

The Women's Movement: Then and Now

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FOREWORD

For some fifteen years I have been invited regularly to address various groups about the history of women. One of the topics I am most frequently asked to speak about is the history of the women's movement. From hastily scrawled notes, I have managed to give some scope and structure to the subject based on my readings, my research and the questions I have been asked. Thus, I have graduated from the history of the women's movement in Quebec to its history in Canada and, eventually, in the western world, thereby placing the Quebec women's movement in a more global context. The various groups I have addressed have also convinced me of the relevance of the path I have taken.

This text is the outcome of this process which reflects the circumstances in which it came about. The approach is two-fold. The first part, more academic in nature, attempts to summarize the history of the women's movement from 1840 to 1968. The other two parts are more journalistic, more discursive in nature. Through a brief description of the numerous practices and analyses, I have attempted to present an overall assessment without expressing a viewpoint. In fact, the events are too recent for them to be approached in the same way as early feminism. I am aware of having attempted to force a point in several places in order to make the landscape fit the frame I have chosen. If, in doing so, I stir debate and objection, I will have achieved my goal: to bring about an understanding of the historicity, extent and complexity of the women's movement.

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Micheline Dumont.

When the history of women emerged as a specific field of history from a separate, anecdotal, even decorative annex to traditional history, the history of the women's movement was among its preferred avenues of expression.¹ This approach was legitimized in two ways. Firstly, it placed the history of the women's movement within the vast progressive wave which characterizes the history of the 19th Century: it became, basically, a chapter in the history of western democracy. Secondly, it implied that by adopting traditionally male behaviour (political demands, associations, involvement in public life, and so on), women could become part of the object of history. The result was two very widespread, though contradictory impressions: that the history of women boils down to and merges with the history of the women's movement; and that the true history of women has nothing to do with the history of the women's movement. The history of women is about their daily life, the impact of their many activities on society, the lifting of the veil over their feats and actions, the analysis and refutation of thought about women.² The fact is that in practice, female historians of the women's movement and female historians of women were rarely one and the same.

When, like Hymowitz and Weissman, the authors of A History of Women in America,⁴ Le Collectif Clio set out in its Histoire des femmes du Québec⁵ to integrate the history of the women's movement into the history of women, it found itself questioning the short practice of women's history. In Geneviève Fraisse's brief critique of this work, we read: "This book seems to use categories of the history of women other than it is practised in France. It is the history of both their condition and their liberation: there can be no history of women without the history of the women's movement, and vice-versa; no analysis of marriage and work without mention of political and social

activities. This requirement to escape an historical objective, private life, work or politics, is important in the following way: it avoids falling into the trap of a preoccupation with the sordid or saintly aspects of life. To deal simultaneously with large numbers, the life of all women, and the history of a few exemplary figures, is actually beneficial for situating women in history"⁶ (translation).

Another phenomenon must be considered. The women's movement as an historical reality has been the object of a real cover-up. It is barely mentioned, even ignored, both in historical summaries⁷ and in the collective memory of women. As a result each new generation of feminists is unable to identify its own historical roots. The intergenerational solidarity of women is therefore impeded by a process familiar to the history of minority groups (with one major difference--women in fact constitute a majority). Regardless of their ideological position, female historians and feminists at least agree on one point: it is urgent, important and necessary to trace the history of women and even to challenge the accepted ideas about this aspect of history.

This view is all the more evident now as the feminist scene appears to be undergoing drastic changes. The militancy of not long ago seems to be at an end. The aims seem to have splintered into many directions. The outdated images of the suffragettes of former times are re-emerging. There is no apparent unanimity in the analyses made by the various women's groups. One is no longer too sure whether the movement is flourishing or running out of steam. One would also like to be able to take a qualified, critical look at the main manifestations of this movement.

In attempting to see the situation more clearly, it seems logical to prepare first a brief background of the women's movement as a social movement. We can then move on to look at the overall objectives of the various women's groups at this time, identify the main areas of struggle and describe the various analyses proposed in support of the demands of women. This overview will attempt, as far as possible, to remain in keeping with the most recent and most relevant interpretations of the subject. However, as in such a brief text there will be no question of going into the multi-faceted details that such an analysis presupposes, our approach will be very general, in order to reach a broad public. Those who want to make a more in-depth study of any of the issues raised in this text, may refer to the articles or works cited in the notes.

However, the one truly fundamental question raised by this historical survey obviously cannot be answered. Are the changes that have occurred in women's lives the result of feminism as a social movement or, on the contrary, are they the product of structural modifications that have had an impact on the whole of western civilization? This is a formidable question for which caution dictates there be no definite answer; a general questioning which nevertheless fuels the awareness feminists have of their need to articulate their own thought on a specific analysis of what is usually referred to as the status of women.

Brief Survey of the Evolution of Feminism

Like so many "isms", feminism is a term dating back to the 19th Century, but it also has several meanings. The social movement associated with the

term did not appear haphazardly. It was born of the status of women and the political, economic and social climate of the 19th Century explains its emergence at this point in history as an organized movement.

Before the Industrial Revolution, a kind of forerunner of feminism was evident at various times in history, for there have always been women who have accepted the risk of contesting the social condition imposed on them by nature, which relegated them primarily to procreation. Every history of feminism begins by citing, somewhat out of obligation, these isolated voices of women. Writing was one of the preferred means of expression for these women; consequently, the names of several women writers have survived to our day: Christine de Pisan, Louise Labbé, Mary Wollstonecraft.⁸ Recent feminist research, moreover, is now reviving all of the names of these female artists, abbesses, musicians, poetesses, which official history has left buried⁹ and which Judy Chicago invited to her Dinner Party. Going beyond triumphant descriptions such as Regine Pernoud's La femme au temps des cathédrales,¹⁰ female historians nevertheless agree to regard these exceptions as examples of the subjugation of women. It is in this spirit that Joan Kelly asked: "Did women have a Renaissance?".¹¹

Furthermore, several other women, unnamed, have expressed female rebellion: hetairai, courtesans, prostitutes and, above all, witches, condemned to being social outcasts or burned at the stake, are part of the history of pre-feminism the same as celebrated women.¹² The status of women, as we like to say today, is, moreover, not unchanging. There are ages, circumstances, cultures which have granted women powers, rights, privileges. But the main aspect of the status of women has always been expressed through

confinement.¹³ The best example of this is the fate of nuns. For women in countries with a Catholic tradition, becoming a nun has represented an accepted, even legitimized, means of avoiding nature's destiny. But all religious orders have eventually become cloisters. Margaret Brennan correctly defines the cloister as "the institutionalization of the invisibility of women in ecclesiastic communities"¹⁴ (translated from the French version). But the Church does not have a monopoly on the confinement of women. The gynaeceum, the atrium, the convent, the den of females, the harem, the boudoir, the parlour, the kitchen--the list of all those places to which women have been confined could stretch on.

