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A GREEN PARTY: CAN THE BOYS DO WITHOUT ONE?

Ariel Salleh



ARIEL SALLEH left school in Adelaide to combine a university degree with mothering two small daughters. Not surprisingly, her first feminist campaign, Hobart 1971, was over child-care. After postgraduate studies at ANU, she worked in community health and then Aboriginal housing. She co-convened MAUM Sydney, late in 1976. Ariel is now a Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Wollongong. She writes about Green politics, feminism, Marxist theory and deconstruction for

both popular and academic journals and her work on eco-feminism and deep-ecology is widely known overseas. She is an editor of Thesis Eleven and contributes to several Sydney activist groups. Apart from its rather provocative and playful title, Ariel's essay takes a rather different form from the others in the book, as it is crossed throughout by counterpoint texts. Ariel sets out to provide a "frame" inside which the voices of Movement women speak for themselves, emphasising both the decentred character of women's eco-activism and the strongly convergent political analysis developed by women—despite lived separations of space and time.



Even men who are opposed to the arms race are often fascinated by its technological and political complexities, and by the opportunities it affords for endless intellectual exercises which feed the illusion that their participants belong to the corridors of power.

Dorothy Green, Sydney Morning Herald, 8 October 1983

This is so true: but women, in my experience, even highly educated women, come at politics differently. I remember one night at the South Coast Conservation Society, back in 1977. A wrangle was going on between a bushwalker and a physicist, over whether the public could make informed decisions on the uranium question if they could not distinguish ^{238}U from ^{235}U . For some 40 minutes, the meeting was suspended between two powerful egos. Then, almost reluctantly, a small middle-aged woman in a grey cardigan spoke up from the back of the room: a steelworker's wife, her German accent thick and halting.

Well, I am only a grandmother... but I want to be sure that my family will be born, each one... with ten tiny fingers... and ten tiny toes.

Lucy Fisher—housewife, Warilla, NSW.

A shamed silence fell across the room.

In the last 200 years, the major political struggles have centred on the principles of freedom and equality. Now, a far more urgent and fundamental political agenda confronts us, a Green politics, organised around the principle of survival. Scarcely a sign of progress, is it? What is more, this shift of focus produces a political dilemma for women. Not for Lucy; in her soundness and humility, she will live out her days in the conventional gender mould. But women of my generation and younger, who have tasted some emancipation, find them/ourselves in something of a bind. After a 15-year struggle, we are beginning to realise rights and freedoms which men enjoy; but now it's clear that too much emphasis on individual rights, as in liberal feminism, or on class equality, amongst socialist feminists, constrains a wider ecological consciousness.

We are challenging the quest for individual success and recognition which underlies Western society. We are seeking to return to community... "Live simply, that others may simply live" is still the most succinct summary of the need for radical social change.

Chris Wheeler, social justice activist, *Getting Together* transcripts, 1986

It is often women not yet preoccupied with feminine emancipation who already organise themselves around the principle of survival. The housewives of Love Canal in New York State, battling toxic industrial waste contamination of their neighbourhood, are one example. The Chipko women of North India who hugged the trees to save them from commercial decimation, or the old Japanese granny-guerillas who daily disrupt military exercises at the Mt Fuji arsenal, are others. These women are not feminists in the usual urban-Western sense of the word, but they are radical political workers, pitted against the elaborate and irrational life-threatening activities that men persist with.

Yet it would distort reality to set up a dichotomy that too sharply polarises women's political awareness between the old and new political agendas; or as feminist versus non-feminist. Most of us juggle both traditional gender learning and feminist ideals in our daily experience; sisters in change are complex creatures and relate to their world in complex ways. But think of the beautiful diversity of age, class and colour among women who sang their common outrage in the desert heart of Australia, Pine Gap, on 11 November 1983.



Women's eco-action in Australia has a substantial history which I can hardly do justice to here. A Women's Peace Army rallied against the conscription referendum in 1916; while Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and the Union of Australian Women (UAW) have worked consistently for peace over several decades. Further, WILPF's 1969 document on chemical and biological weapons—*New Perversions of Science*—anticipates more recent eco-feminist arguments. During the atomic tests of the fifties, women publicised the effects of strontium 90 in milk on children's bone development. Then a group called Save Our Sons emerged with the Vietnam War and did their best to sabotage the draft by registering names of family pets. At the same time, poet Kate Jennings bravely took to the soap box, urging women members of Students for a Democratic Society to confront their male comrades' bland indifference to the domestic conscription of women, sexual violence in the streets and the savaging of women's bodies in backyard abortions.

My own awareness of this politics had quickened by the mid-seventies: a conservative time, aggravated by the complacent sexism of a hippie boyfriend, of socialist colleagues in academia and of co-workers in the environment movement. So, I was reassured to learn that Friends of the Earth (FOE) women, stirred on by similar experiences, had begun to explore the overlapping ground between feminism and ecology at their 1976 Brisbane conference. Other feminists, of course, were leaving patriarchal expectations behind altogether, to set up communities of their own—Amazon Acres near Wauchope, NSW, being one of the earliest. In Adelaide, young mother and physician Helen Caldicott had started a vigorous media education campaign on the medical and genetic hazards of the uranium industry. I got involved within days of hearing her, and with Movement Against Uranium Mining (MAUM) co-convenor Shirley Ryan, worked hard to extend the Sydney organisation beyond its original home in FOE and the unions to include church people, teachers, scientists, housewives and others from middle Australia. As early as 1977, we were astonished but pleased to find a piece in the Australian *Woman's Day* about women and the anti-nuclear struggle. Later, the Left fought several sectarian battles over the body of MAUM and it lost its broad community base.

