

Women's House

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Why is it that some of the most interesting social experimenters and their experiments gain no visibility in public space, especially if they are dealing with women's issues? Not only do they not get their due attention, but usually they fall into oblivion without having had the opportunity to provoke the discussions so direly desired. Except if some sufficiently committed and conscientious researcher makes her appearance on the scene and takes up the issue and records at least some of their ideas for future reference.

This is no new phenomenon, as we will convince ourselves reading about the following case, related with care by Virginia Woolf in "Three Guineas."¹ It concerns the father of this Barbara,² Benjamin Leigh Smith, who did not comply with the traded ways of paying allowances to children and was of the opinion that the same sum should be paid to daughters as to sons. This is how, when his daughter attained her majority in 1848, he gave her a sum unheard of in those times – three hundred pounds a year. She in turn was bold enough to invest the sum in something useful. She founded a "school that was open not only to different sexes and different classes, but to different creeds; Roman-Catholics, Jews and 'pupils from families of advanced free thought' were received in it." The result was a "most unusual school,' an outsiders' school." She did not stop at this, but even

¹ Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*, in: *A Room of One's Own / Three Guineas*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992, pp. 355-356.

² It is interesting to note that Virginia Woolf leaves Barbara with only her first name. She is referring to Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, one of the most famous feminist leaders and intellectuals of the 19th century. Cf. <<http://athena.english.vt.edu/~jmooney/3044bios-a-g/bodichon.html>> or <<http://www.girton.cam.ac.uk/about/history/bodichon.html>>.

dared challenge the English Law, publish a magazine for women's issues, of found the first girls' college in Cambridge.

Not only in this text, Woolf points out that one of the fundamental problems of women is their economic oppression, which throughout the centuries has led them to complete dependency and submission to the conditions of patriarchal society. It comes as no surprise that to this very moment we continue to be irritated by this fact: unfortunately women still are poorer than men. This is true not only of the so-called "Third World," but also of some of the socially and economically most developed countries in the world. Such as Switzerland for instance. In spite of the claim that a social revolution and evolution has taken place in Western societies following the movements of the sixties of last century, in spite of the enormous work indeed put into subverting power relations and mechanisms, in spite of the great achievements, if I continue digging, I come across a whole range of unresolved problems. This conflict even today provides the backdrop on which most women's initiatives, discussions and struggles are taking place.

Speaking of the financial side of human survival, I cannot but note the continuously and steeply rising concern about making a living, including in "developed countries." In your role as a user and client of the social state, that darn money quickly melts away for the sake of the rent, services gradually become more expensive, and pension and health funds absorb the rest, lightheartedly gambling with your money on the stock exchange. All that remains for you is the stress of reading in the newspaper comments on whether after twenty years you will get a pension or not.

If, having made this choice in life, you have to deal with all of this alone, with all of daily life, with raising one, two or more children, we're getting closer to the situation that has prompted these nine women with their twelve children to look for alternative ways to organize their lives, such that together they could better deal with social and everyday problems. While at the same time finding more free time for themselves, for their own personal development, and wanting, looking for, building a common place: the women's house. A community offering them and their

children a better quality of life in the midst of the hostility of their environment.

This is the only project of its type in Switzerland. The project has no followers, no mediatic advertising, no budget or fees paid out. It does not look for sponsors. There are no "professional development and sustainability plans." It has no professional management, office or accountant. In spite of this, the project has turned out to be sustainable over time. It continues to develop its own way, without becoming institutionalized or turning into a formal or commercial structure the like of most NGOs.³ Such is the fate of most informal organizations and groups of social activists who have started with the best intentions, regardless of the focus of their priorities, central goals and strategies. Whether they deal with women's issues, with protecting rare mountain plants, or with hungry children in a region sufficiently remote from their headquarters. Whether they are located in the East or the West, in the North or the South.

Nevertheless, non-infected islands of human self-initiative and women's solidarity can still be found. The project "Verein Goldregenweg",⁴ or "the project" for short, or the "women's house", has survived over the years due to the efforts and self-discipline of a group of "strong" women who apply a set of strict inner rules - complete equality and lots of work. Perhaps it also helped that all women in the community share one social identity, being "single-parent" families, regardless of their profession or personal interests. And if the main reasons that have brought them to the community are linked to the survival and raising of the children, the women in the project have succeeded not only in developing a common space, in sharing, showing solidarity

³ NGO: non-governmental organization.