It is also worthwhile recalling that all revolutions have led to the emergence of movements organized by women. These first **feminists** demanded rights for women. But these women were still neutralized, stifled, even ridiculed. History gives us many examples that Sheila Rowbotham has capably analysed in Women, Resistance and Revolution.¹⁵ During the French Revolution, Olympe de Gouges published a pamphlet: Les droits de la femme et de la citoyenne denouncing the male arbitrariness in the exercise of the natural rights of women. A lone female revolutionary, she nevertheless dissociated herself from the decision to execute the king of France. She was therefore sent to the guillotine, not for her political views, as might be expected, but for wanting to be a **statesman**, for having **abandoned her household tasks to become involved in the Republic**, for having **forgotten the virtues suitable for her sex**.¹⁶ In the United States, during the first campaigns against slavery, Sarah and Angelina Grimke participated, through their words and writings, in this vast social movement. They were criticized in 1837 in a pastoral letter.

"The power of woman is in her dependance, flowing from the consciousness of that weakness which God has given her for her protection, and which keeps her in those departments of life that form the character of individuals and of the nation...

But when she assumes the place and tone of man as a public performer, our care and our protection of her seem unnecessary; we put ourselves in self-defense against her; she yields the power which God has given her for protection, and her character becomes unnatural."

Many more examples could be given. Revolutionary women all found there was little tolerance of their participation in the revolution; that the cause of women must be subjugated to that of the revolution. Female historians have had quite a time showing that the demands of women are not easily understood and that there is still mistrust of women who leave their assigned sphere of activity: the home. This was borne out by the most profound revolutions, right up until the 20th Century.

Nevertheless, it was owing to the revolutions of the 19th Century that the word **feminism** came into being and movements organized by women emerged.

This term **feminism** merits further discussion. It was coined by Fourier, a forerunner of socialism, in a text of 1837.¹⁸ In short, this was at a time when the first women's movements were appearing; when socialist thought was prompting fresh analyses of social organization. But this term did not come into current usage right away. Rather, the word **feminism** has, in both English and French, another meaning which associates it with **femininity**.¹⁹ This ambiguity was to have a profound significance, as will be seen. In fact, the goal which gave rise to the first women's movements was women's rights and it is only *a posteriori* that today we describe these women and these movements as **feminist**. One thing is certain: these women's movements emerged in the

leading industrialized countries as early as the mid-19th Century. The personal protest of the previous centuries was succeeded by collective, organized revolt. Even more importantly, the organization emanated primarily from women of the middle class.

Now, what set of circumstances explains the emergence of the first women's movements at this point in history? First of all, the Industrial Revolution modified the social and economic structures, creating many human problems in the new cities, and altered family life drastically. The family, which formerly had been where production took place, began the slow evolution that was to transform it gradually into a unit of consumption. At the same time, the change in attitudes helped to confine exclusively middle-class women to domestic life, then referred to as the "woman's sphere".²⁰ Finally, these idle middle-class women began to demand higher educations, and to want to take charge of the many problems that had accompanied urbanization: the working conditions of women and children, delinquency, the emigration of women, infant mortality, epidemics, alcoholism, prostitution, and so on. As Sheila Rowbotham explains: "The separation of family from work had occurred before capitalism, but as industry grew in scale it appeared in its most distinct and clear form."

In some cases, the relation between the start of feminism and the main reformist movements is very clear. The American example is striking. This was a time, we know, when the United States was experiencing a great wave of anti-slavery. Many women provided undisputed leadership. In 1840, a number of women travelled to London to attend an international anti-slavery conference. After some discussion, they were permitted entry into the room

where the proceedings were taking place provided they hid behind a curtain! It was after this experience that Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady-Stanton decided to dedicate themselves to the defence of women's rights. This decision was to materialize eight years later in the Declaration of Seneca Falls²², which is at the source of American feminism.

But for most industrialized countries, the influence is less clear and cannot be illustrated as strikingly. As Elise Boulding explains in The Underside of History, "More and more it was middle- and upper-class women who were realizing the larger picture [of industrialization]. They were developing new approaches to the problems of urban poverty. (...) On the one hand the women were developing their analytical capacities and developing confidence in their own abilities as they got reality-feedback from their efforts. On the other hand they were repeatedly confronted with absurdities: the absurdity of the conventional limitations of their role, the absurdity that men controlled the resources women needed to do their work, and the absurdity that these same men held a definition of women which implied that women could not possibly understand the issues they were dealing with.

In the end, women found that task-oriented cooperative relationships with men in social welfare work could not be carried out as long as women and men were not equal partners in political decision-making. The detour which women took on behalf of women's suffrage was in the context of overcoming obstacles to work to be done. (...) The consciousness-raising came as a consequence of the violence of the reactions of the men to the very pragmatic course the women chose. Neither was there any grand theory of history involved, only a simple conviction that the rights of man were also the rights of woman."²³

These middle-class feminists were not the only ones to place the cause of women in the public sphere. Women workers also formed women's movements, related either to revolutions, the demands of women workers, or socialist groups throughout the 19th Century in Russia, France, England and the United States. Their action and thought are less well-known, for most of these groups were repressed, their writings kept concealed and their newspapers undermined.²⁴ But the authorities used every opportunity, from the time the very first demands were made, to pit the middle class against the revolutionaries.

Analysing these movements as a whole is a very complex undertaking. For feminists, revolutionaries, workers, students (universities were opened to women in the mid-19th Century) were parts of a broader whole encompassing philanthropists, women's religious congregations, reformists, missionary societies.²⁵

It became abundantly clear that all of the women's associations that emerged in the 19th Century were born of the desire and the need of middle-class women to work concretely to change society. It was not a desire on the part of those continually concerned about feeding themselves. The observation that the middle class is the driving force of social change is as valid for women as it is for men.

