

ADRIENNE RICH

**On Lies,
Secrets,
and
Silence**

Selected Prose

1966-1978

love rather than of power, gold, or learning. So the apparent lightness of these poems had better be taken very seriously, and we might well call to mind, as we read these latest poems, the redefinition of "lovers" that Grahm has offered us in "A Woman Is Talking to Death."

The necessity of poetry has to be stated over and over, but only to those who have reason to fear its power, or those who still believe that language is "only words" and that an old language is good enough for our descriptions of the world we are trying to transform.

Motherhood: The Contemporary Emergency and the Quantum Leap (1978)

I want to begin by saying something that has been on my mind ever since I was asked to participate in this conference. I hope, and believe, that every woman in this room knows that on the subject of motherhood there are no experts. What we need, in any case, as women, is not experts on our lives, but the opportunity and the validation to name and describe the truths of our lives, as we have known them. Whatever you hear from me, from Jessie Bernard, from Dorothy Dinnerstein, from Tillie Olsen, [the three other invited speakers at the conference] remember that it is your own sense of urgency, your own memories, needs, questions, and hopes, your own painfully gathered knowledge of daughterhood and motherhood, which you must above all trust. Listen to us, then, as to four women who through certain kinds of luck, privilege, struggle, exceptional status, and at certain kinds of cost, have been able not only to live the experience of daughterhood and motherhood, but also to reflect and write about it. But listen even more closely to yourselves.

One of the most powerful social and political catalysts of the past decade has been the speaking of women with other women, the telling of our secrets, the comparing of wounds and the sharing of

Talk for Columbus, Ohio, conference on the Future of Mothering, sponsored by the Women's Resource and Policy Development Center, June 2, 3, 4, 1978.

words. This hearing and saying of women has been able to break many a silence and taboo; literally to transform forever the way we see. Let this be a time, then, for hearing and speaking together, for breaking silences, not only within ourselves but among all our selves: the daughter and the mother; the black woman and the white; the lesbian mother and the married housewife; the woman who has chosen single or communal motherhood and the woman who has chosen to use her life in ways which do not include the raising of children; the woman who has given up custody of her children and the woman who is fighting to keep hers; the step-daughter, the foster-mother, the pregnant woman; the daughter who has never known her mother, the mother who has no daughters. What we all, collectively, have lived, as the daughters of women, as the mothers of children, is a tale far greater than any three or four of us can encompass: a tale only beginning to be told. I hope that here, speaking to and hearing one another, we can begin to fling cables of recognition and attention across the conditions that have divided us. And so I begin tonight by urging each of you to take responsibility for the voicing of her experience, to take seriously the work of listening to each other and the work of speaking, whether in private dialogue or in larger groups. In order to change what is, we need to give speech to what *has been*, to imagine together what *might be*.

I have seen massive sculpturelike weavings, of jute, hemp, and wool, in which many varicolored strands are quickly visible like vines or striations; but when you come closer and try to touch this or that strand, your hand enters a dense, bristling mesh, thick with knotted and twisted filaments, some harsh and rough to the fingers, others surprisingly silky and strong. In writing *Of Woman Born*, and in thinking about motherhood ever since, I have felt a similar sensation, of elemental exploration and of complex discovery. Let us try then to do justice to the complexity of this immense weaving, even as we single out particular strands or finger particular knots that seem to account for the whole. For motherhood is the great mesh in which all human relations are entangled, in which lurk our most elemental assumptions about love and power.

If we speak of motherhood at all, we are inevitably speaking of something far more than the relationship of a woman with her children. And even this relationship has been shaped long before the first

child's birth. All women are daughters of women—is this an obvious, a simple-minded statement? or does it reach through the layers of the weaving to inner chambers only now beginning to be explored by women? It has been suggested by Margaret Mead that possibly a deep chemical affinity exists, of which we as yet know nothing, between the body of the mother and her still unborn female child. It has been affirmed by Nancy Chodorow, that through the intense mother-daughter relationship women come into a deep and richer inner life than men, and, even when heterosexual, tend to be more deeply attached to women than to men, and more capable than men of relationship.¹ Both Chodorow and Dorothy Dinnerstein feel strongly that the solution to sexual inequality would be a radical change in the system of parenting, that is, that parenting must be shared equally between women and men. I wish here to suggest other forces which sit in wait in the birth-chamber as a woman completes her first nine months of mothering.