⁴ The project carries the name of the street it is located at, Golden Chain Street. The "golden chain" is a poisonous bush (lat. *Laburnum anagyroides* or *Cytisus laburnum*; not to be confused with the Chinese golden rain tree, lat. *Koelreuteria paniculata*) with bright yellow flowers in hanging clusters. In German, its name coincides with the Golden Rain of the ancient Greek myth of Danae, which may give rise to allusions to the patriarchal norms and violence contained in the myth or other, more far-fetched interpretations. We are convinced that the well-intentioned bourgeois of the neighborhood have had in mind that very bush, so that any relation to Greek mythology is purely coincidental.

between themselves, but they have also learned to love each other.

Historically, women have always been placed by and in the discourse developed by men, in a situation of competition with others, “being the object of private ownership.” Consequently, if their struggles are to be effective, it was necessary to create a “place among themselves” – a place of personal and collective “consciousness-building.”⁵ The project “Verein Goldregenweg” succeeds based on its internal social construction and the way it interprets the personal and collective space of the house – a “place among themselves.” In the house, each of the women has her own apartment, a kind of autonomy of her personal space, and on the other hand the collective space, especially around the common apartment in which daily life in the community unfolds. This is where they cook, where they feed the children during the day. It’s also a space for playing, sharing, meeting, partying...

If I start out with some of the early feminist theorists, make my way through the feminist struggles and the entire range of

police. I cannot find the spirit of “traditional” communes of the sixties, or the squats of the eighties.

The shared experience allows “this experience to become politicized,”⁶ to contribute to the struggles. If it was not so, the project would become marginalized. Seen from this angle, the women of the “Women’s house” can be criticized for their lack of political activity and public visibility. If I compare to similar projects of twenty years ago, I find a historical link which is not completely accidental. It is not so much a question of ideology, but of the concept as such. I shall use as an example the women’s fraction of the SDS⁷ – the sixties movement that stands at the origin of Commune 1. Despite their countless points of criticism towards the men in the movement, the women see it as the most progressive at that moment, given that in their opinion besides it there is nobody else to work with. For the women of the SDS, it is essential to raise together broader social questions, to work on them while intervening in a political space within a broader social context that breaks out of the personal and private. In the sixties



political movements and activism, take into account the bitter experience of the generation of the 60ies with its attempt to build the social heaven it was imagining, and get to the theories and visions proposing a society without hierarchies, I might come to the conclusion that the project contains nothing radical – there are no squatted buildings, no protests, no problems with the

and eighties with their radical and expressive political gestures, it was unthinkable that a social project could be realized without public visibility, public debates and political demands.⁸

⁵ Luce Irigaray, *This sex which is not one*. Quoted from the Bulgarian edition, p. 140. Questions II, asked by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe during the preparation of the broadcast “Dialogues” of 1975.

⁶ Luce Irigaray, *op. cit.*

⁷ SDS: Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (Socialist German Students’ Association).

⁸ It seems important to me to provide the opportunity to confront the project with the political context in which the discussions and struggles of the women

On this background or historical foundation, the project “Verein Goldregenweg” is contradictory just like the political context in which it has evolved. The women in the Project have realized the necessity of creating a common space for themselves. They have managed to define their wishes. And their reluctance towards publicity may be explained by the lack of a politicized context. One can only regret the lack of shared experience, because the “Women’s House” can give a serious input and experience to other women on how they may take their life into their hands.

The recession and crisis of the nineties does not hit only the economic sphere, but also the social and political spheres. This includes a sizeable crisis of the individual or of personality, with the not-so-innovative idea of the lost identity in an ever more global world,⁹ regardless of whether we are wired geeks or marginalized social outsiders in the overall spectacle of money, petrol and muscles. Under this cover, we find an economy of power and war.¹⁰ At the same time, over the past decade we have been witnesses to the migration and massing of an unexpected number of people linked to the great political protests and movements. Nevertheless, the opportunism and pragmatism of the system, characteristic of the last years of the past century, but also of the present moment, superposed to our everyday egotism dictated by our own survival, forces all of us to remain merely some lonely people, frustrated from the lack of optimism and opportunities. Any attempt beyond the theoretical interpretations and utopian logic, as marginalized as it may be, which may point out some path towards toppling the current values, a step in the direction of a non-hierarchical society, gives rise to true hope and rouses curiosity.

of the SDS towards the end of the sixties developed. We publish in this volume excerpts from two texts: *Resolution for the 23rd Regular Conference of the Delegates of the SDS, November 1968, Hannover* and *Speech of the Action Council for the Liberation of Women, held by Helke Sanders at the 23rd Regular Conference of the Delegates of the SDS, September 1968 in Frankfurt.*

⁹ ... identity is always lost, exists always in crisis.