Then, in 1978, FOE brought out an all-women's number of *Chain Reaction* listing addresses of feminist ecology groups in Paris, Hamburg and Copenhagen. *Chain Reaction* carried articles on recycling, animal exploitation for cosmetic manufacture, effects of radiation on Aboriginal health, and about patriarchy—progress or oppression?

Most of the pollution created by our society is directly attributable to the same forces that require the oppression of women. The growth ethic (supported by Labor and Liberal alike)...

Vashti's Voice—quoted in *Chain Reaction*, no. 13

That same year, a tribal grouping from South Dakota calling themselves WARN—Women of All Red Nations—began consciousness-raising on environmentally produced leukaemia and birth deformities among their people. In New York, DONT—Dykes Opposed to Nuclear Technology—called a conference on the energy

crisis as a man-made pseudo-problem. Separatist collectives variously known as Feminist Anti Nuclear Group (FANG) or Women Against Nuclear Energy (WANE) were popping up in capitals around Australia. And of course, Aboriginal women from Oenpelli in the Northern Territory were coming forward to testify at the Ranger Uranium Inquiry on the devastating spiritual, social, medical and ecological impact of mining near their communities—and not only uranium, but also bauxite mining at Gove, Aurukun, Weipa; manganese at Groote.

By 1980, an Albury housewife, Margaret Morgan, was running one of the first enthusiastic rural protest groups, and the *Sun Herald* reported on ALP and Australian Democrat women's decisive intra-party stand against the lifting of our hard-won bans on uranium mining and export. Victorian Labor's Jean Meltzer—later a founding member of the Nuclear Disarmament Party (NDP) in 1984, and then, Nuclear Free Australia Party in 1986—was a significant force behind much of this. For my part, I had quit the Labor Party, totally frustrated with its male-dominated machine politics and lack of analysis. Convinced that “women are the real Left”, I travelled to Europe and the States in 1981 and was affirmed by the groundswell of eco-feminist activity everywhere I went. In the USA, the first Pentagon encirclement had just occurred, using a network growing out of the Women and Life on Earth Conference which had been initiated by Ynestra King in Massachusetts earlier that year. Greenham Common in the United Kingdom followed only months later; another military installation was surrounded by women in Comiso, Sicily; and mass demonstrations of Arab women occurred at Kuneitra in Palestine. Norwegian women collected half a million signatures against NATO's cruise missile plan, then they marched from Copenhagen to Paris with their message of peace.

What do you do in case of a nuclear accident?

Kiss your children goodbye.

Australian movement poster, 1976

In the summer of 1982, the Tasmanian Hydro Electricity Commission's project to dam the beautiful Franklin River came to a head.

Men and women from all over Australia went south to block the onset of engineering work. One separatist affinity group from Canberra—the Red Emmas—quickly gained notoriety for their boldness at the blockade. Equally, the relentless energy of Wilderness Society women organisers across every State, was an impressive sustaining force in this long campaign.¹ Women's Action Against Global Violence (WAAGV) also appeared on the Australian scene around 1982. Some of its members had been part of a research and lobby organisation known as the Women's Political Coalition, but were now disillusioned with conventional political methods. Significantly, they mounted a peace cavalcade to the national War Museum in Canberra, then moved on to hold non-violence workshops and parallel parliamentary sittings, passing bills of their own.

It is up to us to make sure the nuclear playground is the last one those boys will have.

Zoe Sofulis—FANG, *Chain Reaction*, no. 13

Over in the USA, Catholic nuns were being arrested on the White House lawns, praying for peace. At home, FANG staged a rally at the Smithfield communications base, north of Adelaide. Another autonomous group, Women's Action for Nuclear Disarmament (WAND), split off from the old established International Association for Cooperation and Disarmament in order to bypass an inhibiting hierarchy. The next year saw WAND, the UAW and WILPF inject heavy emphasis on disarmament into the March 8th International Women's Day celebrations. The urgent need to transfer state expenditure from arms to welfare, housing, child-care and women's refuges is an ongoing theme of all these mobilisations.

24 May 1983 was designated International Women's Day for Disarmament and brought synchronised political responses from re/sisters around the world. European women now marched from Stockholm to Vienna via the USSR. WAAGV, also known as Women for Survival, Greenpeace women, Chrysalis and others, camped outside the Atomic Energy Commission establishment at Lucas Heights, Sydney. That year for the first time, a two-week Permaculture Design Course was offered especially for women at Tyalgum in northern

New South Wales.² The shift of women to rural areas was intensifying too; now along the NSW south coast. Others were taking back control of their lives through herbal medicine, meditation and therapeutic dance. Home-birthing has become a further feminist move away from the profit motive and masculine cult of expertise, towards mending the spiritual dimension of life.