By the late 19th Century, the words **feminism** and **feminist** had become a part of the language. But the term **feminism** was extremely ambiguous, meaning at once femininity and the demand for women's rights.²⁶ The very evolution of **feminism**, moreover, was proof of this ambiguity.

For the feminism of **social commitment** had given rise to a dual analysis; the feminism of **equality** between men and women, and the feminism of the **difference** between the two. In the name of **equality** between the sexes, women demanded greater civil rights for wives, the right to a higher education, the right to vote, the right to practise a profession, the right to share various powers. The resort to codes, to law, to constitutions was a basic reflex for establishing the legitimacy of these feminist demands. This attitude is easily explained: for centuries, women had interiorized the definitions imposed by male philosophers and legislators. They could only refer to them to affirm: We are persons, citizens the same as men.²⁷

Furthermore, their initial demands: legal rights for married women, the right to a higher education, the right to practise professions and, above all, the right to vote, could be situated within the great trend towards access to democracy observed in the western world. Feminism was thus seen as an instance of a collective desire for equality which fits perfectly within the advance of democracies. It fell within that current referred to by Elizabeth Sarah as "malestream history".²⁸

But at the same time, many women in the late 19th Century were demanding the same rights in the name of their very femaleness, and therefore their **difference**. Because they were mothers, they hoped that their active participation in politics and society would change the world. This interpretation of feminism is particularly valid for what was occurring in Canada between 1880 and 1920. As illustrated by the articles collected by Linda Kealey in A not unreasonable claim,²⁹ the feminism which characterized Canadian associations may be described as **maternal feminism**. As Kealey

explains, it "refers to the conviction that woman's special role as mother gives her the duty and the right to participate in the public sphere. It is not her position as wife that qualifies her for the task of reform, but the special nurturing qualities which are common to all women, married or not."³⁰

The ambiguous nature of feminism at this point in history indicates a certain rupture in the evolution of this social movement. The radicalism of the initial demands gave way to a respectable progressiveness. This is illustrated by another phenomenon. While the criticisms of marriage were at the centre of the first feminist analyses, there was a movement in the late 19th Century towards a specific line of reasoning about sexuality. The moral crusade, the fight against prostitution, child welfare, exposure of the sexual brutality of men and even tacit condemnation of contraception³¹ were some of the aims of women during this period, and reflect particularly well the definition of **maternal feminism**. First seen as indications of the Puritanism and conservatism of the women of that time, they are now being given quite another interpretation. It is suggested rather that this issue be regarded as a point of confrontation between the sexes, terrain where the domination of men and the subordination of women might be further reinforced and maintained or, on the contrary, fundamentally altered.³² The fact remains that, on the whole, the feminism of the period 1880-1920 today strikes us as very tame.

It was in 1877 that the first feminist association in Canada, the Women's Literary Society, was founded by Emily Stowe in Toronto. Dedicated to achieving women's suffrage, this association also sought women's right to education and to practise professions. In 1893, the various women's associations (none described itself as **feminist**) formed a federation known as

the National Council of Women of Canada. Through its main chapters this organization was to become the vehicle for women's demands. As in other countries, the aims soon centred on winning the right to vote.³³

The Quebec women who were active in this association eventually created their own group, the Fédération Nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste, at the instigation of Marie Gérin-Lajoie. She drew her inspiration directly from the Christian feminism popularized in France around the same time, a movement similar to maternal feminism.³⁴ It would take too long to mention all of the actions and feats of the first feminists in Canada and Quebec. Their militancy was not very aggressive, unlike the model of Britain's suffragettes. Canada's suffragettes signed petitions, set up mock parliaments, sent postcards, attended conferences. Being basically women of the elite, there were never very many of them. It is estimated there were 10,000 sympathizers in 1914 whose leaders, moreover, had had the benefit of a first-rate education by the standards of the time.³⁵ After the failure of a national campaign for the right to vote in 1913, the movement organized itself more on a provincial basis. The western provinces were the first to grant women the right to vote in 1916, after a number of incidents which made Nellie McClung Canada's best-known feminist. British Columbia and Ontario followed suit in 1917.

The Canadian Government, after granting the right to vote in 1917 to the mothers and spouses of men in the military (to the horror of feminists), extended this right to all women in 1918. The remaining Canadian provinces soon did likewise,³⁶ with the exception of Quebec. It was at this time that Quebec feminists were rallying behind Thérèse Casgrain in the Ligue des Droits

de la femme (1929) and Idola Saint-Jean in the Alliance canadienne pour le vote des femmes au Québec (1927) for a long struggle which was to continue until 1940.³⁷ Quebec women were also to obtain, in 1929, a Commission d'enquête sur les Droits de la femme, the Dorion Commission, which was to improve somewhat the rights of separated women while upholding an ultra-conservative view of marriage and the family.³⁸

During this time, some feminists from Alberta, led by Emily Murphy, initiated the famous "person case" which, after an extended legal battle, was to obtain from the London Privy Council, in 1929, the ruling that "women are persons", according to the British North America Act.³⁹

Canadian and Quebec feminists far from limited themselves to the question of women's suffrage. Among other causes, they participated in pacifist movements,⁴⁰ trade-union movements⁴¹ and the development of higher learning.⁴² But the collective memory has retained primarily this aspect of their struggles which stirred such ridiculous reactions on the part of the authorities, particularly in Quebec.

