cost of exclusion.

The refusal of the freedom of abortion is part of the global denial of woman's autonomy.

We do not wish to think about motherhood all our lives or to continue to be unwitting instruments of patriarchal power.

Woman is fed up with bringing up a son who will turn into a bad lover.

In freedom she is able and willing to face the son and the son is humanity.

In all forms of cohabitation, feeding, cleaning, caring and every aspect of daily routing must be reciprocal gestures.

By education and by mimesis men and women step into their roles in very early infancy.

We understand the mystifying character of all ideologies, because through the reasoned forms of power (theological, moral, philosophical, political) they have constrained humanity into an inauthentic condition, suppressed and consenting.

Behind every ideology we can see the hierarchy of the sexes.

From now on we do not wish to have any screen between ourselves and the world.

Feminism has been the first political moment of historical criticism of the family and society.

Let's unite the situations and episodes of historical feminist experience: through it woman has manifested herself, interrupting for the first time the monologue of patriarchal civilization.

We identify in unpaid domestic work the help that allows both private and state capitalism to survive.

Shall we allow that which happens again and again at the end of every popular revolution, when woman, who has fought with the others, finds herself and her problems pushed to one side?

We detest the mechanisms of competitiveness and the blackmail exercised in the world by the hegemony of efficiency. We want to put our working capacity at the disposal of a society that is immune to this.

War has always been the specific activity of the male and his model for virile behaviour.

Equality of remuneration is one of our rights but our suppression is another matter. Shall we be content with equal pay when we already carry the burden of hours of domestic work?

We must re-examine the creative contributions made by woman to society and defeat the myth of her secondary industry.

Attributing high value to "unproductive" moments is an extension of life proposed by woman.

Whoever is in power states “loving an inferior being is part of eroticism.” Maintaining the status quo is therefore an act of love.

We welcome free sexuality in all its forms because we have stopped considering frigidity an honourable alternative.

Continuing to regulate life between the sexes is a necessity for power, the only satisfactory choice is a free relationship.

Curiosity and sexual games are a right of children and adolescents.

We have looked for 4,000 years; now we have seen!

Behind us is the apotheosis of the age-old masculine supremacy. Institutionalized religions have been its firmest pedestal. And the concept of “genius” has constituted its unattainable step. Woman has undergone the experience of seeing what she was doing destroyed every day.

We consider incomplete any history which is based on non-perishable traces.

Nothing, or else misconception, has been handed down about the presence of woman. It is up to us to rediscover her in order to know the truth.

Civilization had despised us as inferior, the church has called us sex, psychoanalysis has betrayed us, Marxism has sold us to hypothetical revolution.

We ask for testimonials for centuries of philosophical thought that has theorized about the inferiority of woman.

We hold systematic thinkers responsible for the great humiliation imposed on us by the patriarchal world. They have maintained the principle of woman as an adjunct for the reproduction of humanity, as bonded with divinity, or as the threshold of the animal world, a sphere of privacy and pietas. They have justified by metaphysics what was unjust and atrocious in the life of woman.

We spit on Hegel.

The servant-master dialectic is a settling of accounts between groups of men: it does not foresee the liberation of woman, the great oppressed by the patriarchal civilization.

Class struggle, as a revolutionary theory that developed from the servant-master dialectic, also excludes woman. We question socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

By not recognizing herself in male culture woman deprives it of the illusion of universality.

Man has always spoken the name of humanity but half the world population now accuses him of having sublimated a mutilation.

Man's strength lies in identifying with culture, ours in refuting it.

After this act of conscience man will be distinct from woman and will have to listen to her telling what concerns her.

The world will not explode just because man will no longer hold the psychological balance based on our submission.

From the bitter reality of a universe that has never revealed its secrets we take much of the credit given to the obstinacies of culture. We wish to rise to be equal to an answerless universe.

We look for the authenticity of the gesture of revolt and will sacrifice it neither to organization nor to proselytism.

We communicate only with women.

Notes

- 1 “1968–79—Feminism and the Italian Party System: Women's Politics in a Decade of Turmoil.” *Comparative Politics* (April 1982): 261–62.