Historically, cross-culturally, a woman's status as childbearer has been the test of her womanhood. Through motherhood, every woman has been defined from outside herself: mother, matriarch, matron, spinster, barren, old maid—listen to the history of emotional timbre that hangs about each of these words. Even by default motherhood has been an enforced identity for women, while the phrases "childless man" and "nonfather" sound absurd and irrelevant to us.

And so this woman in labor is on the one hand, even perhaps in terror and pain, doing what history has told her it was her duty and destiny to do; while at the same time doing what her mother did, reenacting a scene, which both separates her from her own mother (for now she is, supposedly, herself a woman and no longer a child) and creates her more intensely in her mother's image.

Motherhood is also, of course, at the crux of the self-determination of women over our bodies. Many of you need no reminding that here in Ohio we meet on soil already shaken by the fire-bombing and burning of four women's health clinics within the past four months, part of a nationwide pattern of terrorism against the hard-won and fragile right of women to make the invariably difficult

¹The *Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: University of California, 1978), p. 198.

choice to end an unwanted pregnancy. But these attacks on the grassroots, spreading movement of women to repossess our bodies are only one small piece of the larger picture to which I allude, in the title of this talk, as "the contemporary emergency." Sometimes referred to as "the backlash," this emergency is many-pronged, and I believe it is important to grasp it as clearly and as realistically as we can.

Motherhood, the family, are still too often relegated to the realm of the "private and personal." "For love," women are assumed to provide unflagging emotional care, not only to children but to men; while in terms of the physical work we do, our enormous, unpaid contribution to every economy is everywhere dismissed as only the natural service of women to men and children. We would rightly be skeptical of a feminism which denied the value and dignity of traditional women's work in the home. But in fact it is not feminists who have belittled and devalued the work of the housewife and mother. It is the statisticians, the political scientists, the economists, the image-makers of television and other advertising, the professionals, who depict the woman at home as "not working," as invisible, as an empty-headed consumer. Listen to the idiotic baby-voices allotted to women in canned radio commercials, look at the grinning smiles of housewives and mothers as depicted on television, observe the obscene patronizing of women on game shows, read the childraising and sex manuals, equally patronizing, written by the male doctor experts.² The feminist movement has from the first demanded choice as each woman's right, respect for each woman's being; feminist artists, historians, anthropologists have been the first to show concern and respect for the crafts of the midwives and grandmothers, the anonymous work of women's hands, the oral culture of women sitting in kitchens, the traditional arts and remedies passed on from mother to daughter, the female culture never granted the reverence accorded to "high art." A recognition of women's unquenchable creativity—contained so often within domestic limits, yet astounding

² For a detailed documentation and analysis of "the woman problem," by postindustrial science, especially medicine, see B. Ehrenreich and D. English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women* (New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1978), a brilliant study marred only by its failure to deal with heterosexual itself as a primary mandate to women.

in its diversity—has been one of the deep perceptions of a feminism which looks with fresh eyes on all that has been trivialized, devalued, forbidden, or silenced in female history. And so we can both take pride in all that women have done for "love"—including the resourceful, heroic coping of ordinary women everywhere—and also ask: "Why should women, and women only, work for love only? And what kind of love is this, which means always to be for others, never for ourselves?"

But the dismissal of the traditional work of women as nonwork, of our art as mere "decoration" or "craft" or "scribbling," the condemnation to the housewife and mother, the long and violent campaign against voluntary motherhood, the suspect status of women who are neither wives nor mothers—these are merely symptoms of the much larger phenomenon of *gynephobia*—fear and hatred of women—which in its less virulent and savage forms we have called "sexism." Much is being written these days about gender-identity—and about how we can change the restricting images of self that both girls and boys learn so early, as the chief lessons of culture. I believe that the issue of gender-identity may well mask a reality much deeper and more terrifying to contemplate than the superstitions which impose one set of qualities upon one sex and another set on the other.

Beneath sexism, beneath socially enforced gender-identity and stereotype, lies *gynephobia*. It is an ancient and well-documented phenomenon,³ and it is not a simple one, neither in its origins nor in the many faces it wears in the present day. Certainly male contempt and loathing for women and for women's bodies is embedded in language, art, folklore, and legend; the need to contain and restrict women's creativity and power within the mothering role is an insistent theme in all social institutions; what has been called "the backlash" is, I think, only an intensification of the long assault upon every effort by women to repossess ourselves, to lay hold on our integrity, to refuse to hate ourselves as we have been hated.