Throughout the western world, the first feminist movement underwent, if not a fading away, then at least a dramatic slowdown after 1925. At the turn of the century, the concept of the new woman had led to considerable unrest. A generation later, the fears had been laid to rest: The new woman was nothing more than a Utopian ideal.⁴³

This conservative withdrawal, hastened by the confusion of the economic crisis of the 1930s and World War II, was to divest the concept of feminism of

its claim-making element. This withdrawal was particularly apparent in the United States where feminism had won some victories, as well as in Canada. "After the Second World War, in most countries, men and women were unanimous in regarding marriage and the family as the safest refuge from all of the problems. Inflation was high and the memories of the Depression were still very much alive. The experts argued that the labour market could not absorb the war veterans while keeping the female labour force active. The desire to return to normal life helped to maintain a particularly conservative social climate. Feminist claims became as outdated as the suffragettes. The proportion of girls in postsecondary institutions began to decline. The average age of girls upon marriage dropped to 19 years, the average number of children per family began to rise, and families, by the millions, moved to the suburbs. A veritable concerted movement of the political, economic and social powers tried to persuade women that their happiness lay in the role of queen of the household. *The Feminine Mystique* surged throughout all America."⁴⁴

Alice Rossi has tried to explain the decline of feminism during this period; she feels that the *feminine mystique* had quite an impact because it was contemporary with two other phenomena.⁴⁵ Formally, women had obtained some degree of equality. But it is easier to effect legislative changes than to change social customs, attitudes and mentalities. The difficulty of attempting to change the social fabric interrupted the feminist movement. Furthermore, feminism had historically been strong when joined with other reformist movements: anti-slavery, the temperance movement, social reform, and so on. Following the Second World War, there was a decline in political radicalism, an unprecedented economic boom which led to the affluent society and a very distinct rise of social conservatism. Together, they stemmed the momentum of the women's movements of the early part of the century.

Significant structural changes were nevertheless taking place in the western world. They were accompanied by irreversible changes in attitude. Changes initiated a hundred years earlier were eventually to alter broad areas of women's lives. Access to effective contraception, changes in education, the need for and acceptance of paid employment for women, the opening of new positions in new bureaucracies, the participation of women in the media, the decline in number of religious vocations especially in Quebec, the involvement of women in political, social and cultural causes--these were all factors which helped break down the traditional structures. If there was one movement which mobilized women at this time, it was The Voice of Women.⁴⁶ In the early 1960s, many women felt that feminism was a thing of the past. For, without organized feminist movements, women were under the illusion that they had achieved equality.

Provided they fulfilled their roles of wife and mother, women could play the role of their choice in society. The emergence of a new feminism resulted from this "provided they...", from the limits imposed on women's choice and from the conditions society continued to impose on the **so-called natural role** of women. Active women then realized that they were expected to be superwomen. They became aware that society provided no service to help them in their dual role. They met with a double standard with respect to the expectations and capabilities of men and women. They identified the hidden inequalities of the social order.

Firstly, reformist feminism resurfaced in the early 1960s. The Fédération des femmes du Québec and the AFEAS were founded in Quebec in 1966, and a new Canadian organization, the Committee for the Equality of Women in

Canada, was established. All of these associations sought a federal inquiry into the status of women. "The climate was entirely favourable. The Canadian economy was booming. In Cabinet, Judy LaMarsh, the only female minister, pestered her colleagues to study, once and for all, the status of women. In the leading Western nations, studies and surveys on this very subject were being completed or undertaken. The minority Liberal government had to attribute greater importance to the fundamental rights of individuals because of the presence of the N.D.P. deputation which ensured its majority in the House. International peace movements, opposition to the Vietnam War and debate on racial segregation focussed attention on human rights, providing a valuable theoretic context within which to situate the issue of the status of women. The demand for a commission of inquiry came at just the right time. But the government did not give in right away to this demand. In an interview, Laura Sabia called for a women's march on Ottawa, and the next day a Toronto newspaper ran the headline: "Three Million Women to March on Ottawa". This scoop doubtless hastened the decision. In February 1967, the Government of Canada set up a Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada. This was to be of considerable significance for women. Their response was to shatter all expectations: in less than two years, the status of women had become the foremost social issue"⁴⁷ (translation).

But soon, many other feminisms formed around this reformist nucleus: Marxists, whose feminism challenged the social order; radicals, whose feminism challenged male domination; feminism which exalted femaleness; the feminism of androgyny, a trend which advocates a redefinition of cultural roles.

This new feminism grew out of the experience of thousands of women who had been active in various protest groups in the late 1960s: nationalist movements, student movements, pacifist movements, integrationist movements, socialist movements, and so on. Their experience showed that they were not full-fledged members in these various organizations. They belonged, but only on condition they confined themselves to menial tasks: typing, preparing coffee, licking envelopes, photocopying, and so on, or to dispensing sexual favours. There was objection to their desire to play the same role, in action and thought, as men. The same phenomenon was occurring in Paris, New York, Montreal, San Francisco, Toronto, Vancouver, Berlin. The movement for social change had revealed to women activists their own oppression. Women were excluded from political decision-making. Once they realized this, the very term **feminism** took on new meaning. Virtually worldwide, the Women's Liberation Movement, or Women's Lib, or the M.L.F. in France, emerged.⁴⁸

The traditional definition of feminism: "the principle that women should have political, economic, and social rights equal of those of men", no longer applied to the new movements described as feminist, for they set as a precondition either the struggle of the social classes or the end of the male oppression of women and, consequently, challenged power as it was traditionally exercised. Current feminism, which might be described as essential, denounces a **cultural** concept of femaleness which is portrayed as **natural**. Its militancy therefore bears an existential relation to the root **femin--** and no longer simply a qualitative relation. Moreover, in their desire to distinguish themselves from men's movements, some opted to use the expression **women's movement** rather than **feminism**. For, since 1969, there have been many ways of being a feminist.

The Women's Movement Today

One thing is certain; the present debate surrounding the status of women is distinctly different from the feminist analyses of the 19th Century. Organized feminist groups still exist, but what characterizes current feminism is its polarization of specific objectives, which I place under the following four headings: **the body, employment, a voice and power.** It should also be pointed out that the motivations and reasonings of each of these differ and at times cover a range of very distinct positions on each issue. Let us examine this further.

The Body

Some of the major feminist issues fall under this heading: contraception, abortion, pornography, battered wives, rape, control of one's own health, feminist intervention against sexism in therapy, self-defence techniques (wendo), support for pregnant women and single mothers, lesbianism.⁴⁹ This list alone speaks volumes: it condenses the most intense, most emotional, most radical and least neutral issues. Underlying each is the control that men have traditionally had over women's bodies. The weakening of this control by women themselves seems to challenge the ontological identity of men, so much so that debate is heated. It is known that the debate surrounding abortion has polarized the new feminism, just as the debate surrounding the right to vote polarized the original feminism.⁵⁰

And women have not limited themselves to making demands. They have established places where women can find support and solidarity: homes for the

victims of sexual assault; homes for battered women and their children; courses in self-defence; concertation for the struggle for contraception and abortion; health centres. Funded by grants, they attempt to provide the extensive services made necessary as a result of women's awareness. Not all groups use the same approach. Some are content to be protectionist. Others see themselves more as **emancipationists** and call on women to discover their rights, to ensure their financial and psychological independence, and even to assume responsibility for their own claims.