Ivaylo Ditchchev, *From affiliation to identity. Politics of the image* (in Bulgarian), Sofia 2002, p. 23. Ivaylo Ditchchev refers to Erik Erikson.

¹⁰ Term used by Luce Irigaray in “*This sex...*”, *op. cit.*

Viewed on a theoretical level, the Project provides the tools for deconstructing the concept of the home. The private home – sanctuary of the family, a small social formation which has found its concrete definition when it was created for the use of the modern state and industrialization. And which has bolstered up its “unalienable right” to exist by providing a vital pillar in the construction and smooth functioning of the institutions, as well as in the perpetuation of the mechanisms of control. Historically, the home presupposes property – private property. The home is the first form of property, and correspondingly of oppression. In the grammar of the home, women and children are the objects of the male subject.

The “Women’s House” as a social formation breaks out of the traditionally imposed scheme of the family home, in this world structured by the Law of the Father and the concepts defined by it. The project proposes the alternative of “collective motherhood,” an essential means for women in the community to deal not only with their everyday problems linked to the complicated combination of having to make their own living while at the same time raising and educating their children, but also finding time for themselves. “Collective motherhood” is an opportunity to work towards the social and moral development of the children in their education under the effect of the community. At the same time, there is no effort to “tip over the pedagogical relationship,” through which some sort of truth would be imposed, and which would lead to a marginalizing and seclusion of the children from their peers and from reality. “Collective motherhood” works as a fundamental unifying mechanism for the community, through the equitable daily distribution of responsibilities and work among the women.

What will become of the children from the project? What personalities will they have formed, in the context of this “social experiment”? To what extent will they be prepared to continue to take down taboos? And how will they deal in the future in their personal life with their role of “programmed rebels,” when, coming out of their “home”, concepts will be defined under the pressure of established social consensus. We ask this question without going into the theoretical and practical spheres of psychoanalysis or Oedipal system of Freudian theory with all

the research that followed in its step, including existing criticism. Our interest remains focused on “collective motherhood,” that social practice that was used in the sixties in some groups of activist women in order to manage to reconcile their wage-labor with their active participation in the struggles and their responsibilities as a parent.

In a bolder interpretation we can find how “collective motherhood,” with the opportunities it can provide, contributes to the ideas for an anti-Oedipal system that would come close to the theoretical ideas of the “fluid mechanics” or “flows.” Because if we reject fatherhood from a discussion, we should also try to deconstruct motherhood, itself defined by (and through) this same “sole existing” discourse and its language.¹¹

Coming from a context which lies partly outside the authoritarian discourse of the fathers, for the girls and boys growing up and being raised in and by the community, at least at first sight there is no possibility for everyday identification with the favored figure of the father and his power. Unfortunately of course, outside the house and “home” the irradiation by this entire phallic culture remains – in school, on the street, by friends, television, advertising.

“Phallocracy” is still solidly anchored within the traditionally prevalent model of family life, and the message reaching our children from all hip-hop videos, schoolbooks and billboards is clear: you really want to be part of this. In the average family, it’s as if a great part of the creative energy of the “couple”¹² goes into maintaining and perpetuating the power of the father.

These are some of the broader, long-term questions raised by the Project as a social experiment: How can we deal with that difficult undertaking that is the education of our sons, an education with which we do not serve the power interests within the existing discourse? What kind of personalities do we want to, are we able to and would we really foster in our sons, careful

¹¹ Jacques Derrida, lecture held in Sofia at the conference “*The Balkans and Europe. Deconstruction of the political*,” 16-18 November 2001.

¹² Here I use the designation “couple” in quotes in reference to feminist theory, which discusses the social influence in the construction of the married “twosome.” In other words, it takes more than two to make a “couple.”

not to repeat the model provided by the men in the existing economic and social system? Are we able to escape the pattern of privileging our sons with respect to our daughters? Can we give our daughters the tools not only to survive in a patriarchal world, but to find new ways of struggling and undermining?

I am reminded by the flow of these thoughts, of the answer of the Romanian artist Stela Lie, in an interview I made with her in a completely different context:

*It’s equally difficult for men and women to work in contemporary art in Romania. At the same time the men are lagging in their development. For instance, in my personal experience, they expect food on the table, and this food someone has to prepare it and put it on the table, and that is the woman. All this takes a lot of time, and that is time that could be put into our professional work. Yes, and here’s my husband! Meet my husband! He is an architect, he’s not stupid, a contemporary person, and in spite of it all he almost completely relies on me for homework. But all this is the women’s fault, with the way they’re educating their sons. For me it’s always easier to speak out of personal experience, and not from a feminist or gender theoretical point of view. But what I can permit myself to say, generalizing the question: Society is always patriarchal. So much for my answer to your second question, does it do?*¹³

What struck me most on the way was the insistent repetition of one and the same picture. Stopped cars and, next to them, on the very pavement, casually half-turned to the side, men relieving themselves with visible calm. Strikingly this turned in my mind to understanding, as we were drinking coffee in a little restaurant. I saw how a young mother took her boy to the very middle of the lawn in front, turned him around to face the path and slowly started unbuttoning his brand-new pants. Indeed, who better than a woman could educate patriarchal thinking in a man?

