

8/16/70

I got somewhat drunk the other night and this is what came out. It's fairly loose and unstructured, but not--I hope--totally incoherent. I'm one of those people who think most clearly (?) in front of a typewriter--other people should feel free to reply in whatever form is most appropriate for them, but I hope there will be some form of response. To begin:

I had been reading the literature of the women's movement for a long time, but it wasn't until I hit upon NOTES FROM THE SECOND YEAR that I felt sufficiently moved to start making phone calls to discover what was happening in Berkeley. I read Shulamith Firestone and suddenly I realized that I wasn't some sort of freak--my anguish was real, and my reactions to the antics of the various men in my life had been fairly rational, after all--if I was a hysterical bitch, there must be others someplace. And so I went to an East Bay Feminists meeting, and there were more of us than I'd ever suspected. I wanted to join a consciousness-raising group, but I wasn't clear who was supposed to raise my consciousness, or whether I was supposed to raise it by myself.

And so we have stumbled along, with numerous additions and varying degrees of success. People seem to have very different ideas of what we're groping for. Beverly and Lynne stress relationships within the group; to some extent I tend to agree--I suspect that once we really feel we know one another a lot of new possibilities may open up. The danger of this emphasis is that we may simply amble along on a course of rather aimless rap sessions. I think it's important that people feel they can bring personal problems or situations to the group, but I also feel that we need considerably more structure and even discipline. It can only be self-imposed. No one is going to lead us by the hand. (One of the best things that has come out of the women's movement is the beginning of the end of the "star-system" among radicals--but where there are no leaders we all have to be leaders. There's a beautiful little piece about the IWW that goes--"When that boatload of wobblies come/Up to Everett, the sheriff says/Don't you come no further/ Who the hell's yer leader, anyhow/ Who's yer leader?/And them wobblies yelled right back--We ain't got no leader/We're all leaders/And they kept right on comin'.")

I'm not certain why all of the others are here, but I believe people have good reasons for what they do. Coming to meetings has not made them sufficiently free to talk about their motivations. Probably in part this is due to the fact that people like me have talked too much, for varying reasons. When I worked in the South, we had the equivalent of Maoist self-criticism sessions (although obviously we didn't realize that at the time)--project meetings at which our deepest feelings came out into the open, in addition to the most private details of our lives. Our survival (literally) depended on trusting one another, and we became accustomed to speaking very openly about ^{our} emotions and relationships. For that reason it may be easier for me to discuss such matters now. And for whatever reasons, there isn't much about my life which I feel would be risky to lay on the table for dissection, including my rather staggering errors of judgment.

When I went to general meetings of the East Bay Feminists I felt like a flaming moderate. At our meetings I feel like the house radical at times. There are points at which I feel that people think I'm a man-hater--maybe we should talk about man-hating some time, because I'm not certain it's invariably a bad thing. I guess one alternative is not to hate at all, but I'm not a saint and I believe with Fanon that an oppressed people needs a certain amount of revolutionary hatred before it is possible to take risks and act. Hostility which remains mute and inarticulate is pretty sterile, but I think under the right circumstances it can be directed toward constructive ends. The worst alternative is to turn that hatred inward, toward ourselves and other women, which a lot of us (including myself) tend to do almost instinctively. We've been shat upon so long we believe that's all we deserve.