Basically, women appear to have greater autonomy with respect to their bodies, a reality that men, as a group, do not seem to accept. The former law of the **double standard** with respect to adultery is no longer, but in fact a new **double standard** is thriving more than ever. How does one reverse a thousand-year-old prejudice? Women now know that their status as **persons** has been achieved not only through a body of laws, but also through their control of their bodies. They have difficulty understanding how procreation can still be associated with sexuality when this connection traditionally has only been made where women are concerned.

However, it must not be thought that feminist gains have resolved the problems, for women experience bodily (and not at the level of principles) certain consequences of the legitimate expression of their sexuality. Fear is at the centre of this suffering: fear on the part of women and men and, above all, the total lack of any real dialogue between the two.

Undeniably, the novelty of this debate lies in its public nature. An untold millenium is surfacing in the consciousness of women. Their problems,

they are discovering, are not essentially a question of justice or equality, but rather are related to the domination of one sex by another. This domination is two-fold: a double standard in sexual morals (the expected virginity of the wife and experience of the husband); hypocritical legislation which condemns contraception and abortion; sexual harassment; sexual prejudices and stereotypes that keep women in a state of economic inferiority on the labour market; the incredible line of reasoning which makes women the prisoners of two contradictory images: angel and demon; the reduction of women to the status of sexual objects; the mistrust of women's bodies; absurd definitions of female sexuality; unequal family responsibilities. What women understand is that men control them through domination of their bodies (and often of their children). They realize that the alleged sexual revolution is at their expense (the concept "you belong to only one" has been replaced by "you belong to all"). They are discovering the urgency of changing the relationships between men and women and are demanding some say in this redefining. They also realize that men in general are not very tolerant of their speaking out on all these issues. They increasingly have difficulty believing in the respect that men supposedly want to have for women. For, as Sarah Kaufman understood so well, "The respect due women is a way of ensuring their respect."⁵¹

Employment

Many of the issues raised by women also fall under this heading: sexual discrimination in jobs, salaries and promotions; access to all training programs; maternity leave and day-care; sexual harassment in the workplace; the status and rights of women who work with their husbands; the impact of new

technology and women's access to nontraditional occupations; work in the home and the financial support of women in the home. A number of agencies have status of women committees: trade-union federations, religious congregations, political parties, institutions, and so on. A host of professional associations have cropped up. Services are being established to help integrate women into the work force.⁵²

Is the overall assessment positive or negative? In theory, formal equality has been achieved and entrenched in most legislation. Agencies, such as the League of Human Rights, enable women to appeal against certain breaches in the application of laws. The principle of affirmative action is accepted and often implemented. There is an attempt right now to set up affirmative action programs in many governmental agencies. The most spectacular breakthrough in recent years has been that of women in business with their husbands who are finally gaining access to standard employee protection.

But it should nevertheless be noted how slowly changes in mentality and attitude come about. The vicious circle of women's education and female employment is far from broken. There are the **pink school** and **pink-collar workers**. There is a continued failure to validate more than one model of professional fulfilment: the male model. Technological changes risk being introduced at the expense of female workers. Society continues to penalize collectively women who decide to work and have children too. There is some resistance to adapting work schedules. Instituted religion seems to be the most reluctant to alter its laws. The establishment of day-care facilities perpetually calls into question the responsibility of mothers.

What women are understanding increasingly is that the organization of work has always helped place women in an inferior position, by gradually introducing mechanisms of differential socialization of the sexes which have imposed male and female social models. These models vary depending on the times and country, but have one common denominator: the inferiority of women. The result is an organization of work that conceals systemic discrimination against women. Officially, there is no discrimination. But in practice, it is practised insidiously since job requirements such as degrees, experience and seniority automatically eliminate women from candidates lists.

Essentially, what no one dares admit is that the present organization of work depends on the free, underpaid, nonunionized, part-time, volunteer, moonlight, household, and ghetto work of women, without which everything would collapse. And yet, their work effort does not seem to be regarded as fully legitimate. As for work in the home, it is not even a focus of resistance: men continue to think collectively that this is a **naturally** female occupation.

A Voice

It is in speaking out that women have become more visible in the past fifteen years. Homes for women, consciousness-raising groups, publishing houses, book stores, plays, shows, film, publications of all kinds, research groups, magazines and scientific journals, symposia, courses, programs of study, associations, training sessions, information sessions--the list goes on and on. A passing trend? No. The movement is irreversible and, for the time being, shows no signs of slowing.

There have been many achievements, and in many areas. Every viewpoint is expressed and every setting is affected. In the academic community, there are at least two bilingual multidisciplinary agencies: the CRIAW-ICREF (Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, since 1976) and the Canadian Women's Studies Association; these spawn conventions, courses, studies and publications. There are also a number of top-notch magazines in which researchers can publish the results of their work: Atlantis, Canadian Women's Studies/Les cahiers de la femme, Resources for Feminist Research/Documentation sur la recherche féministe.

Widely-circulated journals are also published. La vie en rose (1979), published in Montreal, is the leading feminist journal published in Quebec. Herizons enjoys the same standing among English-language readers. La Gazette des femmes (1979), published by the Quebec Council on the Status of Women, has a circulation of 45,000.

It is literary works that have received the widest acclaim. The writings of Canadian and Quebec women have earned a worldwide reputation. Certain works, such as Denise Boucher's Les fées ont soif, have generated passionate debate.⁵³

But all of these endeavours risk being put to distorted use. Women's concerns and feminism have become best-selling items. There is therefore considerable risk that the consumer society will neutralize the feminist analysis just as it neutralized the hippie wave of the 1970s. The male reaction is also typical. "Another book about women!" can often be heard. But women will never manage to write as much about themselves as men have

written about women. To cite just one example from among thousands: in Europe between 1400 and 1600, that is well before widespread use of the printing press, over 890 works were written on the subject of the education of women alone--works whose common denominator was an argument for the exclusion of women, because of their nature, from the practice of science and from access to various types of learning. Basically, the thought of women about women remains unheard, marginal. It is merely tolerated. It is barely articulated before there is a desire to cut it off.