There has been a basic contradiction throughout patriarchy: be-

³ See H. R. Hays, *The Dangerous Sex: The Myth of Feminine Evil* (New York: Pocket Books, 1972), first published 1964; Katherine M. Rogers, *The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1966); Andrea Dworkin, *Woman Hating* (New York: Dutton, 1974); Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon, 1979).

tween the laws and sanctions designed to keep women essentially powerless, and the attribution to mothers of almost superhuman power (of control, of influence, of life-support). The other side of the contradiction, of course, is the negation of women who are not mothers, or who are woman-identified. The unmarried or childless woman may be more acceptable today than when she was perceived as so threatening that she was burned as a witch. But the socialization of every girl toward heterosexual romance and childbearing is still probably the most intense socialization practiced by society as a whole. At the same time, once a woman has borne a child she is viewed as the primary and uttermost source of that child's good and evil, its survival, health, sanity, and selfhood. A society which penalizes some children because they are not white, others because they are not male, indoctrinating in them a sense of worthlessness, can still lay the blame for the waste of its young on the "bad" mothers who have somehow failed to be superhuman, who have somehow failed to rear, in a callous and ruthless social order, well-adjusted, obedient, achieving, nonalienated children.

Cynophobia supposes the eternal, universal guilt of women, and most women carry in us a learned, internalized version of that guilt. Maternal guilt is perhaps the most familiar to many of us; but many also know the guilt leveled at the woman who affirms herself, who is centered-in-herself, and who, in a woman-hating environment, dares to love herself and other women. It is ironic, to say the least, that the first verbal attack slung at the woman who demonstrates a primary loyalty to herself and other women is *man-hater*. The fear of appearing or being named as a man-hater still causes many women to deny the reality of gynophobia, the concrete evidences of woman-hating embedded in our culture, in language, image, and act.

Cynophobia is an old historical reality; what creates an emergency today is the fusion of gynophobia with technology. To deal fully with the implications of this—the acceleration of technological change over the past century, the rapidly increasing complexity of systems and the training of elite males who will decide how and for what technology is to be used—this would take several volumes, and some of these are already written. In response to this crisis, a strong feminist ecology movement is beginning to take shape, as exemplified by the Women's Conference on the Environment in Albany, June

17-18, 1978, and by the publication of two major books on women, manmade technology, and nature: Susan Griffin's *Woman and Nature* and Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology*.⁴ What I want to do here is look at some things that are happening with respect to the control of motherhood, the exploitation of women's reproductive power by male-dominated institutions and systems.

The Supreme Court decision leading to state withdrawal of Medicaid funds for abortion is a legal attack upon a hard-won freedom for women. It is also directly linked with the growing use of sterilization as a population-control device—first in Latin America and other Third World areas, but soon to be attempted in the States as a major form of "family planning." If poor women cannot afford abortion, and cannot afford to raise their children, they are more likely to give what is often cynically termed "informed consent" to sterilization.⁵ Already by 1968, 35.3 per cent of Puerto Rican women of childbearing age, two-thirds of them under thirty, had been sterilized—under funding by the department cynically termed Health, Education, and Welfare. Experimental contraceptives are tested by AID in Puerto Rico for dissemination in the Third World although they fail to meet the admittedly low standards of the United States drug industry. Sterilization is being used on poor women and women of color in the continental United States, even where abortion is legal and has been requested.

⁴ Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978); Mary Daly, op. cit. For an analysis of a specific application of technology, see Janice Raymond, *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* (Boston: Beacon, 1979).

⁵ The importance of "guidelines" in the performance of elective sterilization is unquestionable. But, as we examine the social and economic conditions under which women give consent, and the absence of alternatives, it becomes clear that "the question of poverty is inseparable from reproductive freedom for women" and the meaning of "voluntary" becomes inseparable from a woman's entire life-situation, the actual range of her choices, her view of sterilization as "an escape from abject poverty." For an excellent overview of the issue, with emphasis on Puerto Rico, see *Workbook on Sterilization and Sterilization Abuse* (Ad Hoc Women's Studies Committee Against Sterilization Abuse, Women's Studies, Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, N. Y. 10708). See also "Who Controls Reproduction: Birth Control, Population Control, Sterilization Abuse" in *Isis International Bulletin* no. 7, spring 1978 (Case Postale 301, 1227 Carouge/Geneva, Switzerland).

