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Gender in/of Culture

INTRODUCTION

All through the twentieth century, from the suffrage movement, through writers such as Virginia Woolf, then Simone de Beauvoir, to the writers in this collection, feminists have not been content to allow political and economic analysis to stand alone, but have always provided it in conjunction with critiques of cultural structures and production. In the second half of the century Simone de Beauvoir's ringing words have been echoed and quoted in a large amount of feminist writing: 'Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men. They show it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth.'¹ De Beauvoir argues that culturally woman is constructed as 'other' to man, who is the norm. While most, if not all, of the texts in this book may be said to engage with this assertion in some manner, the ones in this chapter directly address the gendered nature of culture – how representational practices *in* culture and the representation or mediation *of* culture can be said to be gendered.

Valerie Solanas's *Scum Manifesto* is read today sometimes with great veneration and sometimes with utter derision. The passage cited here as the opening text of this collection has been selected for another reason. It shows how the *Manifesto* is also a funny and trenchant tract on gender roles and cultural production. Solanas turns masculine and feminine roles upside down, suggests that male artists are weak individuals and thus have feminine roles² and that women are heroic and creative. Her involvement in Andy Warhol's Factory provides added interest to her analysis (she is often remembered today as the woman who shot Warhol). 'The true artist is every self-confident, healthy female, and in a female society the only Art, the only Culture, will be conceited, kookie, funky females grooving on each other and on everything else in the universe', she writes, betraying the date of her writing and providing a utopian rallying call.

Shulamith Firestone was an art student in Chicago when she became active in the women's movement. In the chapter '(Male) Culture' (here edited) from her book *The Dialectic of Sex* she indicates and analyses the lack of women artists. Women who are artists 'have had to compete *as men*, in a male game' – our culture has no room for a female viewpoint to be accorded respect. Those who endeavour this 'must achieve and be rated by standards of a tradition she had no part in making'. These standards are biased: a woman's viewpoint is no less limited than a man's viewpoint and until women's voices are accorded their proper place we should not speak of our culture as universal.

Sherry B. Ortner's paper argues the necessity for a rigorous methodology when defining terms and determining the questions to be asked: 'we must be absolutely clear about *what* we are trying to explain, before explaining it.' Coming from an anthropological background, she defines culture as 'human consciousness and its products'. She then develops her theory that if every known society both accords women certain cultural roles but devalues them overall, then the issue is not that women are nature, but that 'women are seen "merely" as being *closer* to nature than men.' The reasons for this subtlety are argued through the complex cultural structuring of activities such as child-rearing and cooking.

The following two texts are both from performances. Carolee Schneemann used hers for both her super-8 film 'Kitch's Last Meal' (1973–5) and for two performances titled 'Interior Scroll' (1975 and 1977). Photographs by Anthony McCall documenting this latter performance are much in circulation in histories of performance art and of feminist art, and have also been commodified on the art market as if the photographs themselves were the artworks.³ The moments represented are those at the end of the performance when Schneemann stands naked, body smeared with 'expressionist' brush marks, and has extracted a scroll from her vagina from which she is reading out the text reproduced here. In her own collected writings,⁴ Schneemann was careful to supply a number of photographs juxtaposed with the full text; one still image alone can reinforce the issue she addresses in the text as a problem: the representation of women as artists and their work as art.

Faith Wilding's performance 'Waiting', done while she was a student at the Feminist Art Program at CalArts, Los Angeles, is in a tradition of performance art that is found much more in the US than in, say, Europe – a tradition that builds upon theatrical modes and literary representation more than visual representation and a more conceptual approach to time and duration. Sitting in a rocking chair on stage, Wilding acted out with her voice and body posture the ageing of a woman from infancy to old age and death. The text demonstrates the passivity of women in their allotted roles of relationship to other family members.

In the extracts from 'The Straight Mind' reproduced here, Monique Wittig revisits both de Beauvoir's concept of the 'Other' and the anthropological differentiation of nature and culture investigated by Ortner (she links her concept of the straight mind to Lévi-Strauss's *The Savage Mind*). Her aim is to expose 'the obligatory social relationship between "man" and "woman"' – what Adrienne Rich would come to call 'compulsory heterosexuality'.⁵ While Wittig would concur with Ortner that the relation between nature and culture is itself a cultural construct, she turns to the very language used to mediate these concepts. Language is not neutral, but embodies straight ideology. 'Thus lesbianism, homosexuality, and the societies that we form cannot be thought of or spoken of . . . The transformation of economic relationships will not suffice', she argues: language itself must be worked upon in order to shift concepts. Language is also addressed by Isabelle Bernier. Drawing upon work done by Rozsika Parker in *The Subversive Stitch*, and by Parker and Griselda Pollock in *Old Mistresses*, she attends to the shifting and gendered hierarchies of differing materials: those which connote 'masculinity' ('art') and those which connote 'femininity' ('craft').⁶

The interview given by Luce Irigaray concerns the identification 'as a woman', the position of women in institutions, and of their works in the twentieth-century canon.

Running through Irigaray's answers are her theories that subjectivity is sexed, and that it is articulated in writing and elsewhere. She understands a culture where a woman might say 'I do not write as a woman' as one which has 'contempt for the value of women'. For Irigaray, cultural processes and products are never neuter. She questions the veracity of the interviewer's assessment of women's progress, indicating that women who gain 'success' have had to pay highly for it, and suggests that progress will only be found in a culture which recognizes the links between sexed subjectivity and language: it is an argument for recognition of difference in culture, rather than the erasure of difference suggested by the neutrality of equality and sameness. The final text in this chapter, statistics gathered by the New York based Women's Action Coalition in the early 1990s, backs up Irigaray's scepticism about women's progress in today's institutions. The readings in this chapter provide differing analyses of why this might be so, and differing strategies for righting the situation. These are radical (going back to the root) or revolutionary in different ways, whether it be the supremacist separatism of Solanas, the revolutionary egalitarianism of Firestone or the radical linking of subjectivity, cultural structures and difference argued by Luce Irigaray.

Notes

- 1 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972; first pub. France, 1949), p. 175.
- 2 A thread later taken up by June Wayne in a more orthodox manner in 'The male artist as a stereotypical female', *Art Journal*, 32 (4) (1973): 414–16.
- 3 See Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 1998), pp. 36–7 and *passim*, on the problematic of documenting performance.
- 4 Carolee Schneemann, *More than Meat Joy: Performance Works and Selected Writings* (New Paltz, NY: Documentext, 1979; 2nd edn, 1997).
- 5 Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence' (1980), in *The Signs Reader: Women, Gender and Scholarship*, ed. E. Abel and E. K. Abel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 139–68.
- 6 Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: The Women's Press, 1984); Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock: *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981).

Essential reading

- de Beauvoir, Simone, 'Dreams, fears, idols', in *The Second Sex* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972; first pub. France, 1949), pp. 171–229.
- Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990).
- Figs, Eva, *Patriarchal Attitudes* (London: Faber, 1970).
- Greer, Germaine, *The Whole Woman* (London: Doubleday, 1999).
- Haraway, Donna, 'A manifesto for cyborgs: science, technology, and socialist-feminism in the 1980s', *Socialist Review*, 15 (2) (1985): 65–108; reprinted in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda Nicholson (London: Routledge, 1990).
- hooks, bell, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990).
- Jardine, Alice and Smith, Paul (eds), *Men in Feminism* (London: Methuen, 1989).

- Kristeva, Julia, 'Women's time' (1979), *Signs*, 7 (1) (1981): 13–35; reprinted in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 187–213.
- Plant, Sadie, *Zeros and Ones: Digital Women and the New Technoculture* (London: Fourth Estate, 1997).
- Probyn, Elspeth, *Sexing the Self: Gendered Positions in Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1993).
- Riley, Denise, *Am I that Name?: Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History* (London: Macmillan, 1988).

Valerie Solanas, 'Scum Manifesto' (1968)

From *Scum Manifesto* (London: The Matriarchy Study Group, 1983; first pub. 1968), pp. 23–6.

[. . .] 'Great Art' and 'Culture': The male 'artist' attempts to solve his dilemma of not being able to live, of not being female, by constructing a highly artificial world in which the male is heroized, that is, displays female traits, and the female is reduced to highly limited, insipid subordinate roles, that is, to being male.

The male 'artistic' aim being, not to communicate (having nothing inside him, he has nothing to say), but to disguise his animalism, he resorts to symbolism and obscurity ('deep' stuff). The vast majority of people, particularly the 'educated' ones, lacking faith in their own judgement, humble, respectful of authority ('Daddy knows best' is translated into adult language as 'Critic knows best', 'Writer knows best', 'PhD knows best'), are easily conned into believing that obscurity, evasiveness, incomprehensibility, indirectness, ambiguity and boredom are marks of depth and brilliance.

'Great Art' proves that men are superior to women, that men are women, being labelled 'Great Art', almost all of which, as the anti-feminists are fond of reminding us, was created by men. We know that 'Great Art' is great because male authorities have told us so, and we can't claim otherwise, as only those with exquisite sensitivities far superior to ours can perceive and appreciate the greatness, the proof of their superior sensitivity being that they appreciate the slop that they appreciate.