Feminists have not limited themselves to speaking out. They have also challenged the use of language, since "Of all the weapons used to dominate women, the most subtle, the most pernicious is, without a doubt, language: the first form of overall socialization, it is also the oldest, and the form which acts the most subconsciously, and therefore the most effectively"⁵⁴ (translation). The dictionary, the official catalogue of definitions and word genders, patents the concepts that define us. With seeming objectivity, that of the neutral consignment of knowledge, language tools, the dictionary, grammar, justify the linguistic frameworks of the male domination of women.⁵⁵

Therefore, for a number of years, women have denounced this situation and countered with new verbal practices with far-reaching effects.

Is this, as some would have us think, a petty whim? On the contrary; the protest and the new language practices have thrown the changes society is undergoing into high relief. Every time the feminine form is used, it is being stated: women can do it; our culture wrongly imposes male models on us. Every time a text is written using feminine forms, the men who read it are

made to feel excluded, a feeling so familiar to women. Every time a text uses both the feminine and masculine forms, men and women can feel they are addressed on an individual basis, and no longer on the basis of sex as is the case with all writing using the masculine form. God The Father and Mother subverts the relationship with the divine.

Finally, women have realized that, in general, the written works that fill our libraries are the product of men. The concepts, theories, explanations—in a word, science, is a sexist line of reasoning. Therefore, feminist researchers are right now challenging scientific discourse in its sexist elements.⁵⁶

Power

One of the consequences of women speaking out has been to challenge power in all its forms. In addition to ~~conquests~~ of power, however, the true nature of this analysis has been to affirm that "The personal is political", rendering the cultural division between the private and public domains archaic.⁵⁷

Consequently, the most important gain has been an ongoing debate about a separate, subversive power, another power. Since it has focussed on power and no longer exclusively on rights, feminist thought has deepened and, consequently, is becoming more threatening.⁵⁸

It is now known that the equation of feminism with women's right to vote was dominant in the action of early feminists and, above all, in the way this

action has been interpreted. What one tends to forget, however, is that feminism was thus neutralized and identified with a single phase of the democratizing process, as was the extension of the right to vote to workers, national minorities, Blacks, and so on.

What women now realize is that once acquired, this right to vote had none of the expected impact with respect to social change and the exercise of power. The most obvious indication of this has been the slowness with which women have acceded to the seats of power. The other indication is the slowness with which women's demands are actually heeded. What does this mean?

Of course, it is in this regard that change seems, on the face of it, to be most evident. There are women mayors, members of Parliament, ministers, presidents of labour unions and corporations, chairpersons of boards of directors. Men, moreover, are shortsighted. It takes only two or three female members of Parliament for them to assert melancholically: "Since women dominate politics...". As for women, they wonder whether the political authorities are not using a few women just to show their good intentions. Are women tolerated in positions of power only when the real power has been transferred elsewhere? This question is being asked with increasing frequency.

But above all, women as a group are turning away from institutional politics, thereby delaying the feminization of the political authorities. Women feel alienated from current political thinking and clearly see that their priorities rarely coincide with those of government. The best example of this is the fate of the recommendations contained in the Bird Report. Ten

years after its submission, 43 recommendations had been implemented, 53 were slated for implementation and 24 were still awaiting implementation.⁵⁹ Also, a number of feminists deplore what they refer to as **institutional feminism** which, in their view, demobilizes women in general.⁶⁰

Feminists are therefore now pursuing two apparently contradictory routes to attaining power. First, women have gained access to certain seats of power. The sole fortress that eludes them is the Catholic Church. This route towards power is historically descended from the feminism of equality.

But other feminists are proposing new thought about the relationship of women to power. They denounce the exclusively male models that continue to be offered for the traditional avenues to power. They point out the extent to which the viewpoints of women are never heard. They denounce the other areas where power is exercised by men collectively: the family, male-female relationships with respect to sexuality, the abortion issue, language, the press, medicine, legislation, and so on. They establish a connection between this power and formal political power. They attempt to identify, in theory and in practice, a nonsexist practice of politics. They try, basically, to be at once within and outside the system.

Critical Analysis of Women's Movements

The lengthy description above illustrates that it is difficult to find one's way. The feminist movement is not unambiguous and every trend has its place in the present context. This plurality may be regarded as a sign of its vitality.

It is more than time to reject the former distinction between the right feminism and the wrong feminism; between radical feminists and moderate feminists. We must also guard against the new dichotomy which has just emerged: yes to feminism and no to feminists; and against newspapers and magazines that publish interviews with young women who believe in the victories of feminism but refuse to describe themselves as feminists; and against analyses denouncing these "feminists who take it upon themselves to speak on behalf of all women and distort the cause of women for political ends"⁶¹ (translation). In Montreal, in the fall of 1985, an international conference on La situation des filles (the status of young women) added to the climate of pessimism. There was talk, among other things, of the cost of feminism. But this had nothing to do with the social costs represented by an eventual change in society. Rather, it analysed the difficulties encountered by the woman attempting to reconcile her feminist commitment with having a career and a family. This analysis is, to some extent, consistent with these Superwomen Anonymous associations which are apparently springing up in the United States.

It extends further. For two or three years, anti-feminist movements, originating in the U.S., have been emerging. The largest is R.E.A.L. Women (R.E.A.L. stands for Realistic, Equal, Active for Life). This group pursues a number of goals: it is anti-abortion and anti-contraception, against equal pay for work of equal value, against universal day-care, against affirmative action programs, against the allocation of federal funds to the status of women. As may be noted, the new right does not beat about the bush. In the summer of 1984, a campaign of letters and telegrams resulted in millions of messages being sent to the federal ministers. In fact, it would appear that

R.E.A.L. Women is receiving significant financial assistance to neutralize and offset all of the gains made by feminism. It claims a membership of 20,000, but refuses to release the names of its backers and its membership list. It is worth mentioning in passing that R.E.A.L. Women has no interest in issues related to violence against women. Other movements, officially concerned with defending the family, also blame feminists for all of society's ills.⁶²

The feminist analysis is disturbing. But one thing must be recognized: anti-feminism is scarcely more reassuring. If women are reluctant to describe themselves as feminists, it is perhaps because they are afraid to do so.