Here are some examples quoted from an article on sterilization of Native American women from the Denver, Colorado, feminist newspaper, *Big Mama Rag*:

Sterilization of women in this country has increased 300% since 1970. . . . An estimated 32% of all black women under thirty have been sterilized. . . . Over 25% of all American Indian women of childbearing age have been sterilized since 1973, leaving only about 100,000 women of childbearing age who can have children. Among those sterilized, 10% were under the age of 21. . . . Many Indian women are coerced into signing forms agreeing to sterilization. It is frequently insinuated that they will lose welfare payments and benefits if they refuse. A large number of women agree to sterilization operations because they are afraid that their children will be taken away from them if they don't. To avoid this type of misunderstanding government agencies are now required to inform women that there are other forms of birth control available to them and that other benefits may not be withheld if they refuse. However, there is no indication that these laws are being followed or enforced.⁶

The agencies implementing sterilization policies here and abroad are among those which present a "humanitarian" image to the public: HEW, VISTA, the Peace Corps, AID.⁷ But women must be deeply skeptical of apparent solutions to human distress which may deprive any woman or group of women of the decision as to how their bodies are to be used. The assumptions justifying coercive sterilization are part of the objectification and exploitation of women's bodies that we see in pornography and in cultural imagery everywhere that degrades women. And no woman, or group of women, is finally exempt from these attitudes.

⁶ Judy Barlow, "Sterilization of Native American Women," *Big Mama Rag*, vol. 6, no. 5, May 1978.

⁷ "Humanitarian" at least in name. "The United States plans to sterilize one-quarter of the world's women," said Dr. R. T. Ravenholt, director of AID's office on population control. According to Ravenholt, population control is necessary to maintain "the normal operation of commercial interests around the world." "Without our trying to help these countries with their economic and social development, the world would rebel against the strong U.S. commercial presence," he said. (Liberation News Service, quoted in *Akwesasne Notes*, September 1977, p. 31.)

Meanwhile, in underdeveloped countries, the multinational corporations manufacturing commercial infant formula have been aggressively marketing their products as a better, Western replacement for breast milk. In Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, the Philippines, areas where protein-calorie malnutrition can be an acute problem, and where mothers have successfully breastfed their children for centuries, samples of formula are given away at prenatal clinics, pushed by company employees costumed as "milk nurses," while clinic walls are plastered with posters alleging the superiority of powdered formula. Hospitals are bribed to permit advertising and sales with free gifts of medical equipment and other largesse. Very large numbers of children are dying from malnutrition—the mothers want to do the best, the most modern thing, for their infants, cannot afford to feed them the full formula, have in any case no refrigeration or sterile water supply, and often dilute or reduce the formula to save money.⁸ When we hear of "population control" as a solution to famine, we must not forget starvation caused by the ruthlessness of "free" enterprise, and by a profound indifference to the lives of women and children.

I believe—as my poem "Hunger" attempts to delineate in a different kind of language—that the problem of world hunger is a central issue for women, that it is inextricably bound up with motherhood, and with the control of women's bodies by male-dominated interests. We hear a great deal about the "population explosion," but little about the withholding of resources, the waste and misuse of protein, the use of food as a tool of international pressure. "Population control" is targeted at women from groups considered expendable or "unfit" on the basis of income, class, and race. Instead of finding ways of supporting human life humanely on the planet, instead of controlling the expansion of corporate power and profiteering in agriculture, such male-dominated, and utterly nonfeminist, groups as Zero Population Growth and International Planned Parenthood seek to remove all choice from women as to the use of their potential for motherhood; sterilization is to replace contraception or

⁸ See *Isis International Bulletin* no. 2, "Breast-Feeding: A Political Issue"; also "Baby Food Politics" in *Isis* no. 7; and Jane Cottingham, ed., *Bottle Babies: A Guide to the Baby Foods Issue*, published by *Isis*, December 1976.

abortion. Obviously, sterilization itself is no evil, so long as women have real psychological and economic choices. It is the uses of technology for both genocidal and gynecidal purposes which more and more women now view as a major emergency.

Another example: the sudden rise of 50 percent in the number of Caesarean operations performed in U.S. hospitals has attracted the attention of feminists in health work and childbirth education, as well as of some male physicians. Here again low-income women stand a higher chance of being viewed as "poor risks" in pregnancy and given Caesareans—using Medicaid money to pay the higher costs of this kind of delivery.⁹ It is increasingly clear that medical technology has, in U.S. hospitals, but also in other parts of the world, become a means of alienating women from the act of giving birth, hence from their own bodies, their own procreative powers, and of keeping birth itself so far as possible in male control. It has also become a major industry. The story of this male "theft of childbirth" has been told and documented by Ehrenreich and English, by Suzanne Arms, and by myself;¹⁰ and there is an active feminist health and home-birth movement dedicated to the project of "taking our bodies back." But the effort to seize the process of birth from women is now abetted by a technology far more developed than when in the seventeenth century the Chamberlen family hid the secret of the forceps for three generations. This new level of technology and medical research can create female genitals in a male-to-female transsexual; it can offer "restructured vaginas" as a solution for heterosexual sex problems; it can project mammal cloning as a realistic possibility; yet it has been unable to produce a truly safe and effective contraceptive device. The enormous complexity of sex-change surgery, as Janice Raymond has exhaustively shown, is now a major medical industry, aimed at solving the problems of gender-suffering through technology rather than through profound societal changes which would do away with sex roles altogether.¹¹