Appreciating is the sole diversion of the 'cultivated': passive and incompetent, lacking imagination and wit, they must try to make do with that; unable to create their own diversions, to create a little world of their own, to affect in the smallest way their environments; they must accept what's given: unable to create or relate, they spectate. Absorbing 'culture' is a desperate, frantic attempt to groove in an ungroovy world, escape the horror of a sterile, mindless existence. 'Culture' provides a sop to the egos of the incompetent, a means of rationalizing passive spectating; they can pride themselves on their ability to appreciate the 'finer' things, to see a jewel where there is only a turd (they want to be admired for admiring). Lacking faith in their ability to change anything, resigned to the status quo, they *have* to see beauty in turds because, so far as they can see, turds are all they'll ever have.

The veneration of 'Art' and 'Culture' – besides leading many women into boring, passive activity that distracts from more important and rewarding activities, from cultivating active abilities and leads to the constant intrusion on our sensibilities of pompous dissertations on the deep beauty of this and that turd. This allows the 'artist' to be set up as one possessing superior feelings, perceptions, insights and judgements, thereby undermining the faith of insecure women in the value and validity of their own feelings, perceptions, insights and judgements.

The male, having a very limited range of feelings and, consequently, very limited perceptions, insights and judgements, needs the 'artist' to guide him, to tell him what life is all about. But the male 'artist', being totally sexual, unable to relate to anything beyond his own physical sensations, having nothing to express beyond the insight that for the male life is meaningless and absurd, cannot be an artist. How can he who is not capable of life tell us what life is all about? A 'male artist' is a contradiction in terms. A degenerate can only produce degenerate 'art'. The true artist is every self-confident, healthy female, and in a female society the only Art, the only Culture, will be conceited, kookie, funkies grooving on each other and on everything else in the universe. [. . .]

Shulamith Firestone, '(Male) Culture' (1970)

From *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (London: The Women's Press, 1979; first pub. 1970), pp. 148–60.

Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth.

Simone de Beauvoir

The relation of women to culture has been indirect. We have discussed how the present psychical organization of the two sexes dictates that most women spend their emotional energy on men, whereas men 'sublimate' theirs into work. In this way women's love becomes raw fuel for the cultural machine. (Not to mention the Great Ideas born rather more directly from early-morning boudoir discussions.)

In addition to providing its emotional support, women had another important indirect relation to culture: they inspired it. The Muse is female. Men of culture were emotionally warped by the sublimation process; they converted life to art, thus could not live it. But women, and those men who were excluded from culture, remained in direct contact with their experience – fit subject matter.

That women were intrinsic in the very content of culture is borne out by an example from the history of art: men are erotically stimulated by the opposite sex; painting was male; the nude became a *female* nude. Where the art of the male nude reached high levels, either in the work of an individual artist, e.g. Michelangelo, or in a whole artistic period, such as that of classical Greece, men were homosexual.

The subject matter of art, when there is any, is today even more largely inspired by women. Imagine the elimination of women characters from popular films and novels, even from the work of 'highbrow' directors – Antonioni, Bergman, or Godard; there wouldn't be much left. For in the last few centuries, particularly in popular culture – perhaps related to the problematic position of women in society – women have been the main subject of art. In fact, in scanning blurbs of even one month's cultural production, one might believe that women were all anyone ever thought about.

But what about the women who have contributed directly to culture? There aren't many. And in those cases where individual women have participated in male culture, they have had to do so on male terms. And it shows. Because they have had to compete *as men*, in a male game – while still being pressured to prove themselves in their old female roles, a role at odds with their self-appointed ambitions – it is not surprising that they are seldom as skilled as men at the game of culture.

And it is not just a question of being as competent, it is also a question of being *authentic*. We have seen in the context of love how modern women have imitated male psychology, confusing it with health, and have thereby ended up even worse off than men themselves: they were not even being true to home-grown sicknesses. And there are even more complex layers to this question of authenticity: women have no means of coming to an understanding of what their experience *is*, or even that it is different from male experience. The tool for representing, for objectifying one's experience in order to deal with it, culture, is so saturated with male bias that women almost never have a chance to see themselves culturally through their own eyes. So that finally, signals from their direct experience that conflict with the prevailing (male) culture are denied and repressed.

Thus because cultural dicta are set by men, presenting only the male view – and now in a super-barrage – women are kept from achieving an authentic picture of their reality. Why do women, for example, get aroused by a pornography of female bodies? In their ordinary experience of female nudity, say in a gym locker room, the sight of other nude females might be interesting (though probably only in so far as they rate by male sexual standards), but not directly erotic. Cultural distortion of sexuality explains also how female sexuality gets twisted into narcissism: women make love to themselves vicariously through the man, rather than directly making love to him. At times this cultural barrage of man/subject, women/object desensitizes women to male forms to such a degree that they are orgasmically affected.¹

There are other examples of the distorting effects on female vision of an exclusively male culture. Let us go back to the history of figurative painting once again: we have seen how in the tradition of the nude, male heterosexual inclinations came to emphasize the female rather than the male as the more aesthetic and pleasing form. Such a predilection for either one over the other, of course, is based on a sexuality which is in itself artificial, culturally created. But at least one might then expect the opposite bias to prevail in the view of women painters still involved in the tradition of the nude. This is not the case. In any art school in the country one sees classrooms full of girls working diligently from the female model, accepting that the male model is somehow less aesthetic, at best perhaps novel, and certainly never questioning why the male model

wears a jock strap when the female model wouldn't dream of appearing in so much as a G-string.

Again, looking at the work of well-known women painters associated with the Impressionist School of the nineteenth century, Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt, one wonders at their obsessive preoccupation with traditionally female subject matter: women, children, female nudes, interiors, etc. This is partially explained by political conditions of that period: women painters were lucky to be allowed to paint anything at all, let alone male models. And yet it is more than that. These women, for all their superb draughtsmanship and compositional skill, remained minor painters because they had 'lifted' a set of traditions and a view of the world that was inauthentic for them. They worked within the limits of what had been defined as female by a *male* tradition: they saw women through male eyes, painted a male's idea of female. And they carried it to an extreme, for they were attempting to outdo men at their own game; they had fallen for a (lovely) line. And thus the falseness that corrupts their work, making it 'feminine', i.e. sentimental, light.

It would take a denial of all cultural tradition for women to produce even a true 'female' art. For a woman who participates in (male) culture must achieve and be rated by standards of a tradition she had no part in making – and certainly there is no room in that tradition for a female view, even if she *could* discover what it was. In those cases where a woman, tired of losing at a male game, has attempted to participate in culture *in a female way*, she has been put down and misunderstood, named by the (male) cultural establishment 'Lady Artist', i.e. trivial, inferior. And even where it must be (grudgingly) admitted she is 'good', it is fashionable – a cheap way to indicate one's own 'seriousness' and refinement of taste – to insinuate that she is good but irrelevant.

Perhaps it is true that a presentation of only the female side of things – which tends to be one long protest and complaint rather than the portrayal of a full and substantive existence – is limited. But an equally relevant question, one much less frequently asked, is: Is it any more limited than the prevailing male view of things, which – when not taken as absolute truth – is at least seen as 'serious', relevant, and important? Is Mary McCarthy in *The Group* really so much worse a writer than Norman Mailer in *The American Dream*? Or is she perhaps describing a reality that men, the controllers and critics of the Cultural Establishment, can't tune in on?

[. . .]

In order to illustrate this cultural dichotomy in more objective terms, we don't need to attack the more obvious paper tigers (all senses implied) who consciously present a 'male' reality – viz. Hemingway, Jones, Mailer, Farrell, Algren, and the rest. The new Virility School in twentieth-century literature is in itself a direct response, indeed a male cultural backlash, to the growing threat to male supremacy – Virility Inc., a bunch of culturally deprived 'tough guys', punching away to save their manhood. And though they get more credit, these artists write about the 'male' experience no more perceptively than Doris Lessing, Sylvia Plath, Anais Nin have written about the female experience. In fact they are guilty of a mystification of their experience that makes their writing phony.

[. . .]

And what about women artists? We have seen that it has only been in the last several centuries that women have been permitted to participate – and then only on an individual basis, and on male terms – in the making of culture. And even so their vision had become inauthentic: they were denied the use of the cultural mirror.

And there are many *negative* reasons that women have entered art: affluence always creates female dilettantism, e.g. the Victorian ‘young lady’ with her accomplishments, or the arts of the Japanese geisha – for, in addition to serving as a symbol of male luxury, women’s increasing idleness under advancing industrialism presents a practical problem: female discontent has to be eased to keep it from igniting. Or women may be entering art as a refuge. Women today are still excluded from the vital power centres of human activity; and art is one of the last self-determining occupations left – often done in solitude. But in this sense women are like a petty bourgeoisie trying to open up shop in the age of corporate capitalism.

For the higher percentages of women in art lately may tell us more about the state of art than about the state of women. Are we to feel cheered that women have taken over in a capacity soon to be automated out? (Like 95 percent Black at the Post Office, this is no sign of integration; on the contrary, undesirables are being shoved into the least desirable positions – Here, now get in and keep your mouth shut!) That art is no longer a vital centre that attracts the best men of our generation may also be a product of the male/female division [. . .] But the animation of women and homosexuals in the arts today may signify only the scurrying of rats near a dying body.²

But if it has not yet created great women artists, women’s new literacy has certainly created a female audience. Just as male audiences have always demanded, and received, male art to reinforce their particular view of reality, so a female audience demands a ‘female’ art to reinforce the female reality. Thus the birth of the crude feminine novel in the nineteenth century, leading to the love story of our own day, so ever-present in popular culture (‘soap opera’); the women’s magazine trade; *Valley of the Dolls*. These may be crude beginnings. Most of this art is as yet primitive, clumsy, poor. But occasionally the female reality is documented as clearly as the male reality has always been, as, for example, in the work of Anne Sexton.