Milena Kirova, *Belgrade from inside*, in: *Kultura*, No. 25, 21 June 2002 (in Bulgarian) <http://www.online.bg/kultura/my_html/2233/belgrad.htm>

¹³ Dimitrina Sevova, *Interview with the Romanian artist Stela Lie*, for the project “*Exchanging Places*” <<http://xplaces.code-flow.net/stela-lie-en.html>>.





The interviews below were made by Dimitrina Sevova on 16 December 2002 in the common kitchen at Goldregenweg.



Interview with Mirjam

Mirjam, how did you get involved in the project, and what does it mean to you on a personal level?

For each woman in the house you could write an entire story. The reasons that have led them to this project are quite different. Most of us were looking for a new form for their life, a means of compensating for their problems stemming from their situation as single mothers, in order to be able to better look after their children and themselves. This question is especially sensitive for

those women with a single child, because in most cases it turns out that it grows up isolated and lonely. On the other hand, here in the project there are four children to three women, which makes it easier to deal with part of the multitude of our responsibilities as parents, as well as to find time for ourselves. In my concrete case, I didn't want my daughter Luschka to grow up alone. This is a problem for most families with only one child. That's how even before knowing about the project, I tried to find ways to compensate as far as possible for this situation my child was in. Led by this wish, some time ago I chose to live with a woman and her three children, from three different fathers. Then, this woman got married, which completely changed the situation for Luschka and me. We had to find a new place to move to, which had to fulfill my ideas with respect to raising my daughter. The project completely fulfills my criteria. Here it's ideal also for me, since I have an apartment of my own and a private life, and at the same time also the community.

What do you mean? You were saying that at one point for you it became a problem when the woman you were living with got married. This probably meant that her husband would move in to live with you. Is it not in contradiction with the idea of the project to have a relationship, for instance with a man? I mean the situation in which he may stay here, when and however often he wishes?

Of course! Men are all welcome. It's quite open, it's a coming and going. Our friends are welcome. The project encompasses the entire building, that is both entrances. We are nine women, and each of us has an apartment of her own, but we also have this common apartment, where the social activities of the community take place. I have a friend, who at the moment is cooking up in my apartment. He's surely waiting for me by now, and I need to put Luschka to bed. She has to go to school tomorrow, which means I cannot stay much longer.

How do the children feel as part of the project? This is a different situation from the average, at school, on the street?

From the beginning there have never been problems for the children, neither at school nor on the street. This is a center

for children. In the house there are a lot of children. It's fun, and there's always something to eat. Only the neighbors have a slightly strange attitude. But I think there's nothing to it, it's just the usual curiosity. They'll ask in a specific tone: "You're from the women's house?" Nothing more. Without comments. They do not ask superfluous questions, only this suggestive question... Perhaps because we are a minority and this tickles their curiosity. You know, the women's house and what they may be associating us with. They're afraid of witches, but even that is not true any longer, because the children from the neighboring houses now come regularly to play here, and apparently they find it a lot of fun, they like it.

And how do you deal with men, so they won't settle here for good? I mean, it's comfortable and there's always something to eat.

This would completely change the situation, it's out of the question! So far there has not been a man who expressed the wish to move in here. So we have not been forced to think about how to deal with the problem. For men it's attractive, but from a distance. And then they, too, are afraid of witches...

Interview with Cecilia

Cecilia, how did you end up in the project?

My situation is different from that of the other women in the project. I am from Peru. I have two children and am divorced. I have lived in this neighborhood for a long time, here nearby in a neighboring house, where I continue to rent an apartment even today. We cannot move to live within the house, because there are no free apartments. Otherwise, we are here most of the time, together with all others.

Luschka and Andrea's children went to the same kindergarten. I knew Andrea as a parent. Once in a while we would see each other when we brought our children or got them from the kindergarten, and we would then talk. This is how I've long known about the project, and was thinking to myself that it's a good way

for women to manage their lives themselves. In the following, I got separated from my husband. In the process of separation, when I didn't know what to do nor how, I was asked whether I could help out here in the house. I think that as women, we must help each other whenever we can. This is why I started coming here regularly to work. In this way, I had the opportunity to get to know the women, and we became friends. I liked life in the house, and realized that more and more I was becoming part of the community. Imperceptibly and little by little, I became integrated in the project. At some point, they proposed that I become a member of the community, despite the fact that I was living in a different place, and there was no way for me and the children to move into the house. Despite the project's spatial limitations, together with the women we found a form, a solution that suited us. Not only did this enlarge the community, but it broadened the idea of the project.

