

**Tom Richardson**

**BECOMING A MAN**

At this moment there is no coherence in my thoughts though I am sure what I want. I want an article for 'Self and Society' to be academically competent as well as deeply felt.

For me, male, forty-three years old in 1980, becoming a man involves a process of development, of growth, and a equal movement towards un-manning. The growth is towards a simple, warm man-person with differences from woman-person which are not, cannot, be clear to me, but which are not like the sex-typed polarities which are so obtrusive now. That is where the dismantling fits in.

Part of the process of relearning what it is to be a man, involves my relationships with other men. I have had few conversations with men, of the kind I am prepared to have with women. I have no intimate relationship with a man. I understood and acted with real urgency on my need for this intimacy only after three intense days of a Gestalt Workshop some weeks ago. The brothers I talked with then are in another town and among my immediate friends I have not yet made those necessary, intimate links.

(I stopped writing three hours ago to go shopping and prepare our midday meal. Liz (10 yrs) and Dan (8 yrs) came home from school. After anxiously glancing at back-numbers of 'Self and Society' while I drank a cup of tea, I had to go out again to get some bread and a towel rail for Liz to replace the one she snapped on Sunday. Now I'm starting again, having thought about the 'nub' of this piece as I walked back from Woolco.)

This article is about the difficulty of liberating myself from a male-ness which 'copes': freeing myself to be a man who shares his feelings with his friends. Right, what is so hard?

A few years ago I felt really excited and moved by reading Erica Jong's 'Fear of Flying' and Kate Millett's 'Flying'. Those women writing of their experience with such sharp, 'masculine' humour as they struggled to express their artistic creativity (among other things) was really supportive. I was able to identify with their doubts and triumphs. And being an artist was an identifiable goal to have to go through that turmoil for. Because that is what this is really about. The creative turmoil in my life, other men's life, caused not just by women in books, but by real women. Yes, it was my wife and her friend L. and the sisters in the Women's Action Group and the wide movement of women to grasp liberation. 'No more shit from men!' That was the crucial stage. Their ultimatums faced me with this sort of insight:

One heavy part of the oppression which we all suffer in this competitive, authoritarian capitalism, is the power you men have over us women. It is oppressive for you because as long as you will the subservience of any woman, you collude with those who dominate you: and you certainly cannot have equal relationships with us.

(Break for a pee. I see dust in so many places. I should be Hoovering and damp-dusting because Liz gets terrible allergic nasal catarrh from house dust. Instead I'm writing this. My choice.)

I am thinking that we men are so dependent for our development upon the extent to which the women we are involved with are struggling for their own freedom. Which brings me back to men meeting their emotional needs with other men in intimacy, in affection, in dependence. The balance must be tilted so that women are not wrung dry by men in their (men's) 'weakness'. Men must 'believe in' men, believe in themselves just as I needed to believe in myself earlier, writing this.

From my own feelings of incompleteness, which I hide because 'men can cope', I move towards and stifle women, demanding that they fill the hole of desperation I feel at having to be so manly-strong. Met, in those women, by expected warmth, I meet also, unexpected coldness which pushes me to find another warmth. I move towards men to join hands in 'weakness', holding out the other hand for a new contact with women.

I feel I haven't got a lot of time to use that insight. My marriage relationship is not working well, nor have my working hours been satisfying enough.

I notice the whole emphasis of the discussion in this piece is personal, cramped within four domestic walls — no politics in a formal way at all. I find no way to integrate the struggles — for love and equality in bed, in housework; for love and equality in Brick Lane, in Soweto, in Kabul and Ho Chi Minh City. As an attempt to find an answer I share a quotation with you: it is from Marx's 'Theses on Feuerbach':

'The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice.'

I have become a man, we have all become persons — flawed as we are and with perfect potential, as we are — in a particular society within a global society, in this particular age, of capitalist decline and crisis. No therapy, no politics which fails to will and practise the utter transformation of the power and property relations of this society, can liberate any of us. I believe that, more, I *know* that becoming a man or a woman, as men and women can truly be, is *not possible in this society*. I want you to argue with and work with me until, from the ruins of this world, we or our grandchildren can become persons.

Tom Richardson  
June 18th 1980

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Maggy Sundborn

Esalen — indescribable with words:

- pervasiveness of the beauty of the touching, the feeling, the exploring, the stretching, the accepting, the contacting of myself and others.
- so hedonic that for the first week I kept saying to myself — 'I don't deserve this' and 'something must be wrong somewhere', anger too that it was so white, middleclass and in America — (I came to terms with these feelings later); but mainly a 'Picnic at Hanging Rock' feeling of timelessness and perfection derived from the constant pleasure of the senses by flowers, sea, hot baths, cool pool, massages, food, moon, trees, rocks, grass, whales, sea lions, stream, waterfall and snakes: experiencing groups and moving through the everchanging moment during yoga, Feldenkrais and T'ai Chi.
- the music: the resident group playing Santana; the bongo drum jam sessions on the deck; Pachelbel's Canon drifting through an open door inviting me into a workshop;