Eventually, out of this ferment – perhaps very soon – we may see the emergence of an authentic female art. But the development of ‘female’ art is not to be viewed as reactionary, like its counterpart, the male School of Virility. Rather it is progressive: an exploration of the strictly female reality is a necessary step to correct the warp in a sexually biased culture. It is only after we have integrated the dark side of the moon into our world view that we can begin to talk seriously of universal culture.

[. . .]

Only a feminist revolution can eliminate entirely the sex schism causing these cultural distortions. Until then ‘pure art’ is a delusion – a delusion responsible both for the inauthentic art women have produced until now, as well as for the corruption of (male) culture at large. The incorporation of the neglected half of human experience – the female experience – into the body of culture, to create an all-encompassing culture, is only the first step, a precondition; but the schism of reality itself must be overthrown before there can be a true cultural revolution.

Notes

1 Female inability to focus on sexual imagery has been found to be a major cause of female frigidity. Masters and Johnson, Albert Ellis, and others have stressed the importance of 'sexual focusing' in teaching frigid women to achieve orgasm. Hilda O'Hare in *International Journal of Sexology* correctly attributes this problem to the absence in our society of a female counterpart for the countless stimulants of the male sexual urge.

2 However, women's presence in the arts and humanities is still viciously fought by the few males remaining, in proportion to the insecurity of their own position – particularly precarious in traditional, humanist schools, such as figurative painting.

**Sherry B. Ortner, 'Is Female to Male as
Nature is to Culture?' (1972)**

From *Feminist Studies*, 1 (2) (1972), pp. 5–31.

Much of the creativity of anthropology derives from the tension between the demands for explanation of human universals on the one hand and cultural particulars on the other. By this canon, woman provides us with one of the more challenging problems to be dealt with. The secondary status of woman in society is one of the true universals, a pan-cultural fact. Yet within that universal fact, the specific cultural conceptions and symbolizations of woman are incredibly diverse and even mutually contradictory. Further, the actual treatment of women, and the relative power and contribution of women, vary enormously from culture to culture, and over different periods in the history of particular cultural traditions. Both of these points – the universal fact, and the cultural variation – constitute problems for explanation.

It goes without saying that my interest in the problem is more than academic: I wish to see genuine change come about, the emergence of a social and cultural order in which as much of the range of human potential is open to women as to men. The universality of female subordination, the fact that it exists within every type of social and economic arrangement, and in societies of every degree of complexity, indicates to me that we are up against something very profound, very stubborn, something that can not be remedied merely by rearranging a few tasks and roles in the social system, nor even by rearranging the whole economic structure.

First, it is important to sort out the levels of the problem. The confusion can be enormous. For example, depending on which aspect of Chinese culture we looked at, we might extrapolate entirely different guesses concerning the status of women in China. In the ideology of Taoism, *yin*, the female principle, and *yang*, the male principle, are given equal weight; 'The opposition, alternation, and interaction of these two forces give rise to all phenomena in the universe.'¹ Hence we might guess that maleness and femaleness are equally valued in the general ideology of Chinese culture. Looking at the social structure, on the other hand, we see the strong patrilineal descent principle,

the importance of sons, and the patripotestal structure of the family. Thus we might conclude that China is the archetypal patriarchal society. Next, looking at the actual roles played, power and influence wielded, and material contributions made by women in Chinese society, all of which are, upon observation, quite substantial, we are tempted to say that women ‘really’ are allotted a great deal of (unspoken) status in the system. Or again, we might focus on the fact that a goddess, Kuan-yin, is the central (most-worshipped, most-depicted) deity in Chinese Buddhism, and we might be tempted to say, as many have tried to say about goddess-worshipping cultures in pre- and early-historical societies, that ‘actually’ China is a sort of matriarchy. In short, we must be absolutely clear about *what* we are trying to explain, before explaining it.

We may isolate three levels of the problem.

- 1 The universal fact of culturally attributed second-class status to woman in every society. Two questions are important here. First, what do we mean by this, what is our evidence that this is a universal fact? And second, how are we to explain the fact having established it?
- 2 Specific ideologies, symbolizations, and social structural arrangements pertaining to women which vary widely from culture to culture. The problem at this level is to account for any particular cultural complex in terms of factors specific to that culture – the standard level of anthropological analysis.
- 3 Observable on-the-ground details of women’s activities, contributions, powers, etc., often at variance with cultural ideology, and always constrained within the assumption that women may never be officially pre-eminent in the total system. This is the level of direct observation, often adopted now by feminist-oriented anthropologists.

This paper is primarily concerned with the first level of the problem: the universal devaluation of women. It thus depends not upon specific cultural data but rather upon an analysis of ‘culture’ taken generically as a special sort of process in the world. A discussion of the second level, the problem of cross-cultural variation in conceptions and relative valuations of women, must be postponed for another paper, since it will entail a great deal of cross-cultural research. As for the third level, it will be obvious from my approach that I would consider it a misguided endeavor to focus only upon women’s actual, though culturally unrecognized and unvalued, powers in any given society, without first understanding the overarching ideology and deeper assumptions of the culture that renders such powers trivial.

What do I mean when I say that everywhere, in every known culture, woman is considered in some degree inferior to man? First of all I must stress that I am talking about *cultural* evaluations; I am saying that each culture, in its own way and in its own terms, makes this evaluation. What would constitute evidence, when we look at any particular society, that it considers women inferior?

Three types of data would be evidence:

- 1 Elements of cultural ideology and informants’ statements that *explicitly* devalue women, according them, their roles, their tasks, their products, and their social milieu less prestige than men and the male correlates.

- 2 Symbolic devices, such as the attribution of defilement, which may be interpreted as making a statement of inferior valuation.
- 3 Social rules that prohibit women from participating in or having contact with some realm in which the highest powers of the society are felt to reside.

These three types of data may all of course be interrelated in any particular system, but not necessarily. Further, any one of them will usually be sufficient to make the point of female inferiority in any given culture. Certainly female exclusion from the most sacred rite or the highest political council is sufficient evidence. Certainly explicit cultural ideology devaluing women (and their tasks, roles, products, etc.) is sufficient evidence. Symbolic indicators such as defilement are usually sufficient, although in a few cases in which men and women are equally polluting to one another, a further indicator is required – and is, as far as my researches have ascertained, always available.

On any or all of these counts, we find women subordinated to men in every known society. The search for a genuinely egalitarian, let alone matriarchal, culture, has proven fruitless, and it is important for the woman's movement at large to face up to this fact. An example from one society that has traditionally been on the good side of the ledger *vis-à-vis* the status of their women will suffice. Among the matrilineal Crow, Lowie points out that 'Women . . . had highly honorific offices in the Sun Dance; they could become directors of the Tobacco ceremony and played, if anything, a more conspicuous part in it than the men; they sometimes played the hostess in the Cooked Meat Festival; they were not debarred from sweating or doctoring nor from seeking a vision.' Nonetheless, 'Women [during menstruation] formerly rode inferior horses and evidently this loomed as a source of contamination, for they were not allowed to approach either a wounded man or men starting on a war party. A taboo still lingers against their coming near sacred objects at these times.' Further, Lowie mentions, just before enumerating women's rights of participation in the various rituals noted above, that there was one particular Sun Dance Doll bundle that was not supposed to be unwrapped by a woman. Pursuing this trail we find: 'According to all Lodge Grass informants and most others, the doll owned by Wrinkled-face took precedence not only of other dolls but of all other Crow medicines whatsoever . . . This particular doll was not supposed to be handled by a woman . . .'²

In sum, the Crow probably provide a fairly typical case. Yes, women have certain powers and rights, in this case some that place them in comparatively high positions. Yet ultimately the line is drawn; menstruation is a threat to warfare, one of the most valued institutions of the tribe – one central to their self definition – and the most sacred object of the tribe is tabooed to the direct sight and touch of women.

Similar examples could be multiplied ad infinitum, but I think it is time to turn the tables. The onus is no longer upon us to demonstrate that female subordination is a cultural universal; it is up to those who would argue against the point to bring forth counter-examples. I shall take the universal secondary status of women as a given, and proceed from there.

If the devaluation of women relative to men is a cultural universal, how are we to explain this fact? We could of course rest the case on biological determinism: there is something genetically inherent in the males of the species that makes them the

naturally dominant sex; that 'something' is lacking in females, and, as a result, women are not only naturally subordinate but, in general, quite satisfied with their position, since it affords them protection and the opportunity to maximize the maternal pleasures that to them are the most satisfying experiences of life. Without going into a detailed refutation of this position, it is fair to say that it has failed to convince very few in academic anthropology. This is not to say that biological facts are irrelevant, nor that men and women are not different; but it is to say that these facts and differences only take on significance of superior/inferior within the framework of culturally defined value systems.