We are women, we are the web,

We are the flow, and we are the ebb...

Protest song

1983 culminated with the first nationally coordinated on-site demonstration by women over the American "strategic presence" at Pine Gap near Alice Springs. But not without a reminder from Aboriginal women for their white sisters to remember that even radicals can have colonising attitudes. International solidarity with "Close the Gap" protesters was overwhelming; coming from as far afield as Icelandic Women for Culture and Peace and the Revolutionary Union of Congo Women. Men gave support by bike-riding to the national capital from Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. A further protest was held by Aboriginal women of the Arrernte people at Welatye-Therre in the Northern Territory—a sacred site threatened by planned tourist development.

About this time, the deep-ecologists, a very radical fraction of the environment movement, emerged with meetings in Canberra and in Ballina, NSW. Their philosophy, which rejects the classic Western split between Humans and Nature, is very close to the eco-feminist perception of things, yet it quite overlooked the place of women in this whole.³

Man's relationship with woman provides the model for his treatment of nature.

Penny Strange, *It'll Make a Man of You*, 1983

Some did not like being told this, but other deep-ecologists responded warmly to our point of view. The following year, I had an opportunity to apply this eco-feminist perspective in a course called "Women and Technology" taught for the Interdisciplinary Studies

Masters Degree program at the University of New South Wales. There we studied women as producers and re/producers in advanced industrial society; the rise of eco-feminist analyses of medicine, science, militarism and global crisis; and the ideological relation of the new movement to socialism, environmentalism and mainstream feminist politics.

Courageous ANZAC Day marches by Women Against Rape in War represent another facet of the feminine peace initiative. Likewise, elements of the UK women's peace movement such as WONT—Women Opposed to Nuclear Technology—had close ties with Reclaim the Night campaigns. The continuum between militarism, masculine identity and sexual exploitation was one concern behind the 1984 women's action during American navy visits for R & R at Cockburn Sound in Western Australia. Again that year, proposed changes in the Censorship Act led women from both Right and Left across all States, including an impressive mobilisation by Women Against Violence and Exploitation (WAVE), to step up the fight against pornography; especially snuff movies which have brought mutilation, even death to young actresses in Bangkok and Puerto Rico.

Men's fantasies are women's nightmares.

WAVE song

Germany's Green Party parliamentarian Petra Kelly toured Australia, galvanising crowds in 1984; while Sydney women architects and planners—Constructive Women—sponsored Magrit Kennedy from Berlin, an enthusiast for urban renewal using recycling, alternative technologies and permaculture principles. In inner-city Glebe, a small number of disaffected ALP people soon began to explore the idea of Green politics. But despite the efforts of a handful of us to focus on new ways of doing politics within the community, the group, calling themselves "The Greens", moved quickly into an old-style electoral campaign with organisational backing from Socialist Workers Party members. In the federal election, and after much rough and tumble in the newly formed Nuclear Disarmament Party, Quaker mother and environment activist from Perth, Jo Vallentine, was

elected to the Senate on a peace platform. She is now an independent member of the House.

Around 1985, enterprising women followers of Sarkar's Progressive Utilization Theory (PROUT) started up a folk-rock band and a new magazine, *Dawn*, which looks at aspects of women's experience like workplace harassment, spirituality, physical disability, and gives special attention to the economic plight of sisters in the Third World. Women at the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) were pursuing legal challenges over corporate malpractice in contraceptive marketing. Socialist feminists in Workers' and Migrant Health Centres continued to document occupational hazards to women in industry: abortion-inducing and teratogenic chemical emissions, and neuromuscular stresses producing RSI. A Sydney Women and Technology (SWAT) group monitored effects of rapid technological change on women's employment conditions. The exacerbation of the dual-shift for working mothers is of particular concern, as highly skilled computer operators are encouraged into piece-work using domestic terminals. Meanwhile, investigation of what passes for development showed New Guinea men in tractors creating environmental havoc while the women continued to feed the tribe, cultivating yam crops with the digging stick.

Women's position in society has worsened... linked with a male-dominated unsustainable model of development. Women's development is intimately tied up with an alternative ecological development which develops the base of sustenance... not merely markets and cash flows.

Vandana Shiva, Science Research Foundation Director, India, *Ecoforum*, April 1985

The 1986 Marxist Summer School held at the University of Sydney gave eco-feminist politics a hearing for the first time—somewhat to the annoyance of one or two self-styled scientific socialists. Also that year, the Women in Science Enquiry Network (WISNET), already established in Canberra and Melbourne, got going in Sydney. Among other things, WISNET aims to promote communication between scientists and the community on social and environmental

issues; to promote technologies appropriate to world needs, and to build a participatory science as alternative to the male-dominated tradition. Local members of the Feminist International Network on Reproductive and Genetic Engineering (FINRAGE) met with overseas visitors at the Australian National University to consider the political meaning of in-vitro technology for women. Others, including women from the political Right, were already working for a moratorium on the in-vitro fertilisation research program. Sadly, Left Labor women during the IVF parliamentary debate chose to turn a blind eye towards the horrific eugenic implications of this new commercialism, apparently in a cynical attempt to marginalise the party's Catholic Right.⁴ In these same months, Malaysian women and children took to the streets—over dumping, by a largely Japanese owned multinational, of radioactive thorium near community water supplies at Bukit Merah, Perak. Farmers' wives at Coffs Harbour in New South Wales were agitating over malformities in children born near aerial crop-dusting with pesticides; and three housewives at Kurnell began to organise against a planned petro-chemical plant going ahead on the ecologically sensitive shores of Botany Bay.