What place does the project have in your life?

The project is for me a great advantage in my life, for several reasons. The children feel well here, because they know other children in a similar situation and don't feel odd or isolated. There's also my friendship with the women, which is very important to me. But mostly, because here I have found true solidarity. This gives me strength to face the future and go on.

How do the children react to the project?

Quite well. I have talked with them a lot about this new situation, about this change in our lives, and I think that the children take this situation quite well, their mother in one place, their father somewhere else... And here in the community, my children have made many friends. They play together and have fun. I think they like it.

In a few years, the children will have grown up and will perhaps want to live their own lives. Do you have any idea what you'd like to do after this? What is your vision of the future?

I haven't given this concrete thought. My children are still small, and I've got plenty of time ahead of me to deal with this. But for

sure I know that I want to stay here, at least until my children have grown up. I don't know how the project will continue in the future, but I suppose that we'll think up something interesting, together. At present, my children are the most important thing in my life. To have time for them, to give them understanding and love, is of the foremost importance for any child, for it to grow up normally. If you give this, you get everything in return. And that's how the system is, you see how they are manipulating us. You need to work a lot, you think that in this way you'll get everything. Then you come home dead tired, you have no energy or time to speak with your children, to spend time fully with them. And this is the most important for them, otherwise you lose them. Here in the community, through the project we have the energy to give them this support. Communication and solidarity in the group are very important. When one of us has problems, we can help each other, materially or spiritually. When one of us comes home dead tired, the others try to spend time with her children, and the children feel that there is someone they can trust. This is not a family with blood ties, but it gives a feeling of a real family.

Interview with Sophie

How did you get involved in the project?

At the moment I work as an assistant in a pediatrician's practice. But four years ago I used to work in a collective practice, shared by four women doctors of different specializations and their assistants. One of them was a gynecologist, though I was not her assistant. The woman who used to live here in the house before me was a regular patient of this gynecologist's. This whole story started out in a quite funny way for me. One day, while at a check-up sitting on the gynecological chair, this said woman asked the doctor whether she knew about a single mother who might show interest in the project and who would at the same time fit into the community. The woman for some personal reason had to leave the project and was looking for someone to suggest as her successor in the house. As we were working, at some point the

gynecologist cried out: "Sophie, come quickly, I need you!" I was worried and didn't know how to react, since I was busy with other work. I was assisting with a surgical intervention and in the chaos I had not understood what it was about. I thought the gynecologist was calling me to help her with something, and I had to react immediately. After this, I had the opportunity to talk with the woman in detail about the project. It turned out that I had been living nearby, in the same neighborhood one street over, and that I had not known anything about the project all along and had not even suspected its existence. All night after this I was too excited to fall asleep. The explanations of the woman had left a strong impression on me. I thought a lot about my life and things around me, and the same night I decided to come here if they accepted me, to move into the house, because I understood even then that the quality of life here is incomparably better for a single woman with a child. That is why on the very next morning I found myself at this address. This is how everything started out for me.

What does all this mean for you on a personal level?

I had been living for six months in Zurich. I was continuously running this place and that place, without ever finding time for anything. I had to work a lot, over 80 percent. I was constantly tired, and my time was never ever enough, neither for my child nor for myself. Before I moved into the house, my daughter Emi used to spend half of the time with me in Zurich, where she was going to a day nursery, and half of the time with my mother in the countryside. This entire chaos was making me nervous. It was good neither for the child nor for me. Through the project, I mainly found much calmness both for me and for the child. Now we are together at all times. I even find time for my hobbies, which I love. I sing, and I make sculptures in stone. I am also involved in Yoga. We have a Yoga teacher who comes here to us, and we practice collectively. I feel very well as a part of this community.

Interview with Andrea

You are the only one here who has lived in the house since the very beginning of the project. Can you tell us how you came up with the idea of this project and how you started it off?