If we are not willing to rest the case on genetic determinism, it seems to me that we have only one other way to proceed. We must attempt to interpret female subordination in light of other universals of the human condition, factors built into the structure of the most generalized situation that all human beings, in whatever culture, find themselves in. For example, every human being has a physical body and a sense of non-physical mind, is part of a society of other individuals and an inheritor of a cultural tradition, and must engage in some relationship, however mediated, with 'nature' or the non-human realm, in order to survive. Every human being is born (to a mother) and ultimately dies; all are assumed to have an interest in personal survival; and society/culture has its own interest in (or at least momentum toward) continuity and survival that transcends the lives and deaths of particular individuals. And so forth. It is in the realm of such universals of the human condition that we must seek an explanation for the universal fact of female devaluation.

I translate the problem, in other words, into the following simple question: what could there be in the generalized structure and conditions of existence, common to every culture, that would lead every culture to devalue women? Specifically, my thesis is that woman is being identified with, or, if you will, seems to be a symbol of, something that every culture devalues, something that every culture defines as being at a lower order of existence than itself. Now it seems that there is only one thing that would fit that category, and that is 'nature' in the most generalized sense. Every culture, or, generically, 'culture,' is engaged in the process of generating and sustaining systems of meaningful forms (symbols, artifacts, etc.) by means of which humanity transcends the givens of natural existence, bends them to its purposes, controls them in its interest. We may thus equate culture broadly with the notion of human consciousness, or with the products of human consciousness (i.e. systems of thought and technology), by means of which humanity attempts to rise above and assert control, however minimally, over nature.

Now the categories of 'nature' and 'culture' are of course categories of human thought – there is no place out in the real world where one could find some actual boundary between the two states or realms of being. And there is no question that some cultures articulate a much stronger opposition between the two categories than others – it has even been argued that primitive peoples (some or all) do not see or intuit any distinction between the human cultural state and the state of nature at all. Yet I would maintain that the universality of ritual betokens an assertion in all human cultures of the specifically human ability to act upon and regulate, rather than passively move with and be moved by, the givens of natural existence. In ritual, the purposive manipulation of given forms toward regulating and sustaining order, every culture makes the state-

ment that proper relations between human existence and natural forces depend upon culture's contributing its special powers toward regulating the overall process of the world.

These points are often articulated in notions of purity and pollution. Virtually every culture has some such notions, and they seem in large part (though not, of course, entirely) to be about the relationship between culture and nature.³ A well-known aspect of purity/pollution beliefs cross-culturally is that of natural 'contagion' of pollution – pollution (for these purposes grossly equated with the unregulated operation on natural energies) left to its own devices spreads and overpowers all it comes in contact with. Thus the old puzzle – if pollution is so strong, how can anything be purified? When the purifying agent is introduced, why does it purify rather than become polluted itself? The answer, in line with the present argument, is that purification is effected in a ritual context – that purification ritual, as a purposive activity that pits self-conscious (symbolic) action against natural energies, is more powerful than those energies.

In any case, my point is simply that every culture implicitly recognizes and asserts the distinction between the operation of nature as such and the operation of culture (human consciousness and its products), and further, that the distinctiveness of culture rests precisely on the fact that it can under most circumstances transcend natural givens and turn them to its purposes. Thus culture (i.e. every culture) at some level of awareness asserts itself to be not only distinct from, but superior in power to, nature, and that sense of distinctiveness and superiority rests precisely on the ability to transform – to 'socialize' and 'culturalize' – nature.

Returning now to the issue of women, in my initial thinking on the subject, I formulated the argument as follows: the pan-cultural devaluation of woman could be accounted for, quite simply, by postulating that woman is being identified with, or symbolically associated with, nature, as opposed to man, who is identified with culture. Since it is always culture's project to subsume and transcend nature, if woman is a part of nature, then culture would find it 'natural' to subordinate, not to say oppress, her. While this argument could be shown to have considerable force, it also seems to oversimplify the case. The formulation I would like to defend and elaborate on, then, is that women are seen 'merely' as being *closer* to nature than men. That is, culture (still equated more or less unambiguously with men) recognizes that woman is an active participant in its special processes, but sees her as being, at the same time, more rooted in, or having more direct connection with, nature.

The revision seems minor and even trivial, but I think it is a more accurate rendering of cultural assumptions concerning women. Further, the argument cast in these terms has several analytic advantages over the simpler formulation; I will discuss these later. It might simply be stressed here that the revised argument would still account for the pan-cultural devaluation of women, for, even if woman is not equated with nature, she is still seen as representing a lower order of being, less transcendental of nature than men. The next question is why she might be viewed that way.

It all begins of course with the body, and the natural procreative functions specific to women alone. We can sort out for discussion three levels at which this absolute physiological fact has significance.

- 1 Her *body and its functions*, more involved more of the time with ‘species life,’ seem to place her closer to nature, as opposed to men, whose physiology frees them more completely to the projects of culture.
- 2 Her body and its functions put her in *social roles* that are in turn considered to be at a lower order of culture, in opposition to the higher orders of the cultural process.
- 3 Her traditional social roles, imposed because of her body and its functions, in turn give her a different *psychic structure* – and again, this psychic structure, like her physiological nature and her social roles, is seen as being more ‘like nature.’

My argument that woman’s physiology is seen as ‘closer to nature’ has been anticipated, with great subtlety and cogency, and a lot of hard data, by de Beauvoir. De Beauvoir reviews the physiological structure, development, and functions of the human female and concludes that ‘the female, to a greater extent than the male, is the prey of the species.’ She points out that many major areas and processes of the woman’s body serve no apparent function for the health and stability of the individual woman; on the contrary, as they perform their specific organic functions, they are often sources of discomfort, pain and danger. The breasts are irrelevant to personal health; they may be excised at any time of a woman’s life. ‘Many of the ovarian secretions function for the benefit of the egg, promoting its maturation and adapting the uterus to its requirements; in respect to the organism as a whole, they make for disequilibrium rather than for regulation – the woman is adapted to the needs of the egg rather than to her own requirements.’ Menstruation is often uncomfortable, sometimes painful; it frequently has negative emotional correlates and in any case involves bothersome tasks of cleansing and waste-disposal; and – a point that de Beauvoir does not mention – in many cultures it interrupts a woman’s routine, putting her in a stigmatized state involving various restrictions on her activities and social contacts. In pregnancy, many of the woman’s vitamin and mineral resources are channelled into nourishing the fetus, depleting her own strength and energies, and finally, childbirth itself is painful and dangerous. In sum, de Beauvoir concludes that the female ‘is more enslaved to the species than the male, her animality is more manifest.’⁴

De Beauvoir’s survey is meant to be, and seems in all fairness to be, purely descriptive. It is simply a fact that proportionately more of woman’s body space, for a greater percentage of her life-time, and at a certain – sometimes great – cost to her personal health, strength, and general stability, is taken up with the natural processes surrounding the reproduction of the species. Further, in physiological structure, the woman is weaker than the man, ‘her grasp on the world is thus more restricted; she has less firmness and less steadiness available for projects that in general she is less capable of carrying out.’⁵

De Beauvoir goes on to discuss the negative implications of woman’s ‘enslavement to the species’ and general physical weakness in relation to the projects in which humans engage, projects through which culture is generated and defined. She arrives thus at the crux of her argument:

Here we have the key to the whole mystery. On the biological level a species is maintained only by creating itself anew; but this creation results only in repeating the same Life in more individuals. But man assures the repetition of Life while transcending Life through Existence [i.e. goal-oriented, meaningful action]; by this transcendence

he creates values that deprive pure repetition of all value. In the animal, the freedom and variety of male activities are vain because no project is involved. Except for his services to the species, what he does is immaterial. Whereas in serving the species, the human male also remodels the face of the earth, he creates new instruments, he invents, he shapes the future.⁶

In other words, woman's body seems to doom her to mere reproduction of life; the male, on the other hand, lacking natural creative functions, must (or has the opportunity to) assert his creativity externally, 'artificially,' through the medium of technology and symbols. In so doing, he creates relatively lasting, eternal, transcendent objects, while the woman creates only perishables – human beings.

This formulation opens up a number of important insights. It explains, for example, the great puzzle of why male activities involving the destruction of life (hunting and warfare) have more charisma, as it were, than the female's ability to give birth, to create life.⁷ Yet within de Beauvoir's framework, we realize that it is not the killing that is the relevant and valued aspect of hunting and warfare; rather it is the transcendental (social, cultural) nature of these activities, as opposed to the naturalness of the process of birth: 'For it is not in giving life but in risking life that man is raised above the animal; that is why superiority has been accorded in humanity not to the sex that brings forth but to that which kills.'⁸

Thus, if male is everywhere (unconsciously) associated with culture, and female seems closer to nature, the rationale for these associations is easy to grasp, merely from considering the implications of the physiological contrast between male and female. At the same time, however, woman cannot be consigned fully to the category of nature, for it is perfectly obvious that she is a fully fledged human being, endowed with human consciousness just as man is; she is half of the human race, without whose cooperation the whole enterprise would collapse. She may seem more in the possession of nature than man, but, having consciousness, she thinks and speaks; she generates, communicates, and manipulates symbols, categories, and values. She participates in human dialogues not only with other women, but also with men. As Lévi-Strauss says, 'woman could never become just a sign and nothing more, since even in a man's world she is still a person, and since insofar as she is defined as a sign she must [still] be recognized as a generator of signs.'⁹

Indeed the fact of woman's full human consciousness, her full involvement in and commitment to culture's project of transcendence over nature, may, ironically enough, explain another of the great puzzles of 'the woman problem' – woman's nearly universal unquestioning acceptance of her own devaluation. For it would seem that as a conscious human and a member of culture she has followed out the logic of culture's arguments, and reached culture's conclusions along with the men. As de Beauvoir puts it:

For she, too, is an existent, she feels the urge to surpass, and her project is not mere repetition but transcendence towards a different future – in her heart of hearts she finds confirmation of the masculine pretensions. She joins the men in the festivals that celebrate the successes and victories of the males. Her misfortune is to have been biologically destined for the repetition of Life, when even in her own view Life does not carry within itself its reasons for being, reasons that are more important than life itself.¹⁰

In other words, woman's consciousness – her membership, as it were, in culture – is evidenced in part by the fact that she accepts her own devaluation and takes culture's point of view. Because of woman's greater bodily involvement with the natural functions surrounding reproduction, she is seen as more a part of nature than men. Yet, in part because of her consciousness and participation in human social dialogue, she is recognized as a participant in culture. Thus she appears as something intermediate between culture and nature, lower on the scale of transcendence than men.