⁹ Maritza Arrastia, "Epidemic of Caesareans," *Seven Days*, May 5, 1978.

¹⁰ B. Ehrenreich and D. English, *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers* (Old Westbury, N. Y.: Feminist Press, 1973); Suzanne Arms, *Immulate Deception* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975); Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Norton, 1976).

¹¹ Raymond, *op cit*.

Finally, while a powerful corporate state works to remove the right of motherhood from thousands of poor and Third World women, a powerful Church and other corporate interests agitate as "friends of the fetus." As Alice Rossi has pointed out,

There are now far more fetuses in the American work-place than there ever were children in our mines and factories in the whole history of American child labor; yet there have been no large-scale investigations of the potential influence on the fetus of the vast array of new chemicals and synthetic substances in the environments in which employed women work. In one of the few studies in this area, [Wilma] Hunt found a significant correlation between severe air pollution and the incidence of fetal distress, prematurity, and stillbirths.¹²

Both the Right-to-Life and the Population Control movements are obsessed with direct control of women's bodies—not with discovering and creating conditions which would make life more livable for the living. In the middle-class United States, a veneer of "alternate life-styles" disguises the reality that, here as everywhere, women's apparent "choices" whether to have or not have children are still dependent on the far from neutral will of male legislators, jurists, a male medical and pharmaceutical profession, well-financed lobbies, including the prelates of the Catholic Church, and the political reality that women do not as yet have self-determination over our bodies, and still live mostly in ignorance of our authentic physicality, our possible choices, our eroticism itself.

We are undermined and subverted, not simply by precarious and whimsical abortion laws, precarious and fallible birth-control devices; but also by laws and conventions protecting a husband's right to rape and batter his wife or kidnap his children; by pornographic advertising which tells us we love to submit to sexual violence; by the victim-imagery of the Christian Church, which extols passive motherhood in the person of the Virgin Mary; by the very manner in which we give birth in hospitals, surrounded by male experts, su-

¹² Alice Rossi, "Children and Work in the Lives of Women," paper delivered at the University of Arizona, Tucson, February 7, 1976. See Chapter IV, "Work, Reproduction and Health," in Jeanne Mager Stellman, *Women's Work, Women's Health, Myths and Realities* (New York: Pantheon, 1977).

pinely drugged or stirred against our will, our babies taken from us at birth by other experts who will tell us how often to feed, when we may hold, our newborns. And, finally, by the whispering voice of the culture, internalized in us, that says we are forever guilty; guilty of living in a woman's body, guilty of getting pregnant, guilty of refusing the mother-role altogether. A male-dominated technological establishment and a male-dominated population-control network view both the planet and women's bodies as resources to be seized, exploited, milked, excavated, and controlled. Somehow, in the nightmare image of an earth overrun with starving people because feckless, antisocial women refuse to stop breeding, we can perceive contempt for women, for the children of women, and for the earth herself.

I have often asked myself whether the experience of motherhood under patriarchy is finally radicalizing or conservatizing. In attempting to give our children the security, the stability, we know they need, do we become more obedient to a social order we know is morally bankrupt; do we give in to the pressures of convention, of schools, of jobs; are our children our hostages to the State, its real safeguard—and escape-valve—against the anger of women? Or do we discover, in motherhood, the coarse, bitter, bedrock truth of the way things are, the callousness of patriarchy, its hatred of women, its indifference to new life, even to youth itself, that supposed idolatry of American life? In motherhood we are often separated from other women, enclosed in the home, and like paid domestic workers, we find it difficult to organize. Yet mothers *do* organize: to start cooperative childcare, to get broken glass cleaned off a playground, to keep schools open. In Brooklyn there is a Sisterhood of Black Single Mothers, surely one of the most beleaguered of all groups between the twin grindstones of gynophobia and racism. The Lesbian Mothers' National Defense Fund, based in Seattle, has helped a number of women to fight for and win custody of their children. The Welfare Mothers' Movement is a growing force across the country. These groups and others like them consist of women considered marginal to society, women who through color, poverty, and sexual preference already have reason to be politicized, in addition to their status as mothers. If they have organized under the daily, hourly emergency of their situations, mothers everywhere can organize. But

we will need to disabuse ourselves of the myths of motherhood, of the idea of its sacredness, its protected status, its automatic validation of us as women.