Women have been given a reputation for kindness. They are supposed to be kind by nature. Obviously, this is completely inaccurate. Also, today as in the past, feminists are perceived as crazy, hysterical. This is also completely inaccurate. Once women understand they are being torn between two falsehoods--1) that women are kind; 2) that feminists are crazy--the choice will be an easier one to make.

Women are also expected to demonstrate unanimity, orthodoxy, solidarity. Why? (As far as I know, men have never achieved any of these qualities.) The important thing here is to remember, once again, that the feminist movement does not involve a single reality, but rather movements that diverge considerably with respect to their theoretical framework, their aims, their ideology and their approaches. At present, the term **feminism** arouses fear. And this is normal. A century ago, the term **liberalism** was the spectre in religious circles. Today, liberalism is more an old game and its supporters are seen as right-wing. To my mind, feminism will have become innocuous when it no longer arouses fear.

There are three broad trends that may be distinguished in the range of feminisms.⁶³ They may be roughly summarized as follows: women want to be seen as being the same as men; they see themselves as in opposition to men; they want men and women to be equal, but based on different models.

The first group is made up of feminists whose basis is the analysis of equality, a characteristic of the feminism in the mid-19th Century. It is a position which does not challenge the established social order, limits itself to denouncing the instances of subordination and attempts to eliminate them using the traditional tools of political pressure. "Equality is understood from the standpoint of integrality, the integrality of rights, first of all, the surest means of cutting short all possible quibbling"⁶⁴ (translation). "The right to work, the right to education, the right to economic independence, the right to availability, defined as freedom from unwanted pregnancy and full-time motherhood"⁶⁵ (translation). Its preferred weapon is the denunciation of myths, notably those concerning women's work: the role of the woman in the home, female absenteeism, women's lack of motivation, and so on. "The aim of the analysis on which egalitarian feminist ideology is based is therefore to awaken the critical mind of women as to the present, concrete reality, to stimulate their questioning about assertions that have hitherto gone unchallenged. Women have interiorized myths; the evil must be exorcised"⁶⁶ (translation).

The women's movements that appeared in the late 1960s offered another, far more radical analysis which challenges the traditional exercise of power. It focussed on protest against society, the family, sexuality, capitalism and led to the most succinct stands, those that were of such concern to men. It

is virtually impossible to summarize the positions of these groups of feminists for they themselves may be broken down into a number of trends. The movements that emerged from the left (socialism, Marxism) generally related the liberation of women to the global transformation of the social and economic order. Others, rightly disappointed in this analysis, made the analysis of male power and its dispute the basis of their demands. All leftist feminist groups often had, and continue to have, stormy relations with the various socialist movements, whether with respect to theory, analysis, strategy or practice. Finally, political lesbianism proposed sexual orientation as the only coherent practice for radical feminists.

"A simplistic view of radical feminism consists in summarizing it as follows: the refusal of love, the rejection of culture, the hatred of men and separatism. The media have given remarkable coverage to a literal interpretation of these stands. The effect has, we think, been positive in that it has shaken somewhat the tranquility and self-righteousness of men and the right. It is to radical feminists that feminism owes its autonomous existence, its escape from the watchfulness of socialism and the achievement of its universal scope"⁶⁷ (translation).

Within the sphere of radical feminism there also developed an exaltation of femaleness that fuelled most of these trends.

Finally, a number of individuals, men and women, based their analysis on the criticism of cultural roles, male or female, and advocated the pluralism that must emerge from current changes. This feminism has been described as androgynous. These individuals want men and women to be equal in relation to each other but based on models that have yet to be devised and that will be

determined by men and women together. In this analysis, there is no complementarity: simply, on the horizon, a new society.

"The feminist theory of androgyny (...) sets forth the primacy of the human being and affirms the equality of the sexes in reciprocity, seeing each at this stage of our evolution as the origin of the repressions of the other"⁶⁸ (translation). The androgynous perspective can be recognized in a number of feminist issues: the analysis of sex stereotypes and feminist intervention in therapy are two prime examples. The thinking of feminist theologians, notably after Mary Daly,⁶⁹ is a significant contribution to this wave of thought. Furthermore, this analysis also contains social components. A theory has even been advanced about the theme of androgynous political life. This life would be the fruit of the equal cooperation of men and women and would be open, notably, to ecological, socialist and pacifist concerns. A number of theorists are of the view that this wave of thought is an avenue of reconciliation between the other two trends. This is the opinion, notably, of Ginette Castro, who made a detailed analysis of American feminism. In contrast, it might be objected that, because it relies on a process of conversion, it has more to do with a Utopia than with a real movement of social protest.

But these difficult distinctions remain primarily theoretical. Each trend influences the others with respect to strategies, aims, lines of reasoning, making it all the more difficult to understand the whole. This is because life conforms poorly to theoretic distinctions... The following table, taken from the work by G.G. Yates entitled What Women Want, is an interesting analytical tool for seeing the main trends in relation to each other.

Comparison of the Ideologies of the Women's Movements

Characteristic	Feminist ideology	Women's liberationist ideology	Androgynous ideology
Ordering principle	Women-equal-to-men	Women-over-against-men or separate-from-men	Women-and-men-equal-to-each other
Source of standard	Established by men, adopted by women	Arrived at by women	Arrived at by men and women together
Analysis of problem	Women subordinate of secondary to men	Women as sex objects, property, laborers	Loss of legitimacy of traditional male/female roles
Identification of enemy	Socioeconomic attitudes and institutions	Men, other women, capitalism, the family	Cultural value orientations, institutional structures
Techniques for change	Court cases, electoral process, information dissemination, voluntary groups	Consciousness-raising, separation from men for female psychic support, awareness and exercise of woman power	Educational process, voluntary groups, information dissemination
Primary focus for change	Political	Social	Cultural
Strategy	Pressure	Conflict	Conversion
Goals	Integration (collapse of diversity into unity)	Segregation (diversity at expense of unity)	Pluralism (diversity within unity)

SOURCE: What Women Want: The Ideas of the Movement, Gayle Graham Yates, Harvard University Press, 1975.