Woman's physiological functions may thus tend in themselves to motivate (in the semantic sense) a view of woman as closer to nature, a view that she herself, as an observer of herself and the world, would tend to accept. Woman creates naturally from within her own being, while men are free to, or forced to, create artificially, that is, through cultural means, and in such a way as to sustain culture. In addition, woman's physiological functions have tended universally to limit her social movement, and to confine her universally to certain social contexts which *in turn* are seen as closer to nature. That is, not only her bodily processes, but the social situation in which her bodily processes locate her, may have that significance. And insofar as she is permanently associated (in the eyes of the culture) with these social loci, they add weight (perhaps the decisive part of the load) to the view of woman as closer to nature. I refer here of course to woman's confinement to the domestic family context as a 'natural' extension of her lactation processes.

Woman's body, like that of all female mammals, generates milk during and after pregnancy for the feeding of the new-born baby. The baby cannot survive without breast milk or some highly similar formula at this stage of life. Since it is in direct relation to a particular pregnancy with a particular child that the mother's body goes through its lactation processes, the nursing relationship between mother and child is seen as a 'natural' bond and all other feeding arrangements as unnatural and makeshift. Mothers and their children, culture seems to feel, belong together. Further, since children as they get beyond infancy are not yet strong enough to engage in major work, yet are mobile and unruly and not yet capable of understanding various dangers, they require supervision and constant care. Mother is the 'obvious' person for this task, as an extension of her 'natural' nursing bond with the children, or because she has a new infant and is involved with child-oriented activities anyway. Her own activities are thus circumscribed by the limitations and low levels of her children's strengths and skills; she is confined to the domestic family group; 'woman's place is in the home.'

Woman's association with the domestic circle contributes to her being seen as closer to nature in several ways. In the first place, infants and children might easily be considered part of nature. Infants are barely human and utterly unsocialized; like animals they do not walk upright, they excrete without control, they do not speak. Even slightly older children are clearly not yet fully under the sway of culture; they do not yet understand social duties, responsibilities, and morals, their vocabulary and their range of learned skills is small. One can find implicit recognition of an association between children and nature in many cultural practices. For example, the majority of cultures have initiation rites for adolescents (primarily for boys, of course – I will return to this point below), the point of which is to move the child ritually from a less-than-fully-human state into fully fledged society and culture; and many cultures do not hold funeral rites for children who die at early ages, on the explicit notion that they are not yet full social

beings. It is ironic that the rationale for boys' initiation rites in many cultures is that the boys must be purged of the defilement accrued from being around mother and other women so much of the time, when in fact it might be the case that some of the women's defilement derives from being around children so much of the time.

The second major problematic implication of women's close association with the domestic ambience derives from certain structural conflicts between the family and the society at large in any social system. The implications of the 'domestic/social opposition' in relation to the position of women have been cogently developed by Rosaldo¹¹ and I merely wish to show its relevance to the present argument. The notion that the domestic unit – the biological family charged with reproducing and socializing new members of the society – is opposed to the social entity – the superimposed network of alliances and relationships which *is* the society, is also the basis of Lévi-Strauss's argument in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. Lévi-Strauss argues not only that this opposition is present in every social system, but further that it has the significance of the opposition between nature and culture. The universal incest prohibition and its ally, the rule of exogamy, ensure that 'the risk of seeing a biological family become established as a closed system is definitely eliminated; the biological group can no longer stand apart, and the bond of alliance with another family ensures the dominance of the social over the biological, and of the cultural over the natural.'¹² And while not all cultures articulate a radical opposition between the domestic and the social as such, nonetheless it is hardly contestable that the domestic is always subsumed by the social; domestic units are allied with one another through the enactment of rules which are logically at a higher level than the units themselves, and which create an emergent unit – society – which is logically at a higher level than the procreative units of which it is composed.

Now, since women are associated with and indeed more or less confined to the domestic milieu, they are identified with this lower order of social/cultural organization. What are the implications of this for the way they are viewed? First, if the specifically biological (reproductive) function of the family is stressed, as in Lévi-Strauss's formulation, then the family, and hence woman, is identified with nature pure and simple, as opposed to culture. But this is obviously too pat; the point seems more adequately formulated as follows: the family (and hence woman) represents lower-level, socially fragmenting, particularistic sorts of concerns, as opposed to interfamilial relations, which represent higher-level, integrative, universalistic sorts of concerns. Since men lack a natural basis (nursing, generalized to child care) for a familial orientation, their sphere of activity is defined at the level of interfamilial relations. And hence, so the cultural reasoning seems to go, men are the 'natural' proprietors of religion, ritual, politics, and other realms of cultural thought and action in which universalistic statements of spiritual and social synthesis are made. Thus men are identified not only with culture, in the sense of all human creativity, as opposed to nature; they are identified in particular with Culture in the old-fashioned sense of the finer and higher aspects of human thought – art, religion, law, etc.

Once again, the logic of cultural reasoning here, aligning woman with infra-culture and man with culture, is clear, and, on the surface, quite compelling. At the same time, woman cannot be fully consigned to nature, for there are aspects of her situation, even within the domestic context, which undeniably demonstrate her participation in the

cultural process. It goes without saying, of course, that except for nursing newborn infants (and even here artificial nursing devices can cut the biological tie), there is no reason why it has to be mother as opposed to father or anyone else who remains identified with child care. But even assuming that other practical and emotional reasons conspire to keep woman in that sphere, it is possible to show that her activities there could as logically put her squarely in the category of culture, thus demonstrating the relative arbitrariness of defining her as less cultural than men. For example, woman not only feeds and cleans up after children in a simple caretaker operation – she is in fact the primary agent of their socialization. It is she who transforms the newborn infant from a mere organism into a cultured human, teaching it manners and the proper ways to behave in order to be a bona fide member of the culture. On the basis of her socializing functions alone, she is as purely a candidate to be a representative of culture as anyone might be. Yet in virtually every society there is a point at which the socialization of boys is transferred to the hands of men. The boys are considered, in one set of terms or another, not to have been ‘really’ socialized yet; their entrée to the realm of fully human (social, cultural) status can be accomplished only by men. We can still see this in our own schools, where there is a gradual inversion of proportion of female to male teachers as one progresses up through the grades; most kindergarten teachers are female, most university professors are male.¹³

Or again, we might look at cooking. In the overwhelming majority of societies cooking is the woman’s work. No doubt this stems from practical considerations – since she has to stay at home with the baby, it is convenient that she perform the chores that are centered in the home. But if it is true, as Lévi-Strauss has argued,¹⁴ that transforming the raw into the cooked may represent, in many systems of thought, the transition from nature to culture, then here we have woman aligned with this important culturalizing process, which could easily place her in the category of culture, triumphing over nature. Yet when a culture (e.g. France or China) develops a tradition of *haute cuisine* – ‘real’ cooking as opposed to trivial ordinary domestic cooking – the high chefs are almost always men. Thus the pattern replicates that in the area of socialization – women perform lower-level conversions from nature to culture, but when the culture distinguishes a higher level of the same functions, the higher level is restricted to men.

In short, we can see once again the source of woman’s appearing more intermediate than men with respect to the nature/culture dichotomy. A member of culture, yet appearing to have stronger and more direct connections with nature, she is seen as something in between the two categories.

The notion that women have not only a different body and a different social locus from men, but also a different psychic structure, is most controversial. I would like to argue that she probably does have a different psychic structure, but I will draw heavily on a paper by Chodorow which argues convincingly that that psychic structure is not innate, but rather is generated by the facts of the probably universal female socialization experience. Nonetheless, my point is that, if we grant such a thing as the (non-innate) feminine psyche, that psyche has certain characteristics that would tend to reinforce the cultural view of woman as closer to nature.

It is important that we specify that aspect of the feminine psyche which is really the dominant and universal aspect. If we say emotionality or irrationality, we come up against those traditions in various parts of the world in which women functionally are,

and are seen as, more practical, pragmatic, and this-worldly than the men. The relevant, non-ethnocentric dimension seems to be that of relative concreteness versus relative abstractness: the (non-innate) feminine personality tends to get involved with concrete feelings, things, and people, rather than with abstract entities; it tends toward personalism and particularism.