The right to have or not have children; the right to have both children and a selfhood not dependent on them; these are still being fought for, and this fight threatens every part of the patriarchal system. We cannot afford to settle for individual solutions. The myth that motherhood is "private and personal" is the deadliest myth we have to destroy, and we have to begin by destroying it in ourselves. The institution of motherhood—which is maintained by the law, by patriarchal technology and religion, by all forms of education—including pornography—has, by the most savage of ironies, alienated women from our bodies by incarcerating us in them.

The "quantum leap" of my title is of course a leap of the imagination. When I chose that title, I was thinking a great deal about time. I am a woman of forty-nine, a lesbian/feminist, mother of three adult sons who still sometimes appear as young children in my dreams. The feminist movement of this half-century surfaced "just in time" for me; I had been a solitary feminist for too long. I know that the rest of my life will be spent working for transformations I shall not live to see realized. I feel daily, hourly impatience, and am pledged to the active and tenacious patience that a lifetime commitment requires: there can be no resignation in the face of backlash, setback, or temporary defeat; there can be no limits on what we allow ourselves to imagine. Because the past ten years of feminist thinking and action have been so full, so charged with revelations, challenges, as well as with anger and pain, we sometimes think of that decade as if it had been fifty years, not ten. *Why haven't we come further?* But in the great evolution of woman that this century's radical feminism envisions, we have only begun. And yet this longer historical view seems unbearable to me when I consider the urgency of each woman's life that may be lost, poured away like dishwater, because history does not move fast enough for her.

So the "quantum leap" implies that even as we try to deal with backlash and emergency, we are imagining the new: a future in which women are powerful, full of our own power, not the old patriarchal power-over but the power-to-create, power-to-think, power-

to-articulate and concretize our visions and transform our lives and those of our children. I believe still, as I wrote in the afterword to *Of Woman Born*, that this power will begin to speak in us more and more as we repossess our own bodies, including the decision to mother or not to mother, and how, and with whom, and when. For the struggle of women to become self-determining is rooted in our bodies, and it is an indication of this that the token woman artist or intellectual or professional has so often been constrained to deny her female physicality in order to enter realms designated as male domain.

It has never been my belief that mothering could, under different circumstances, become easy. As I wrote at the end of my book:

To destroy the institution is not to abolish motherhood. It is to release the creation and sustenance of life into the same realm of decision, struggle, surprise, imagination, and conscious intelligence, as any other difficult, but freely chosen, work.

This means, among other things, that a woman could choose motherhood freely, not just because safe and effective birth control was universally available, but because she would have no need to prove her adequacy as a woman by getting pregnant; that a woman need not look for economic security to a man, getting pregnant as a by-product; that no false necessity would dictate a choice between a woman's uterus and her brain; that the woman mothering her child was a being with dignity in the world, who respected her body, who had as much power as any other individual person to act upon and shape her society, and who possessed the wherewithal to meet her own needs and those of her children, whether she chose to live with a man, with a woman, with other parents and children, or in a separate household with her children. These are minimal conditions; but implied in them are enormous social and political changes.)

What would it mean to mother in a society where women were deeply valued and respected, in a culture which was woman-affirming? What would it mean to bear and raise children in the fullness of our power to care for them, provide for them, in dignity and pride? What would it mean to mother in a society which had truly addressed the issues of racism and hunger? What would it mean to mother in a society which was making full use of the spiritual, intel-

lectual, emotional, physical gifts of women, in all our difference and diversity? What would it mean to mother in a society which laid no stigma upon lesbians, so that women grew up with real emotional and erotic options in the choice of life companions and lovers? What would it mean to live and die in a culture which affirmed both life and death, in which both the living world and the bodies of women were released at last from centuries of violation and control? This is the quantum leap of the radical feminist vision.

I believe we must cope courageously and practically, as women have always done, with the here and now, our feet on this ground where we now live. But nothing less than the most radical imagination will carry us beyond this place, beyond the mere struggle for survival, to that lucid recognition of our possibilities which will keep us impatient, and unresigned to mere survival.