Man believes he is immune from the effects of his technology, because he is above Nature . . . As long as persons with masculine values control what gets researched (and how), deadly technology will continue to be developed.

Myrna, *Man Made Madness*, 1981

Women gave a lot to both the Broad Left and Getting Together conferences which coincided over Easter 1986. Addressing the principle of equality, a Socialist Feminist Caucus from Melbourne told the Broad Left that Australian welfare recipients, mostly women, get less than 25 per cent of average male earnings to live on, while tax cuts serve to benefit the same male wage earners. They also argued a need for affirmative action in unions, to break the stranglehold of men's networks there. In the wider context of an affluent West and decimated Third World, Getting Together people agreed that the earth's finite resources could be protected and shared only by our learning to abandon an industrial-based high-consumption

economics. The big question, of course, was whether a Green Party should be formed. Women favoured a looser, more organic coalition of movement organisations—wary, like sisters all over the world, of promoting any more patriarchal excursions into capital-P politics. Even as this was debated, some conference women were feeling that they were not being listened to, and had moved off into separate sessions.

One problem all wings of the [German] Party have is sexism . . . With no concrete, comprehensive plans for an alternative mode of operating, they simply slipped into the familiar, patriarchal patterns.
Charlene Spretnak, co-author, *Green Politics*, 1984

In 1986 also, Gillian Fisher, now ex-NDP, stood for the NSW byelection in Vaucluse under the new Nuclear Free Australia Party banner. She won about 5 per cent of the vote, even while standing alongside an NDP candidate. Towards the year's close, Women for Survival renewed their campaign against the Government's lease of Pine Gap to the American defense establishment; and expiry date 19 October was marked by a women-only encampment on the lawns of Parliament House. A rhythmic spiral-dance through its precincts symbolised women's perseverance and continuity with the chain of being.⁵ A team of women is now preparing to set sail across the ocean in the Pacific Peace Fleet. A late number of my *East Bay Women for Peace Newsletter* announces San Francisco WPF 25th Anniversary Dinner; War Tax Resistance; Action on War Toys; solidarity with deposed Judge Rose Bird; and Fund Raiser Concert for Nicaragua. In March 1987, women at the University of Southern California hosted a first international gathering of eco-feminists.

Yet the path is not straightforward for all women. The current Labor Minister for Education and Youth Affairs and Minister assisting the Prime Minister on the Status of Women wrote the following about our politics:

Women, as the bearers and rearers of children, have a stronger stake in the future . . . Women—being outside the power structures and the decision-making—have been the victims rather than the

perpetrators of armed warfare . . . Women . . . less socialised into the dominant male patterns of aggressive behaviour, are more able to see an alternative mode of human relations.

Senator Susan Ryan, Cabinet Minister, quoted in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 October 1983

Why then, did not she, Ros Kelly, Jeanette McHugh and others, leave House and Party behind with the Government's 1986 Budget decision to resume uranium exports to France? How inspiring it would be, if our 16 women Senators and eight MHRs put aside their male-defined terms of reference, and dared to act in concert according to their consciences as women.



The revival of radical feminist thought with an eco-feminist diagnosis of the global crisis has helped clarify the aims of this recent international politicisation of women. The literature is a product of both despair, following the early years of feminism, and of continued hope, in the counter-cultural project of the sixties. If the penny drops for eco-feminists somewhere in the early seventies, it is already the middle of that decade before their ideas get into print. The remarkable simultaneity and similarity of these isolated analyses underline their origin as a response to quite universal circumstances encountered by this generation of women.

American theologian Rosemary Ruether's *New Woman, New Earth* and French writer Françoise D'Eaubonne's *Les femmes avant le patriarcat*, which appeared in 1975, took up archetypal feminine attitudes which had earlier been tossed aside with feminism, and argued their new relevance in the context of ecological struggle. They showed how Judaeo-Christian culture has been deforming to men—who are, in turn, appropriative and destructive of nature. The same themes were developed in "economist" Hazel Henderson's *Creating Alternative Futures* and poet Susan Griffin's *Woman and Nature: the Roaring Inside Her*, both of which were published in 1978. Griffin described the split consciousness on which the modern scientific paradigm is based: the same socially condoned mind-trick which allows prostitution or lethal pornography to coexist alongside worship of

the Virgin Mary and greed to exist alongside starvation.

Millions starved in Africa last year where the food needs were estimated as 20 million tonnes . . . And yet there were 297 million tonnes of grain in storage throughout the world.