Chodorow accepts a view of the feminine personality along these lines; she states that 'female ego qualities . . . include more flexible ego boundaries (i.e. less insistent self-other distinctions), present orientation rather than future orientation, and relatively greater subjectivity and less detached objectivity.' She cites various studies which have tended to confirm that this is indeed a relatively accurate picture of the female personality; these studies are primarily taken from Western society, although Chodorow suggests that in a broad way the difference between male and female personality – roughly, men as more objective or category-oriented, women as more subjective or person-oriented – are 'nearly universal.'¹⁵

The thrust of Chodorow's very elegantly argued paper is that these differences are not innate or genetically programmed, but arise from 'nearly universal features of family structure, [namely] that women are largely or entirely responsible for early child care and for (at least) later female socialization, [and that this is] a crucial asymmetry in male and female development.' She introduces the object-relations theorists' distinction between 'personal' and 'positional' identification as psychological processes, 'personal identification' being 'diffuse identification with the general personality, behavioral traits, values, and attitudes of someone one loves or admires,' 'positional identification' being 'identification with specific aspects of another's role,' rather than with the whole person.¹⁶ Chodorow argues that, because the mother is the early socializer of both boys and girls, both develop personal identification with her. The boy however must ultimately shift to a masculine role identity, which involves building an identification with the father. Since father is almost always more remote than mother (he is rarely involved in child care, and perhaps works away from the home much of the day), building an identification with father involves a positional male role as a collection of abstract elements, rather than a personal one with father as a real individual. Further, as the boy enters the larger social world, he finds a world in fact organized around more abstract and universalistic criteria,¹⁷ as indicated in the previous section; thus his earlier socialization prepares him for, and is reinforced by, the type of social experience he will have.

For girls, on the other hand, the personal identification with mother created in early infancy can persist into the process of learning female role identity. Because mother is immediate and present to the daughter during the learning of role identity, 'learning to be a woman . . . involves the continuity and development of a girl's relationship to her mother, and is based on generalized personal identification with her rather than on an attempt to learn externally defined roles categories.'¹⁸ This pattern of course prepares the girl for, and is fully reinforced by, her central role in later life – motherhood; she will become involved in the world of women, characterized by few formal role differentiations,¹⁹ and specifically in relationships with her children involving again 'personal identification,' and so the cycle begins anew.

Chodorow demonstrates, to my satisfaction at least, that the source of the feminine personality lies in social structural arrangements rather than innate differences. But,

for my purposes, the significant point is that, insofar as a 'feminine personality,' characterized by personalism and particularism, has been a nearly universal fact, albeit an unconscious by-product of social arrangements, then having such a psyche may have contributed to the universal view of women as somehow less cultural than men. That is, woman's dominant psychic modes of relating would incline her to enter into relationships with the world that culture might see as being more 'like nature,' immanent and embedded in things as given, rather than, like culture, transcending and transforming things through the superimposition of abstract categories and transpersonal values. Woman's relationships to her objects tend to be, like nature, relatively unmediated, more direct, whereas men not only tend to relate in a more mediated way, but in fact, ultimately, often relate more consistently and strongly to the mediating categories and forms than to the persons or objects themselves.

If women indeed have this sort of psyche (albeit as a product of social arrangements), it is not difficult to see how it would lend weight to a view of them as being 'closer to nature.' Yet at the same time, this sort of psychic mode undeniably plays a powerful and important role in the cultural process. For though unmediated relatedness is in some sense at the lowest end of the spectrum of human spiritual functions, embedded and particularizing rather than transcending and synthesizing, that quality of relatedness also stands at the upper end of that spectrum. That is, mothers tend to be committed to their children as individuals, regardless of sex, age, beauty, clan affiliation, or other sorts of categories in which the child might participate. Now, any relationship which has this quality – not just mother and child of course, but any sort of highly personal, relatively unmediated commitment – may be seen as a challenge to culture and society 'from below,' insofar as it represents the fragmentary potential of individual loyalties over the solidarity of the group. But it may also be seen as embodying the cement or synthesizing agent for culture and society 'from above,' in that it represents generalized human values above and beyond particular social category loyalties. Every society must have social categories that transcend personal loyalties, but every society must also generate a sense of ultimate moral unity for all members above and beyond those social categories. Thus that psychic mode which seems to be typical of women, which tends to disregard categories and to seek 'communion'²⁰ directly and personally with others, while appearing infra-cultural from one point of view, is at the same time associated with the highest levels of the cultural process. And thus, too, once again, we see a source of woman's apparent greater ambiguity with respect to culture and nature.

My primary purpose here has been to attempt to explain the universal secondary status of women. Intellectually and personally, I felt strongly challenged by this problem; I felt it had to be dealt with before an analysis of woman's position in any particular society could be undertaken. Local variables of economy, ecology, history, political and social structure, values and worldview – these could explain variations within that universal, but they could not explain the universal itself. And if we were not to accept the ideology of biological determinism, then explanation, it seemed to me, could only proceed by reference to other universals of the human cultural situation. Thus the general outlines of the approach – although not of course the particular solution offered – were determined by the problem itself, and not by any predilection on my part for global abstract structural analysis.

I argued that the universal devaluation of women could be explained by postulating that woman is seen as 'closer to nature' than men, men being seen as more unequivocally occupying the high ground of 'culture.' The culture–nature scale is itself a product of culture, culture being seen as a special process the minimum definition of which is the transcendence, by means of systems of thought and technology, of the natural givens of existence. This, of course, is an analytic definition, but I argued that at some level every culture incorporates this notion in one form or another, if only through the performance of ritual as an assertion of the human ability to manipulate those givens. In any case, the core of the paper has been concerned with showing why woman might tend to be assumed, over and over, in the most diverse sorts of worldviews, and in cultures of every degree of complexity, to be closer to nature than men. Woman's physiology, more involved more of the time with 'species life;' woman's association with the structurally subordinate domestic context, charged with the crucial function of transforming animal-like infants into cultured beings; 'woman's psyche,' appropriately molded to mothering functions by her own socialization, and tending toward greater personalism and less mediated modes of relating – all these factors make woman appear to be rooted more directly and deeply in nature. At the same time, however, her 'membership' and fully necessary participation in culture is recognized by culture and can never be denied. Thus she is seen as something in between culture and nature, occupying an intermediate position.

This intermediacy, further, has several implications for analysis, depending upon how it is read. First, of course, it answers my primary question of why woman is everywhere seen as lower than men, for even if she is not seen as nature pure and simple, she is still seen as achieving less transcendence of nature than men. Here intermediate simply means 'middle status' on a hierarchy of being from culture to nature.

Second, 'intermediate' may have the significance of 'mediating,' i.e. performing some sort of synthesizing or converting function between nature and culture, here seen (by culture) not as two ends of a continuum, but as two radically different sorts of processes in the world. The domestic unit and hence woman who in virtually every case appears as its primary representative, is one of culture's crucial agencies for the conversion of nature into culture, especially with reference to the socialization of children. Any culture's continued viability depends upon properly socialized individuals who will see the world in that culture's terms and adhere more or less unquestioningly to its moral precepts. The functions of the domestic unit must be closely controlled in order to ensure this outcome as far as possible; its stability as an institution must be placed as far as possible beyond question. We see this protection of the integrity and stability of the domestic group in the powerful taboos against incest, matricide, patricide, fratricide,²¹ and so forth. These sorts of injunctions are clearly so vital for society that they are made to appear rooted in the fundamental order of existence; to violate them is to act 'unnaturally,' and the sanctions are often automatic and supernatural rather than merely social and dependent on the vagaries of human moral will. In any case, insofar as woman is virtually universally the primary agent of socialization, and is seen as virtually the embodiment of the functions of the domestic group, she will tend to come under the heavier restrictions and circumscriptions which surround that unit. Her (culturally defined) intermediate position between culture and nature, here having the significance of her *mediation* (i.e. performing conversion functions) between

culture and nature, would thus account not only for her lower status, but for the greater restrictions placed upon her activities. In virtually every culture, her permissible sexual activities are more closely circumscribed than man's, she is offered a much smaller range of role choices, and she is afforded direct access to a far more limited range of the social institutions. Further, she is almost universally socialized to have (and the contexts she lives in as an adult reinforce her having) a narrower and generally more conservative set of attitudes and views than men; this, of course, is another mode of restriction, and would clearly be related to her vital function for society of producing well-socialized members of the group.

Finally, woman's intermediate position may have the implication of greater symbolic *ambiguity*.²² The point here is not so much her location between culture and nature, as the fact of marginality *per se* in relation to the 'centers' of culture, and the ambiguity of meaning which is inherent in a marginal position. If we think of the 'margins' of culture as a continuous periphery, rather than as upper and lower boundaries, we can understand the notion that extremes, as we say, meet – that they are easily transformed into one another in symbolic thought, and hence seem unstable and ambiguous.

These points are quite relevant to an understanding of cultural symbolism and imagery concerning women. As we know, female imagery in cultural constructs of various kinds is astonishingly variable in meaning; frequently within a single cultural tradition it embodies radically divergent and even polarized ideas. In the discussion of the 'female psyche,' I said that the psychic mode associated with women seems to stand both at the bottom and the top of the scale of human modes of relating. That mode tends to cause involvement more directly with others in themselves than as representatives of social categories of one kind or another; this mode can be seen either as 'ignoring' (and thus subverting) or 'transcending' (and thus achieving a higher synthesis of) those social categories, depending upon how culture cares to look at it for any given purpose. Thus we can account easily for both the subversive female symbols – witches, evil eye, menstrual pollution, castrating mothers – and the feminine symbols of transcendence – mother goddesses, merciful savioresses, female symbols of justice, and the strong presence of feminine symbolism (but not actual women) in the realms of art, religion, ritual, and law. Further we can understand the penchant of polarized feminine symbols, like all marginal symbols, to transform into one another in rather magical ways: the whore, it seems, can be redeemed to sainthood more easily than the faithful housewife.