The actual idea for this project predates its realization by about three years. Some time was needed to arrive little by little at the materialization of these ideas. Two women, in similar situations, who knew each other and were alone with their children, expressed the wish to live together. They organized a summer holiday and invited all kinds of women with their children in a house they had rented, so they could spend some time together. Most of us didn't know each other. During the two weeks of vacation, all of us together formulated the idea of the project, and when we came back we continued to meet, discuss and work on the project. We needed to think about the form, the structure, the aims and the purpose. We needed to formulate all sort of things, to discuss also purely pragmatic questions, such as how much money we had at our disposal and whether we would manage to buy something together or whether we would have to look for a house that we could rent together. And we started looking for a place sufficiently big to fit us all, which corresponded to our ideas for the project and at the same time provided good conditions for raising our children. When our choice fell on this place, the house was almost empty, because the owners, a co-operative, wanted to renovate it. This meant that all of us could move in at the same time. Eight years ago, in the summer, we moved in with our children, and this was in a sense the actual beginning of the project. At the moment, there are nine women participating in the project, but we are not the same group of women as in the beginning. At the beginning, we were seven women, and there was more coming and going. In fact I am the only one remaining of the founders.

Why did the others leave?

That's a hard question! Don't you want to eat your soup first?

Were there intrigues? I have myself taken part in a artist women's group, and behind the seemingly feminist

platform you would find a heap of commercial and personal careerist interests. Discord and intrigues were the constant background to our "purely artistic" work and activities. This stood in the way of communication within the group, and I also felt personally hurt by it. By this I don't want to imply that I do not believe there can be real solidarity, trust... between women.

Oh, there are! There are intrigues! When I arrived, you were already talking to Cecilia. She was speaking quite highly and positively of the project, and this is how she feels about things. Of course now the situation in the house is rather different from what it was at the beginning of the project, much more positive for the community. Things evolve, and I was speaking about the beginning. Then, there was a lot of tension. For instance, at the beginning of the project two women left, saying they could not live in this way any longer, here together with the others, and another two had driven them to making that decision to leave.

You had problems with hierarchies within the community?

The beginning was very emotional, and there were various reasons for conflict. It was not so much the hierarchy in the group. Two of the women were commenting on the way the two others were raising their children, which is a sensitive topic for a mother.

Are there any direct links between the project and some political movements or women's organizations?

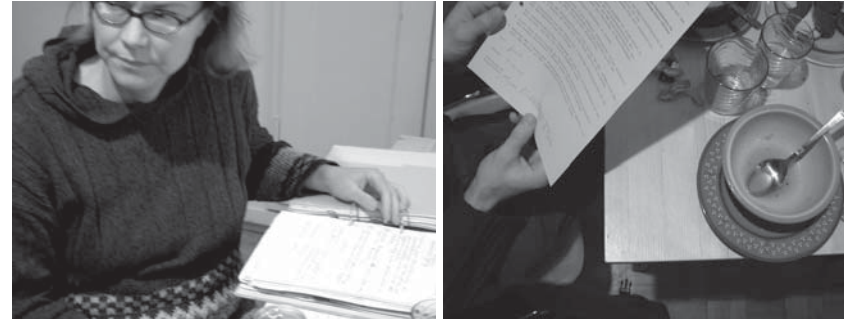
In the generation of the founders, we were more politically involved and were fighting for women's rights. At the beginning we were thinking that we could spread the idea, and that other projects could evolve in similar ways, benefiting from our experience. Such efforts are no longer being made. The project has no followers. We are looked upon as strong women, and people wonder how we manage. One generation ago it was harder, now it's easier, the situation has changed, and even this is not of prime importance any more, since our goals have also changed. The main goal we set in this project is to create a good environment for raising our children. Everything else has become of secondary importance.

Doesn't this change the form of the project? Does the lack of clearly expressed political activity and of a link to women's movements not have a negative impact on the community?

No, because from the outset the idea and the form have been sufficiently stable, and in the course of the project evolving, the idea and form have remained. To this day, since the inception of the project we have made only one single slight amendment to the statutes: It is now allowed for a single father to join the project. In any event, none has yet shown up. In a sense we do have some followers, but this is neither a group nor an organization, but two other women who have joined us. They do not live in the house, because there are no more free apartments here. But they have rented apartments in other buildings nearby and otherwise have joined the activities. But that was the end of our efforts to make the project grow.

Given that it is the only such project in Switzerland and it has evolved so successfully and lastingly, I'm surprised that to this day nobody has taken professional interest in the community. How is the media's interest in the project?

At the beginning we were an object of interest to the media. We were much more often in contact with them, although this was mostly due to the problems we initially had with the building, and the conflict with the owners. We were under pressure from them because of the overall renovation of the house, with which we did not agree. We ended up in court and contacted the media in an attempt to have the problem solved more to our advantage. In the course of time, the problems we had with the cooperative that owns the building evened out. As women who are trying to actively build something, we gradually won their sympathies, with the help of some people from the Social-Democratic Party. For the past three years, we have even received a solidarity donation from the cooperative. It covers our electricity and phone bill, furniture for the common apartment and material for the children to draw and be busy with (basteln). Some part of the cleaning of the common apartment is remunerated, and we are not paying rent for the common apartment any longer, in which we meet, talk, celebrate, raise our children together, etc.