Judy Henderson, medical practitioner, *Getting Together* transcripts, 1986

In 1980, Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* carried the story further with a scholarly reconstruction of the logic of domination as it has unfolded in philosophy since the Renaissance.

Feminist magazines like *Off Our Backs*, *des femmes hebdo*, *Womenergy* and *Heresies*, long-time advocates of a unity between personal and political, now extended their interest to the connection between the environmental crisis and patriarchal self-alienation. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament's *Peace News* was also amenable to articles along these lines. Following Greenham Common, the UK literature on women, militarism and peace now exploded—with Pam McAllister's collection *Reweaving the Web of Life* (1982), Lynne Jones's *Keeping the Peace* (1983), Cynthia Enloe's *Does Khaki Become You?* (1983) and others. A primer of eco-feminist writing came out the same year: Leonie Caldecott and Stephanie Leland's *Reclaim the Earth*. Its theoretical chapters are not strong, but it contains useful extracts on issues like the dioxin disaster at Seveso, rights of animals, Mad Women of the Plaza Mayo, carcinogenic preservatives in food and female infanticide in India. Petra Kelly's autobiographical essays, *Fighting for Hope*, an inspiring document of the Greening of one woman's awareness, were translated from German in 1984.

Significantly, the ancient Greek word *Oikos*, which is the etymological root of the term ecology, means the domestic environment, the sphere of basic needs inhabited by women, children and slaves. In the classical world view, this was paired against *Polis*, the public sphere of men and free citizens. Eco-feminism defines the contemporary global crisis as a by-product of these "abstracted" patriarchal political institutions rather than more narrowly—say, of capitalism. Patriarchy is understood as one possible form of social relations, which is based on the social crippling of both men's and women's capacities

in a way that allows for the systematic domination of women by men. Capitalism is recognised as a recent historical variety of patriarchy; and economic forces are recognised as powerful determinants, having to be sustained in turn by ideological beliefs and practices.

Women are not inherently non-violent:

they are traditionally oppressed . . .

Nor are men inherently violent:

they are traditionally and structurally dominant . . .

Penny Strange, *It'll Make a Man of You*, 1983

In my own research and teaching, I have been attracted by the work of neo-Marxist social thinkers known as the Frankfurt School.⁶ They see the break of *Polis* from *Oikos*, the splitting of what is culturally valued from nature and life needs, as fundamental to the logic of all domination. Exploitation of nature, of one race or class by another, of woman by man . . . all these are related episodes and all equally political. The mental and ideological precondition of this "mastery" is that whatever is to be dominated and used must be seen as "other", so losing its own value and individuality. It must be turned into "an object".

Now this tendency to objectify nature and other people can also be applied to one's own self. In fact the first act of control was probably exercised over an inner "nature", as men learned to block their physical knowledge of things from feeling. The denial of sensuality is certainly identified by old Freud as the moment when patriarchal culture got underway. Then it becomes rationalised, institutionalised and reinforced as it is repeated in the biography of each successive male. Recent feminist theorists such as Dinnerstein and Chodorow assume that this splitting in men, but not women, has to do with the infant male's need to break early physical ties with a seemingly all-powerful woman/mother figure—in order to establish an identity of his own.⁷ But this explanation begs the question of an already established masculine norm, and so, like most attempts to get back to the beginning of things, it is a circular argument.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the separation of sense from intellect is basic to the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and it leaves us with a culture that polarises everything it sees. The division between wide green unruly wilderness as against an imposed human order is a keystone of this obsessive and oppressive thought pattern. And this splitting up of reality into self/other, either/or, left/right, white/black and so on effectively keeps woman in her place too. The scientific method is similarly premised on a fractured consciousness—a so-called neutrality, an isolation of observer from field, of fact from value. Now, the industrial revolution and modern bureaucratic rationality have joined this much-prized "objectivity" to an equally mindless technological prowess.

The Frankfurt School has described these developments as the rise of "instrumental rationality". In such a culture as this, the world is viewed with abstract detachment; it is measured, analysed, taken apart and put back together again according to human design. Questions of value are reduced to cost-benefit analyses. Instrumental rational societies may be capitalist or socialist. In either system, what has evolved into a technocratic compulsion to measure and control spills over from the workplace to saturate our relationships. Unconsciously, other people become resources, commodities to be consumed, manipulated, exchanged—in a word, screwed. Some neo-Marxists like Fromm, and radical feminists such as O'Brien, suggest that the primitive origin of this disconnectedness must have come with men's recognition of their rather small role in human re/production—that strange labour of labours, which is Mother/Nature's privilege.⁸ Is the alienated and destructive productivism which drives both capitalist and socialist machines nothing but one vast compensatory rage, then?

Men are fighting, not for self-determination, but for energy control.

Roslyn Livingston, *Chain Reaction*, no. 13

Carried more deeply, this writing involves a far-reaching critique of our prevailing epistemology or theory of knowledge, and also a thoroughgoing redefinition of what actually constitutes the arena of politics.⁹ And while not all women eco-political workers are

intellectuals who would want to formulate their conviction in terms such as these, there is pretty much tacit consensus on the guiding principles of feminist praxis. Here, two assumptions occur again and again, reappearing in multiple guises. First, there must be consistency between theory and practice. This implies no contradiction between ends and means, of course; and further, no real distinction between reform versus revolutionary activity. The second assumption—a logical corollary of the first—is that personal and political experience are not separate spheres but flow into each other. This is in contrast with the masculine way of doing things.