If woman's (culturally viewed) intermediacy between culture and nature has this implication of generalized ambiguity of meaning characteristic of marginal phenomena, then we are in a better position to account for those cultural and historical 'inversions' in which women are in some way or another symbolically aligned with culture and men with nature. A number of cases come to mind: the Sirionó of Brazil, among whom, according to Ingham, 'nature, the raw, and maleness' are opposed to 'culture, the cooked, and femaleness';²³ Nazi Germany, in which women were said to be the guardians of culture and morals; European courtly love, in which man was said to be the beast and woman the pristine exalted object – a pattern of thinking that persists, for example, among modern Spanish peasants;²⁴ and there are undoubtedly other cases of this sort. These instances (in fact, of course, *all* cultural symbolic constructs) still require detailed analysis of cultural data, but the point of woman's generalized

marginality with respect to culture, and particularly the polarized ambiguity, from the point of view of culture, of the feminine mode of interpersonal relations, may at least lay the groundwork for such analyses.

In short, the postulate that woman is viewed as closer to nature than man has several implications for further analysis, and can be read in several different ways. If female-ness is read simply as a *middle* position on the scale of culture to nature, then it is still seen as lower than culture and thus accounts for the pan-cultural assumption that women are lower than men in the order of things. If it is read as a *mediating* element in the culture–nature relationship, then it may account in part for the cultural tendency not merely to devalue women but to circumscribe and restrict their functions, since culture must maintain control over its (pragmatic and symbolic) mechanisms for the conversion of nature into culture. And if it is read as an *ambiguous* status between culture and nature, the ambiguity may help to account for the fact that, in specific cultural ideologies and symbolizations, woman can occasionally be categorized as ‘culture,’ and can in any event be assigned widely divergent and even polarized meanings in symbolic systems. Middle status, mediating functions, ambiguous meaning – all are different readings, for different contextual purposes, of woman’s assigned intermediate status between nature and culture.

Ultimately, of course, it must be stressed that the whole scheme is a construct of culture rather than a given of nature. Woman is not ‘in reality’ any closer to (nor farther from) nature than man – both have consciousness, both are mortal. But there are certainly reasons why she appears to be that way. The result is a vicious circle: various aspects of woman’s situation (physical, social, psychological) lead to her being seen as ‘closer to nature,’ while the view of her as closer to nature is embodied in institutional forms that regenerate her situation. The implications for social change are similarly circular: a different cultural view can grow only out of a different social actuality, a different social actuality can grow only out of a different cultural view.

Women cannot change their bodies. But it seems unlikely that the physiological difference between men and women would be adequate to motivate the devalued view of women were that view not lent further weight by the social and psychological variables discussed above. While I am not prepared to put forth a detailed program of social and cultural renovation, it seems clear that the way out of the circle involves society’s allowing women to participate in, and women actively appropriating, the fullest range of social roles and activities available within the culture. Men and women can, and must, be equally involved in projects of creativity and transcendence. Only then will women easily be seen as aligned with culture, in culture’s ongoing dialectic with nature.

Acknowledgements

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Terence Turner, and the present version of the paper, in which the thrust of the argument has been rather significantly changed, was written in response to those comments. I of course retain responsibility for its final form [which appeared] in *Woman, Culture and Society*, ed. Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press) [1974, pp. 67–87]. The paper is dedicated to Simone de Beauvoir; *The Second Sex*, published in [French in] 1949, remains in my opinion the best single, comprehensive statement of ‘the woman problem.’

Notes

- 1 R. G. H. Siu, *The Man of Many Qualities* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968), p. 2.
- 2 Robert Lowie, *The Crow Indians* (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1956), pp. 61, 44, 60, 229. While we are on the subject of oppression of various kinds, we might note that Lowie secretly bought this doll, the most sacred object in the tribal repertoire, from its custodian, the widow of Wrinkled-face. She asked \$400 for it, but this price was ‘far beyond [Lowie’s] means,’ so he ultimately got it for \$80 (p. 300).
- 3 Sherry B. Ortner, ‘Sherpa purity’, *American Anthropologist*, 75 (1973): 49–63; and Sherry B. Ortner, ‘Purification rites and customs’, *New Encyclopaedia Britannica: micropaedia*, 15th edn (Chicago, IL: Encyclopaedia Britannica).
- 4 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Bantam Books, 1961), pp. 60, 24, 24–7 and passim, 239.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 31.
- 6 *Ibid.*, pp. 58–9.
- 7 Indeed, it is one of the more egregious injustices of cultural thought that, in most cultural symbolic concordances, woman is associated with death rather than with life.
- 8 de Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, p. 59.
- 9 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, trans. J. H. Bell and J. R. von Sturmer; ed. R. Needham (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 496.
- 10 de Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, p. 59.
- 11 Michelle Z. Rosaldo, ‘Women, culture and society: a theoretical overview’, in *Woman, Culture and Society*, ed. M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 17–42.
- 12 Lévi-Strauss, *Elementary Structures*, p. 479.
- 13 I remember having my first male teacher in fifth grade, and I remember being excited about that – it was somehow more grown-up.
- 14 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, trans. J. and D. Weightman (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).
- 15 Nancy Chodorow, ‘Family structure and feminine personality’, in *Woman, Culture and Society*, ed. Rosaldo and Lamphere, pp. 43, 56.
- 16 *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 51.
- 17 Chodorow, ‘Family structure’, pp. 49, 58; Rosaldo, ‘Women, culture and society’, pp. 28–9.
- 18 Chodorow, ‘Family structure’, p. 51.
- 19 Rosaldo, ‘Women, culture and society’, p. 29.
- 20 Chodorow, ‘Family structure’, p. 55, following David Bakan, *The Duality of Human Existence* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1966).
- 21 Nobody seems to care much about sororicide.
- 22 See Rosaldo, ‘Women, culture and society’.
- 23 John M. Ingham, ‘Are the Sirionó raw or cooked?’, *American Anthropologist*, 73 (1971): 1092–9. Ingham’s discussion is rather ambiguous itself, since women are also associated with animals: ‘the con-

trasts man/animal and man/woman are evidently similar . . . hunting is the means of acquiring women as well as animals' (p. 1095). A careful reading of his data suggests that both women and animals are mediators between nature and culture in this tradition.

24 See Julian Pitt-Rivers, *People of the Sierra* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1961); and Rosaldo, 'Women, culture and society'.

Carolee Schneemann, 'From Tape no. 2 for "Kitch's Last Meal"' (1973)

Text used in super-8 film 'Kitch's Last Meal' (1973–5) and 'Interior Scroll' (1975, 1977), reproduced in *More than Meat Joy: Performance Works and Selected Writings* (2nd edn, New Paltz, NY: Documentext, 1997).

I met a happy man
a structuralist filmmaker
– but don't call me that it's something else I do –
he said we are fond of you
you are charming
but don't ask us to look at your films
we cannot
there are certain films we cannot look at:
the personal clutter
the persistence of feelings
the hand-touch sensibility
the diaristic indulgence
the painterly mess
the dense gestalt
the primitive techniques

(I don't take the advice of men
they only talk to themselves)

**PAY ATTENTION TO CRITICAL AND PRACTICAL FILM LANGUAGE
IT EXISTS FOR AND IN ONLY ONE GENDER**

even if you are older than me you are a monster
I spawned you have slithered out of the excesses and
vitality of the '60s

he said you can do as I do
take one clear process
follow its strictest implications
intellectually establish a system of permutations
establish their visual set

I said my film is concerned with
DIET AND DIGESTION

very well he said then why the train?

the train is DEATH as there is die in diet
and di in digestion

then you are back to metaphors and meanings
my work has no meaning beyond the logic of its systems
I have done away with emotion intuition inspiration –
those aggrandized habits which set artists apart from
ordinary people – those unclear tendencies which are
inflicted upon viewers . . .

it's true I said when I watch your films
my mind wanders freely during the half hour
of pulseing dots I compose letters
dream of my lover
write a grocery list
rummage in the trunk for a missing sweater
plan the drainage pipes for the root cellar
– it is pleasant not to be manipulated

he protested
you are unable to understand and appreciate
the system the grid the numerical and rational procedures
the Pythagorean cues –

I saw my failings were worthy of dismissal
I'd be buried alive
my works lost . . .

he said we can be friends equally
tho' we are not artists equally

I said we cannot be friends equally
and we cannot be artists equally

he told me he had lived with a 'sculptress'
I asked does that make me a 'film-makeress'?

Oh no he said we think of you as a dancer.

Faith Wilding, 'Waiting' (1977)

From *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist*, by Judy Chicago
(New York: Anchor Books, 1977), pp. 213–17.