You mentioned that you have statutes. What type of questions do the statutes of the project cover? How is the community, how life in the house structured?

Everything is very democratic. There is no hierarchy whatsoever in the community. Our statutes rather deal with the way in which a given question is to be solved. We hold meetings every two or three weeks, or more often if there are urgent questions to be solved. We discuss all sorts of questions in regards to how we organize our common life. We have a good documentation, with minutes of all the meetings. At the moment there are very few questions pertaining to tension between the women, next to none. That's how when a new woman wishes to join the project, not only does she have to get to know everyone, but the others all need to get to know her well. This can happen little by little, as she comes to the house for a few hours every day in the beginning and gradually joins in with the life and work in the community. After a time, all need to decide unanimously whether they want her as a member of the community. If one of us opposes this decision, we have to refuse her candidacy. One of the principles of the project is that all the women have to work equally much. For instance if one mother's children are old enough so they do not need special care, she has to join in with raising the smaller ones who do. If any one of us wishes to change the principles of the project in this way, it means that she has already half left the project. What is important is that there is work to be done and distributed, and there must be no privileges with regard to this.

Rules at Goldregenweg

Lunch table:

- Children must be announced, or excused, with the supervising woman.
- Friends of the children can be invited if the supervising woman agrees.
- The supervising woman is in the common apartment starting 11 a.m. (exceptions according to the schedule, or when her children are ill)
- Shoes have to be taken off at the door, and stowed away.
- Lunch is ready at 12:15 p.m.
- The table is lifted, and children may stand up not before 12:40 p.m.
- Each child takes its own dishes to the kitchen.
- Children brush their teeth after lunch.
- Menu, checklist, write down amount of shopping bill immediately if possible.
- Write a note for the shopping list of the next woman in case something runs out.
- The children are not forced to eat, but must at least try a tiny bit of everything.
- Frank and Manuel eat no meat, Frank eats no cheese, either, the Khodaris children eat no pork meat, Sergio eats almost no vegetables.
- General rule: little meat, little sugar and few finished products.
- Leftovers are stored in the fridge, where all can get something when they want. If the portion is large enough, a meal check goes onto the list.

House rules:

- The house doors remain open during the day; at nights, at least Goldregenweg 27 should be locked.
- The laundry room must be locked at all times.
- Laundry can be done whenever the laundry room is free, even during the night or on weekends.
- Take the laundry from the clothes-lines promptly, so that there is room for the next person.
- Garden: for Goldregenweg 25, Andrea takes care of it; for the common apartment, everything is public; with Sawsan, the best is to ask her first.
- Pots on the window sills are officially forbidden; they should at least be securely fastened.
- Barbecues are officially forbidden, but we have not had complaints so far.
- Ladders on the balcony are also officially forbidden; however, in the common apartment we need them (despite complaints).

Contract between the Association Goldregen and the women of the association

The undersigned woman hereby enters the following obligations towards the Association Goldregen:

- to transfer monthly 1/7 of the rent and incidental expenses of the common apartment to the account of the association.
- to transfer a deposit, defined by the association, to the account of the association. The deposit is restituted when moving out, upon deduction of all open debts.
- to pay one seventh of the co-operative capital for the common apartment. When a woman moves out, her share of the co-operative capital for the common apartment is restituted only after her successor has moved in.
- to participate in all expenses defined by the association with one seventh part of the expenses. Revenues, e.g., from the heating bill calculation of the common apartment, dividends from the share certificates for the common apartment, donations, etc., remain in the association's funds.
- to fulfill the babysitting chores defined by the association.
- to declare absences falling within the babysitting periods (school days) at least a month in advance, and agree on time with the women of the association on a replacement.
- when moving out, to notify in writing not only the landlords, but also the association, three months in advance as at the end of the month.
- upon exclusion from the association, to terminate the contract with the landlords with three months notice.
- in case of notice of termination outside the contractual deadlines, to notify the landlords only of a successor who has been selected by the association.
- not to enter into a subletting contract without the consent of the association, and notify the association of it at least three months in advance.
- during the three months notice, the babysitting chores continue to be mandatory, as well as the contribution to the costs of the common apartment.