That ability to depersonalise every one and thing . . . necessary for "success as a man".

Jenni Dall, *Chain Reaction*, no. 36

Thus, while feminists appreciate only too well how structural and institutional forces work—seeing themselves as one such force—they nevertheless avoid turning their politics into rigid monumental forms. Most women understand human interaction as the stuff that all political contestation is made of and are happy to work at a grass-roots level rather than create new power hierarchies.

Further, our redefinition of “the political” introduces new and unheard-of problems to be analysed and solved. In many activist contexts, women find themselves making complex decisions, with little prior experience, and in practically uncharted areas. At the same time, they struggle to maintain a democratic and nurturing group environment, in order that less articulate sisters can contribute to the process. Because of this mixture of macro and micro political awareness, women’s activism is very demanding and very thorough. It is always double-edged, both inward and outer at once. Not surprisingly, many succumb to burnout and despair. There is so much to do—change at the level of self; in relationships; on child raising; within education; media; political institutions . . . To borrow another sociological term, feminist politics is reflexive. Women are particularly alert to the need to work on themselves; to cleanse and heal the scars received from childhood conditioning and from the continual abrasions of ongoing patriarchal relationships.

This means that sometimes women want to be in groups without men, so they can express ideas and feelings in non-threatening surroundings—surroundings free of the ego-games, interruptions, put-downs and non-verbal power-play which make up such a large part of masculine “communication”.

Did you ever have the feeling of possessing a currency you can't use? It is just what I often felt in mixed groups.

Isabella Paoletta, *Getting Together* transcripts, 1986

Women are also encouraging men to form their own groups. In this way, men can learn how to give each other support instead of relying on an audience of women to smile and nod at what they say—as well-mannered girls always do. But separatism is an historically transitional strategy in the struggle to restore our socially crippled complementarity. Personally, I do not like it. It is at odds with consistency between means and ends and with the logic of ecology—flow, diversity, symbiosis—which could guide our action. Separatism may be appropriate for caucuses or for inward-looking exploratory or therapeutic sessions, but when the aim is to reach out and share ideas, broadening the web, it seems very hard to justify. It is also a fact that, in the present political climate, the issue can be introduced obstructively by the Left in an attempt to short-circuit meetings designed for open public discussion of the broader feminist analysis.

The reflexive nature of feminist politics also accounts for why women prefer working in collectives, with an informal rotation of roles and lateral decentralised network links. Recent history confirms that in formal organisations women generally end up taking the brunt of domestic duties like typing, research, tea-making and sex, with little opportunity to try out public spokesperson roles. There is also a certain elitism about vanguard organisations, a symptomatically “objectifying”, patriarchal them/us split, quite out of touch with genuine respect and communication—that colonising tendency again. The worst excesses of this “instrumental rationality” as the neo-Marxists call it, is demonstrated by party politics, which inevitably gets down to a manipulative scramble for numbers. Yet, many radical men still have a deep need for emotional gratification in terms of

the old political paradigm. Ego is still smoothed by rubbing shoulders with other men in power, it is still massaged by the general cut and thrust of capital-P politics.

So now the time has come to ask, "Should we form a Green Party?" a new question poses itself: Can the boys do without one? It is, after all, the quality of consciousness shared by men and women working together for social change, their mutual empowerment, that is the real proof of progress.

The number one battleground is ego, patriarchal ego, not necessarily an ego that is owned by men. Women are also capable of maintaining it.

Georgina Abrahams, peace worker, *Getting Together* transcripts, 1986

In the context of personal politics, the skills offered by women and men from Chrysalis groups all round Australia—listening, meeting facilitation, non-violent conflict resolution, have been invaluable to our movement, since affinity group training first kicked off at the Franklin blockade.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the problem of ego is not going to be easy to solve. Some quarters of the German feminist movement argue that a separate Women's Party, entering the Bundestag on its own terms, is the only solution to this age-old problem. It would be one way of rounding out the bourgeois liberal agenda for representative democracy before moving on to the next historical phase. And no doubt, it would keep many men happy into the bargain. Eco-feminists, however, see electoral activity as essentially an educational or consciousness-raising exercise rather than a political end in itself. Process not structure; bread before stone.

Feminists do not want a piece of the male pie. We want a new pie... We must withdraw physical, psychic and psychological energy from the institutions that oppress us...

Becca Miller, *Chain Reaction*, no. 36

Instead of reinforcing abstract, depersonalising institutions, many women are already carrying out their politics directly and concretely within civil society itself. Since community empowerment is the end

goal, why not go straight for it? Women are working on community access radio, organic food cooperatives, waste recycling and neighbourhood play groups. There are now self-managing tenants' unions and workplace coops in the cities, ethical investment banks and permaculture collectives further out. All replace state or private sector institutions with informal, people-negotiated economic arrangements. Power without politics . . .