It is also noted that each of the issues that has mobilized feminists has been broached according to the various viewpoints of the groups. The issues of work in the home, abortion and pornography are highly representative. Paid work in the home is seen as a patriarchal alienation or as the beginning of economic independence. The liberalization of abortion is seen as a means of correcting the inequality of access to abortion, as a means of protecting women from the tragic consequences of back-room abortions, or as a means of freeing women from sexual oppression. But the best example is pornography. Pornography is "the ideology of a culture which promotes and legitimizes rape, assault and other violent crimes against women"⁷⁰ (translation). It is the eroticization of violence. It is involved in the escalation of the contempt for women that nothing, it seems, can curb. It is, according to more and more women, the ideological basis of the oppression of women. But pornography has found powerful allies: the champions of freedom of expression and the press, the opponents of Puritanism, the official raters and scholars who distinguish between **soft core**, **hard core** and **snuff**. There are inevitably feminists in both camps.

There are, therefore, many types of feminists. As usual, the mass media showcase the most sensational and radical positions and manifestations. This compels women mobilized by a feminist cause of concern to them, to state "I am not a feminist, but...".

In the current panorama of women's movements, a number of factors are instrumental in adding to the confusion. The first concerns the exercise of authority. A number of feminists challenge the very concept of authority and hierarchic structure. Both these realities, some women feel, are male

realities that have led to nothing but conflict and war. A great many women's movements therefore have no structural organization, no leader and, at times, function anonymously. These groups appear and disappear with surprising speed. Any attempt at a profile would result in a document that was out-of-date even before its completion. These groups with no apparent structure are referred to as autonomous women's groups because they are not associated with any party, or any particular cause. These autonomous groups often originate with trade unions or political parties and are formed when the women realize that women's priorities will never become the priorities of trade unions or political parties. Thus, a number of feminist groups often lack the usual bureaucratic and organizational structures, and this disrupts the male models.

Another aspect of women's movements is that they usually form around a very concrete objective. The list of these objectives was presented in the second part of this paper, objectives which take the form of centres, homes, services, journals, groups that have sprouted up pretty well everywhere. Most can only run on very meagre grants and have no permanent offices. Part of their energy goes into the preparation and justification of grant applications. Some survive only a few years, or even just a few months. Essentially, it is not that women's groups are temporary, but that government keeps them temporary.

A third reality should be pointed out. There exists parallel to these groups in Canada, as we have seen, a large national feminist federation, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, which brings together several hundred diverse groups including some thirty national associations. There are also federations of women's groups in most provinces. In Quebec,

there is the Fédération des femmes du Québec, founded in 1966. Under pressure from these large organizations, which gave rise to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada (Bird Commission, 1968-71), governments were obliged to set up official structures to give women a political platform for their demands. The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women was established in Ottawa in 1973. Provincial councils also exist in almost every province. The Quebec council has been in existence since 1973. Some would like to see these councils embrace all feminism. But nothing of the sort. Such feminism is generally described as institutional. In fact, the action of these councils is backed by the governments that set them up. It is now common to hear the most committed feminists protest against the action of the councils and government, accused of taking over the demands of women, neutralizing them and putting them at the bottom of the list of government priorities. They therefore maintain a parallel system of demands (demonstrations, provocative writings, declarations), giving the public, with the powerful complicity of the media, the impression that feminists are never satisfied. Let us listen to one. "This take-over by the State has made it possible for demands to be taken directly to the State; this largely explains their legal aspect and the stature the Council on the Status of Women (a para-governmental agency) has managed to enjoy among women. (...) Moreover, because the mandate of the CSW was to translate the demands of women into terms compatible with the reasoning of the State, it occupied a position inconsistent with its true impact on the women's movement. (...) This explains why the women's movement in Quebec in the late 1970s seems to have been highly institutionalized. And this was so because a number of groups had turned to the CSW to advance women's issues institutionally, while others never managed to free themselves from the State view of modernization as developed since the quiet revolution"⁷¹ (translation).

Most women are undecided about, I would even say torn between, the many trends, for it has become unthinkable to be a woman and deny the fundamental questioning posed by the feminist analysis. It may be that there is nothing more troubling than the feminist analysis. It is an essentially hard perspective: nothing it touches is left intact—not the family, not work, not social organization, not the relationships between the sexes, not power. We can cover our eyes, but we cannot pretend it is over. We can also understand the fear of some: the unknown is at our door. The road to be travelled is so long we feel we will never reach the end; everything must change. Our ideas about structures, institutions, norms are so carved in stone that we are unable to imagine, to invent a new society. And our male interlocutors personally feel they are the target, although the protests are not directed against individuals but rather against the institutions, structures, norms and values that shape the oppression of women as a group. Or they reject or ridicule feminism "without seeing how much their rejection or their decision is an escape that belies their fear of discovering they have no other identity other than sexism"⁷² (translation). Could this be because, consciously and deliberately, the feminist approach goes to the very heart of the problem of the sexes and, in questioning the identity of every man and woman, confronts individuals and collectivities with formidable questions?

"While the first wave of feminism (...) abruptly ended following an ideological vacuum, the second wave of this same feminism fairly threatens to abruptly end following an excessive ideology!"⁷³ (translation). Faced with this observation, there are those who hope for a third wave somewhere midway

between the egalitarian wave of collaboration and the radical wave of opposition, for a synthesis of all the analyses that have been proposed. It is my feeling, however, that the vitality of feminism will always be measured by the diversity of its trends of thought, the ability of its activists to detect the disguises of its opponents, and the awareness of all women of their history and their solidarity.

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9. See numerous articles collected in Bridenthal and Koonz, Becoming Visible. Women in European History, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977.
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22. C. Hymowitz and M. Weissman, op. cit., p. 86s.
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25. Elise Boulding, op. cit., p. 617-688. The phenomenon described by Boulding with respect to female religious congregations is particularly striking in Quebec. See Micheline Dumont, "Vocation religieuse et condition féminine" in Marie Lavigne and Yolande Pinard, Travailleuses et féministes. Les femmes dans la société québécoise, Montréal, Boréal-Express, 1983, p. 271-292.
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32. In this regard, see the second section of the work Reassessments of "First-Wave" Feminism, "The Politics of Motherhood and Sexuality", p. 599-646. See also: Geneviève Fraisse, "Les bavardes: Féminisme et moralisme", in L'Histoire sans qualité, Paris, Galilée, 1979, p. 187-218.
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