
Gyn/Ecology is both a celebration/cerebration of women's power and a savage rejection of the necrophilia of Patriarchy. Mary Daly comes from a theological background and her book echoes that tradition. Written in a poetic, visionary style, Gyn/Ecology is a Journey, a process, it is for the "Hag/Crone/Spinster in every Living woman. It is for each individual Journer to decide/expand the scope of this imagination within her. It is she, and she alone, who can determine how far, and in what way she can/will travel. She and she alone, can dis-cover the mystery of her own history, and find how it is interwoven with the lives of other women." (p.xiii)

The second section is a more detailed examination of a number of systems of control and torture of women ..., foot-binding, genital mutilation, American gynaecology. And the third is a call to women to abandon Patriarchy, to create our own 'otherworld'. We "whirl into another frame of reference .... Unweaving their deceptions we name our Truth. Defying their professions we discover our Female Pride, our Sinister Wisdom. Escaping their possession we find our Enspiriting Selves. Overcoming their aggression we uncover our Creative Anger and Brilliant Bravery. Demystifying/demythifying their obsessions we re-member our Woman-loving love. Refusing their assimilation we experience our Autonomy and Strength. Avoiding their elimination we find our Original Being. Mending their imposed fragmentation we Spin our Original Integrity ...." (p.423)

The history of women, of course, intersects and is played out within the structures of Patriarchy. For Daly "Patriarchy is the homeland of males; it is the Father Land and men are its agents .... Males and males only are the originators, planners, controllers and legitimators of Patriarchy" (p.39). Within Patriarchy there exists a state of war in which men strive to subdue the power and independence of women through practices as foot-binding, witch-burning suttee and ultimately through the annihilation of women altogether by themselves giving birth to transexuals, test-tube babies, etc.

The structure of the book is in three parts. The first section establishes the background, the patterns and methods of Patriarchal Culture. In particular, she focusses on myth and language. "This book is primarily concerned with the mind/spirit/body pollution inflicted through patriarchal myths and language on all levels. These levels range from styles of grammar to styles of glamour, from religious myth to dirty jokes, from theological hymns honouring the 'Real Presence' of Christ to commercial cooing of Coca-Cola as the 'Real Thing' .... Phallic myth and language generate, legitimate and mask the material pollution that threatens to terminate all sentient life on this planet." (p.8)

It is this aspect of the book which many radical feminists identify with and develop in a political sense with other women. Images from the Background, presented in Sydney by the Fools Gallery Theatre Company derives its inspiration from Gyn/Ecology in that the company delineates the "Background .... the unnoticed, disregarded field of reality against which the perceived acceptable 'business of life' is played" (Program notes, p.1). For the Fools Gallery Company however the purpose of such a delineation is to "attempt to put power and joy into living as individuals, an attempt to delineate and then destroy the barriers between men and women and the world." (ibid)
Although this is the political implication which many people draw from Gyn/Ecology I do not think that this is Mary Daly’s political vision. Nor do I think you can accept the book as a poetic vision only and not as an attempt to come to terms with everyday reality. Daly goes to great lengths to attack the publicly recognised women’s movements as “male designed, male orchestrated, male legitimated, male assimilated”. She similarly attacks the homosexual movement and feminist therapy. She criticises many women as “fembots”, “Daddy’s girl”, “Daddy’s little Titterers” in an ironic use of the labelling she is so critical of in other people. She makes specific practical political suggestions, as for example, her solution to the contraceptive problem .... “It is obvious to Hags that few gynaecologists recommend to their heterosexual patients the most foolproof of solutions, namely Mister-ectomy. The Spinsters who propose this way by our be-ing, liv-ing, speak-ing can do so with power precisely because we are not preoccupied with ways to get off the heterosexually defined contraceptive dilemma.” (p.239)

Read on this level I think that the book has very deep political and theoretical failings. One most obvious example is the a-historicism of her work. The framework of Patriarchy is assumed in all instances. There is no other explanation for witch-burning for example, than that men hate and want to destroy women. No reference is made to struggles in the Church, the class divisions in society, natural disasters making for instability during that period. It is the same with the other sections of the book on genital mutilation, suttee, foot-binding, etc.

There is no way open for any criticism within the framework of the book. Daly specifically castigates those who would be critical as “fembots”, token women doing Daddy’s work. In this respect, I think the book must be seen to be extremely authoritarian and anti-women.

In terms of political strategy, there is no consideration of the material circumstances of most women’s lives, certainly no consideration of how men and women might live without exploitation and domination since it is presupposed that that is impossible, and to strive to do so is merely a distraction and draining of our energy which should be woman-centred. There is no attention paid to the class nature of capitalist, or any other society, and the bearing this has on Patriarchal power relations in such a society, or the functions Patriarchy fulfils in class society.

Despite such criticisms Gyn/Ecology does raise one of the most fundamental political and personal problems for women .... that is, given the violence which has been, and continues to be, practised against women, how is it possible to create a society where women and men can live in harmony.

Architect or Bee? The Human/Technology Relationship by Mike Cooley, published in Australia by TNC, $8.95. Reviewed by Peter Mason.

In 1917 Bertrand Russell wrote a speech for the war workers of Glasgow dealing with a pressing problem that is every bit as pressing today: how, as an individual, to avoid being crushed by the huge, impersonal institutions of the twentieth century. Above all how to escape the tendency to greed and self interest which, he said, modern capitalism forces upon all who are not heroic or exceptionally fortunate.

“Vast organisations”, he told them, “are an inevitable element in modern life, and it is useless to aim at their abolition .... It is true that they make the preservation of individuality more difficult, but what is needed is a way of combining them with the greatest possible scope for individual initiative.

One very important step towards this end would be to render democratic the government of every organisation .... There can be no real freedom or democracy until the people who do the work in a business also control its management”.

In the sixty years that have passed since that speech the problems of the individual in the face of these vast organisations have grown so great that most of us, being neither heroic nor exceptionally fortunate, feel generally overwhelmed by them.

Architect or Bee throws a unique and brilliant spotlight on these problems of modern living. It shows how a group of workers in England, far from being daunted by the size and technical power of their institution, have used their imagination to discover how that very technology could be used efficiently and profitably for socially useful purposes. And not only did they show it: they actually did it!

Mike Cooley’s title, Architect or Bee, highlights the human importance of retaining some individual initiative in the processes of production. It comes from a passage in Das Kapital:

A bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of its cells; but what distinguishes the worst of architects from the best of bees in this. The architect raises the structure in imagination before it is erected in reality. At the end of every labor process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement.

Cooley himself is an industrial designer who has seen his profession changed out of recognition by the coming of the computer. Yet he’s saddened by his observation that the human liberation