Again, feminists have gone a fair way down the track with cultural criticism at the level of language and ideas—deconstructing hard and fast concepts, displacing ossified meanings, shattering stereotypes. Especially important is the dismantling of common dualisms like human/natural, masculine/feminine—both now recognised as arbitrary designations. Much of this work is done through film, through dress experimentation, in poetry and philosophy. But people with old-paradigm ideas find it difficult to recognise its results as political; of course they are equally upset by Green politics, which leaves behind old notions of Left/Right. As in other areas of feminist political practice, deconstructive work involves some subtle manoeuvring; yet it is just these existential tensions which make women's culture sensitive and astute.

*To rewrite history
to reflect on the impossibility of reflection
to deconstruct reason while reasoning about difference
to read the body while speaking our minds
to denounce hierarchy but refuse equality
to make the middle ground women's space*

*without reinscribing the sexual position
that leaves us
always on the edge*

Joan Scott, "Occasional Verse", Feminism and the Humanities Conference, Canberra 1986

So, eco-feminist politics involves a double praxis: a move of women and "feminine values" into the *Polis* and, simultaneously, a deconstruction of irrational and excessive patriarchal institutions, by

reconnecting the public sphere to its sustaining roots in *Oikos*.



With its deep structural analysis of masculine identity formation and institutionalised power, with its exposure of instrumental practices in capitalism, science and family life, eco-feminism is the most uncompromisingly thorough political statement to eventuate so far. And, given the profound cultural taboo it breaches with its urge to re/member nature, it is not surprising that some people are unsettled by it, want it to go away, or pretend it says something other than what it does. But this analysis is here to stay; it is part of women's international language, and more, it has strong friends at home. It integrates concerns of radical feminists, ecologists and socialists; and while it has grown out of women's experience, it is in no way the preserve of women. Eco-feminism in Australia finds natural allies among peace workers, the deep-ecology movement, Men Opposing Patriarchy, non-violent direct action trainers, Greens, the alternative technology movement, anarchists, Permaculture, Aboriginal health and land rights workers, radical science collectives, and social justice groups.

At the same time, it is important to realise that Australian women involved in eco-politics come from several quite disparate quarters, and all do not necessarily accept the broader analysis. For example, to a large extent, concern over disarmament and uranium has grown out of socialist politics—UAW, AICD, APC, CPA and more recently SWP inspired campaigns. This kind of politics directs itself to the human costs of nuclear arms, of mining and breakdowns in the fuel processing cycle, as opposed to its technological impact on the ecosystem as a whole. In as much as it remains bound by the main tenet of Marxist productivism—which is the transformation of nature according to Man's will as project of history (and I mean Man's here)—socialist feminism is compromised in relation to environmentalism. On the other hand, the impressive internal critique of Marxism as a gender-blind philosophy, a critique developed by socialist women during the seventies, exposes the logic of domination in a way that will serve all radical movements well.¹¹

Another cluster of Australian eco-activists identify themselves as

spiritual feminists. Some, including many in Women for Survival, are affiliated with established sects like Ananda Marga; others celebrate archetypal Western notions of a feminine essence. Their ideological underpinnings are in the radical feminist writing of Daly, Rich and Spretnak, so at that level, they have little in common with their materialist sisters.¹² They are mainly women in their twenties, city-based, often lesbian, unemployed and rather anti-intellectual. They also put little store by programmatic politics, preferring civil disobedience and spontaneous symbolic forms of confrontation.

A third strand of women, far less visible as movement activists, are the small cells of housewives, mothers and grandmothers—scattered as far afield as Kurnell and the Blue Mountains. They tend to be older and do not necessarily question the politics of their own womanhood. Nor do they have any particular theory behind their protest activity—it is simply based on commonsense. They are convinced that chemical plants in the neighbourhood, pornography or US bases are wrong and will do whatever they can to stop them. Some of these women ally themselves with the Australian Democrats; some are long-time WILPF members; others are active Christians. They are energetic and skilled in organising forums, delegations and submissions, appeals and petitions; they often use cake stalls and display tables in shopping centres to reach a wider public.

Still other women, quite a few tertiary trained professionals among them, put their extra-curricular time into mainstream organisations like TWS or PND. They rarely take a high profile though, and like their socialist sisters they can find themselves run off their feet with maintenance functions for the movement, scarcely finding breath to discuss possible connections between ecology, feminism and Green politics. Moreover, the formal political allegiance of many of them still lies with the ALP—despite its shaky environmental record. Some professional women carry their politics across into their work as well, influencing editorial decisions, classroom activities, or the focus of scientific research projects.

Another body of women already working for a Green future come from the Rainbow Region in northern New South Wales. Some have chosen to set up lesbian communes while others live and work

with men. Some are permaculturalists and concentrate on sustainable farming techniques; others like the Nomadic Action Group (NAG) adopt a gypsy life, well suited to direct action on critical sites like the Franklin or mines at Roxby Downs. At the risk of endorsing patriarchal sentiments, these women embrace the imagery of Mother/Nature. Their response to ecology is intuitive, even mystical; and they shun the intellectual rationalism of much urban feminist politics. Conversely, many city feminists persistently censor discussion of any link—real or metaphorical—between woman and nature, identifying this as the linchpin of masculine domination.