Place:

Date:

Signature of the member of the association:

Signature of the president:

Resolution for the 23.
Regular Conference
of Delegates of the
SDS, November
1968, Hannover

**presented by the Action Council for the Liberation
of Women, West Berlin**

1. The reproduction of the bourgeois separation between private life and social life in the SDS has long enough paralyzed its political work.
2. The SDS defines its political activities in a biased way, by making a taboo of any reflections on problems of personal development (which are not identical to the bourgeois ideas about them).
3. Although the campaigns of the SDS can be communicated rationally to women, they are lacking the preconditions for addressing the subjective needs of the women, whose oppression is experienced directly and most harshly in that 'private sphere' that is excluded from the political struggle. A double frustration awaits women in the SDS when they try to become politically active there, i.e., when they want to go beyond participating in demonstrations, when they want to hold presentations, speeches and submit contributions to discussions.
4. These initiatives of women are understood as transgressions, which they have to pay for by acknowledging the rules of the society of efficiency, aimed at compensating male traumata. The perverting of the social opportunities for men to compensate go from holding speeches through bar-room discussions all the way to lecturing pillow-talk.
5. The class division of the family with the man as bourgeois and the woman as proletarian - master and servant - implies the objective function of the men as the class enemy. The denial of the leader principle in the SDS is nothing but grotesque, given that each member of the SDS who is married or living in a long-term relationship is the leader and thus at the same time the exploiter of a family, or a family-like group. The terms class, class enemy, exploiters are auxiliary constructs that serve women in getting their act together, i.e., in reaching a level of gender specific solidarity which allows them in the political struggle to turn the sensual experience of this patriarchal society against this same society.
6. This implies not the 'politicizing' of private life, but rather the lifting of the bourgeois separation between private life and social life: the point is to understand the oppression within private life not as private, but as conditioned by political economy. It must be our aim to change private life qualitatively and to understand this change as a political action. This act of cultural revolution is part of class struggle.
7. This implies that the revolution, as the aim of class struggle, is not so much a question of taking over power as a question of realizing those bits of anticipated counter-society which are beginning to emerge in the existing bad society. This includes that the claim to happiness,

currently pushed away into private life, but not satisfied even there, must be fulfilled in a social action.

8. Personal development must thus become identical with a praxis that already now anticipates possible moments of a future society, a society that eroticizes all conditions of life and makes aggressions productive.

Excerpt from the
speech of the
"Action Council for
the Liberation of
Women"

**held by Helke Sanders at the 23. Regular
Conference of Delegates of the "German Socialist
Association of Students" (SDS), September 1968
in Frankfurt.**

Dear women comrades, dear men comrades,

[...]

Comrades, your discussion events are unbearable. You are full of inhibitions, which you are forced to exteriorize as aggressions against comrades who have said something stupid, or something you already knew. The aggressions come only in part from political insight or the stupidity of the other side. Why don't you finally admit that you are shattered from last year, that you don't know any longer how to bear the stress of wearing yourselves out physically and intellectually in political actions without getting any pleasure out of it? Why don't you discuss, before planning new campaigns, how they could be realized at all? Why do you all buy Reich? Why do you speak here of class struggle, and at home of difficulties with your orgasm? Is that no topic of discussion for the SDS?

We refuse to continue to have any part in these repressions.

In our self-chosen isolation, we thus did the following: we concentrated in our work on women with children, because they are worst off. Women with children can only start again to think about themselves when the children have stopped continuously reminding them of what society is withholding from them.

Since political women have an interest in no longer educating their children according to principles of competitiveness, the consequence was that for the first time, we took seriously the expectation of society according to which it is women who are to educate the children. We took it seriously in the sense that we refuse to continue to educate our children following the principles of competition and the principle of efficiency, of which we know that their maintenance is the precondition to the very existence of the capitalist system.

We want to try to develop models of a utopian society already within the existing society. In this counter-society however, our own needs must finally find a place. In this sense, our concentration on education is not an alibi for our own repressed emancipation, but the precondition for solving our own conflicts productively. The main task consists in not driving our children on islands far off from any social reality, but rather, through supporting their own emancipatory efforts, to give our children the strength to resist, so that they may solve their own conflicts with reality in favor of a reality to be changed.

At this moment we already have five of these children's shops (Kinderläden); four more are being organized, and a few are at the planning stage. We are working on the model for the kindergarten of the FU (Free University Berlin), are organizing kindergarten teachers or helping kindergarten teachers organize themselves. On the theoretical level, we are trying to criticize the bourgeois principle of rationality and the patriarchal understanding of science.

We have such an immense success, so many people joining, that we can barely deal with this on an organizational level. [...]

Frauenjahrbuch 1, Verlag Roter Stern (1975)