Clearly, in face of the urgent task ahead, Australian women must put these artificial differences aside. This means learning to communicate with sisters on the Right as well. Corporate wives can be a way in to the conscience of the ruling class. They are often autonomous women, highly informed and resourceful. Many are already actively committed on public concerns. Church women too, Quakers, Catholics or fundamentalists, are already working for social justice, peace and conservation. They feel deeply; and, whatever the basis for their reasons, they hold consistently life-affirming policies on key feminist questions like in-vitro technology. Secular women need to find a way of acknowledging the human continuity with “nature” too, but one that sensitively challenges and dissolves the oppressive ideology of our Judaeo-Christian past. Whatever the patriarchy tells us, men are part of nature just as much as women are. For white people, with centuries of Enlightenment arrogance and instrumentalism to overcome, rediscovering physical ties with the earth is not easy. Jammed into our crowded, noisy and poisoned cities, we only now begin to see what Black people had got together in the first place.

*We want to smell the clean fresh air
blowing over our land, not like at
Maralinga where we smelt the black
dust from their bombs... [And] many of
our people died. We want those hard
thinking men of power to go away...*

Pitjantjatjara woman, quoted in *Chain Reaction*, no. 36

In the mid-eighties, women's activism in our country and internationally is less a monolithic movement than one with many diverse strands with apparently incompatible strategies. Feminists seem to cluster in unsympathetic, self-righteous cliques or opt for divisive sectarian alliances, and then become only intermittently effective in making change. For this reason, I have argued in the past that the movement has reached a point of crisis—a time for review and re-orientation. On reflection, I think this pessimism comes from a failure to think historically. The feminist movement *per se* may be fragmented and diffuse, but women's political engagement is a strong and multifaceted thing. It may contain contradictory tendencies, but each of these—liberal feminism, socialist feminism, eco-feminism—is working away on different parts of the social fabric. With time, I think their effects will coalesce.

Casting around New South Wales alone, the number of competent, committed eco-political workers makes an impressive list. To name but a few: Lyn Goldsworthy, anarcha-feminist and advocate for Antarctica; Wendy Varney, fluoride researcher and *Tribune* columnist; Barbara Whiteman, community worker; Nancy Shelley, non-violence activist; Judy Lambert, at the Wilderness Society; Lilith Waud and Kate Boyd, organisers for *Getting Together*; Lea Harrison and Robyn Francis, Permaculture consultants; Kate Short, heart and soul of the Total Environment Centre's toxic chemical committee; Mum Shirl, Aboriginal health worker; Judy Messer, stalwart Plant Variety Rights lobbyist; Jan Ardill, now on R & R from FOE; Bev Symonds, tireless peace worker; Joan Carey, from WILPF; Ruby Emerson, Blue Mountains Women for Peace; Val Plumwood, philosopher and forest conservationist; Joan Staples, farmer turned ACF lobbyist, and Chris Townend, animal liberation publicist. Some of them may not like the label, but all would qualify as eco-feminists. All are finding a way to reconcile the old and the new political agendas in their lives, balancing their individual integrity as women with dedication to a wider, ecological identity beyond themselves.¹³

And this is no mean feat. Caught between the principles of freedom and equality on the one hand, and the global imperative on the other, women take on two fronts at every stage of the struggle. And more,

each front in turn has to be taken on in both private and public life. Out of this complex, often painful experience so uniquely theirs, re/sisters all over the world are creating a new political sense. And their program leaves other ideologies for change looking thin, single-issue and reformist. In building a Green and sustainable future, women in the late twentieth century have a very specific energy and purpose to release.

5: ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA AND THE GREEN MOVEMENT

Burnam Burnam



BURNAM BURNAM was born Henry James Penrith on 10 January 1936 under the family gum tree at Mosquito Point Wallaga Lake Aboriginal Reserve in New South Wales. He was educated at Kempsey High School and at the University of Tasmania where he studied Law for three years. Subsequently he spent 13 years in the NSW Public Service and then he spent four years

working for the government-owned Aboriginal Hostels Ltd as the Senior Aboriginal Executive Officer. In 1975 Burnam Burnam was a Sir Winston Churchill Fellow, travelling the world comparing the developing situation of Aboriginal Australians with other indigenous movements. Burnam Burnam has a distinguished sporting record: he played rugby for the University of Tasmania and for NSW Country; he also played cricket at intervarsity level and for the Sydney Cricket Club, and he was the first Aboriginal to gain the Bronze Medallion in surf lifesaving. Well known for his appearances in films, Burnam Burnam is a fighter for causes and has a long involvement in Aboriginal land rights struggles. He was the Parliamentary Liaison Officer to the NSW Parliamentary Select Committee on Land Rights, he stood as an independent candidate in the last Senate elections for NSW, and currently he is working as Parliamentary Liaison Officer for the NSW Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

The emergence of the Green movement in Australia is a predictable response to the destructive pattern of an invading society which