(A female voice speaks in passive, plaintive tone, childlike at first, becoming almost desperate at adolescence, tender at motherhood, and then very slow and cracked in age)

Waiting . . . waiting . . . waiting . . .
 Waiting for someone to come in
 Waiting for someone to pick me up
 Waiting for someone to hold me
 Waiting for someone to feed me
 Waiting for someone to change my diaper. Waiting . . .
 Waiting to crawl, to walk, waiting to talk
 Waiting to be cuddled
 Waiting for someone to take me outside
 Waiting for someone to play with me
 Waiting for someone to put me on the toilet
 Waiting for someone to read to me, dress me, tie my shoes
 Waiting for Mommy to brush my hair
 Waiting for her to curl my hair
 Waiting to wear my frilly dress
 Waiting to be a pretty girl
 Waiting to sit on Daddy's lap. Waiting . . .
 Waiting for my new school clothes
 Waiting for someone to take me to school
 Waiting to stay up until seven o'clock
 Waiting to be a big girl
 Waiting to grow up. Waiting . . .

Waiting for my breasts to develop
 Waiting to wear a bra
 Waiting to menstruate
 Waiting to read forbidden books
 Waiting to stop being clumsy
 Waiting to have a good figure
 Waiting for my first date
 Waiting to have a boyfriend
 Waiting to go to a party, to be asked to dance, to dance close
 Waiting to be beautiful
 Waiting for the secret
 Waiting for life to begin. Waiting . . .
 Waiting to be somebody
 Waiting to wear makeup
 Waiting for my pimples to go away
 Waiting to wear lipstick, to wear high heels and stockings
 Waiting to get dressed up, to shave my legs
 Waiting to be pretty. Waiting . . .
 Waiting for him to notice me, to call me
 Waiting for him to ask me out
 Waiting for him to pay attention to me
 Waiting for him to fall in love with me
 Waiting for him to kiss me, touch me, touch my breasts
 Waiting for him to pass my house
 Waiting for him to tell me I'm beautiful

Waiting for him to ask me to go steady
Waiting to neck, to make out, waiting to go all the way
Waiting to smoke, to drink, to stay out late
Waiting to be a woman. Waiting . . .
Waiting for my great love
Waiting for the perfect man
Waiting for Mr Right. Waiting . . .

Waiting to get married
Waiting for my wedding day
Waiting for my wedding night
Waiting for sex
Waiting for him to make the first move
Waiting for him to excite me
Waiting for him to give me pleasure
Waiting for him to give me an orgasm. Waiting . . .
Waiting for him to come home, to fill my time. Waiting . . .
Waiting for my baby to come
Waiting for my belly to swell
Waiting for my breasts to fill with milk
Waiting to feel my baby move
Waiting for my legs to stop swelling
Waiting for the first contractions
Waiting for the contractions to end
Waiting for the head to emerge
Waiting for the first scream, the afterbirth
Waiting to hold my baby
Waiting for my baby to suck my milk
Waiting for my baby to stop crying
Waiting for my baby to sleep through the night
Waiting for my breasts to dry up
Waiting to get my figure back, for the stretch marks to go away
Waiting for some time to myself
Waiting to be beautiful again
Waiting for my child to go to school
Waiting for life to begin. Waiting . . .

Waiting for my children to come home from school
Waiting for them to grow up, to leave home
Waiting to be myself
Waiting for excitement
Waiting for him to tell me something interesting, to ask me how I feel
Waiting for him to stop being crabby, reach for my hand, kiss me good morning
Waiting for fulfillment
Waiting for the children to marry
Waiting for something to happen. Waiting . . .
Waiting to lose weight
Waiting for the first gray hair
Waiting for menopause

Waiting to grow wise
 Waiting . . .
 Waiting for my body to break down, to get ugly
 Waiting for my flesh to sag
 Waiting for my breasts to shrivel up
 Waiting for a visit from my children, for letters
 Waiting for my friends to die.
 Waiting for my husband to die. Waiting . . .
 Waiting to get sick
 Waiting for things to get better
 Waiting for winter to end
 Waiting for the mirror to tell me I'm old
 Waiting for a good bowel movement
 Waiting for the pain to go away
 Waiting for the struggle to end
 Waiting for release
 Waiting for morning
 Waiting for the end of day
 Waiting for sleep. Waiting . . .

Monique Wittig, 'The Straight Mind' (1980)

From *Feminist Issues*, 1(1) (1980), pp. 106–11.

[. . .] If the discourse of modern theoretical systems and social science exerts a power upon us, it is because it works with concepts which closely touch us. In spite of the historic advent of the lesbian, feminist, and gay liberation movements, whose proceedings have already upset the philosophical and political categories of the discourses of the social sciences, their categories (thus brutally put into question) are nevertheless utilized without examination by contemporary science. They function like primitive concepts in a conglomerate of all kinds of disciplines, theories, and current ideas that I will call the straight mind (see *The Savage Mind* by Claude Lévi-Strauss). They concern 'woman,' 'man,' 'sex,' 'difference,' and all of the series of concepts which bear this mark, including such concepts as 'history,' 'culture,' and the 'real.' And although it has been accepted in recent years that there is no such thing as nature, that everything is culture, there remains within that culture a core of nature which resists examination, a relationship excluded from the social in the analysis – a relationship whose characteristic is ineluctability in culture, as well as in nature, and which is the heterosexual relationship. I will call it the obligatory social relationship between 'man' and 'woman.' (Here I refer to Ti-Grace Atkinson and her analysis of sexual intercourse as an institution.)¹ With its ineluctability as knowledge, as an obvious principle, as a given prior to any science, the straight mind develops a totalizing interpretation of history, social

reality, culture, language, and all the subjective phenomena at the same time. I can only underline the oppressive character that the straight mind is clothed in in its tendency to immediately universalize its production of concepts into general laws which claim to hold true for all societies, all epochs, all individuals. Thus one speaks of *the* exchange of women, *the* difference between the sexes, *the* symbolic order, *the* Unconscious, desire, *jouissance*, culture, history, giving an absolute meaning to these concepts when they are only categories founded upon heterosexuality or thought which produces the difference between the sexes as a political and philosophical dogma.

The consequence of this tendency toward universality is that the straight mind cannot conceive of a culture, a society where heterosexuality would not order not only all human relationships but also its very production of concepts and all the processes which escape consciousness, as well. Additionally, these unconscious processes are historically more and more imperative in what they teach us about ourselves through the instrumentality of specialists. The rhetoric which expresses them (and whose seduction I do not underestimate) envelops itself in myths, resorts to enigma, proceeds by accumulating metaphors, and its function is to poeticize the obligatory character of the 'you-will-be-straight-or-you-will-not-be.'

In this thought, to reject the obligation of coitus and the institutions that this obligation has produced as necessary for the constitution of a society, is simply an impossibility, since to do this would mean to reject the possibility of the constitution of the other and to reject the 'symbolic order,' to make the constitution of meaning impossible, without which no one can maintain an internal coherence. Thus lesbianism, homosexuality, and the societies that we form cannot be thought of or spoken of, even though they have always existed. Thus, the straight mind continues to affirm that incest, and not homosexuality, represents its major interdiction. Thus, when thought by the straight mind, homosexuality is nothing but heterosexuality.

Yes, straight society is based on the necessity of the different/other at every level. It cannot work economically, symbolically, linguistically, or politically without this concept. This necessity of the different/other is an ontological one for the whole conglomerate of sciences and disciplines that I call the straight mind. But what is the different/other if not the dominated? For heterosexual society is the society which not only oppresses lesbians and gay men, it oppresses many different/others, it oppresses all women and many categories of men, all those who are in the position of the dominated. To constitute a difference and to control it is an 'act of power, since it is essentially a normative act. Everybody tries to show the other as different. But not everybody succeeds in doing so. One has to be socially dominant to succeed in it.'²

For example, the concept of difference between the sexes ontologically constitutes women into different/others. Men are not different, whites are not different, nor are the masters. But the blacks, as well as the slaves, are. This ontological characteristic of the difference between the sexes affects all the concepts which are part of the same conglomerate. But for us there is no such thing as being-woman or being-man. 'Man' and 'woman' are political concepts of opposition, and the copula which dialectically unites them is, at the same time, the one which abolishes them.³ It is the class struggle between women and men which will abolish men and women.⁴ The concept of difference has

nothing ontological about it. It is only the way that the masters interpret a historical situation of domination. The function of difference is to mask at every level the conflicts of interest, including ideological ones.

In other words, for us, this means there cannot any longer be women and men, and that as classes and as categories of thought or language they have to disappear, politically, economically, ideologically. If we, as lesbians and gay men, continue to speak of ourselves and to conceive of ourselves as women and as men, we are instrumental in maintaining heterosexuality. I am sure that an economic and political transformation will not dedramatize these categories of language. Can we redeem *slave*? Can we redeem *nigger*, *negress*? How is *woman* different? Will we continue to write *white*, *master*, *man*? The transformation of economic relationships will not suffice. We must produce a political transformation of the key concepts, that is of the concepts which are strategic for us. For there is another order of materiality, that of language, and language is worked upon from within by these strategic concepts. It is at the same time tightly connected to the political field where everything that concerns language, science and thought refers to the person as subjectivity and to her/his relationship to society.⁵ And we cannot leave this within the power of the straight mind or the thought of domination.

If among all the productions of the straight mind I especially challenge structuralism and the structural unconscious, it is because: at the moment in history when the domination of social groups can no longer appear as a logical necessity to the dominated, because they revolt, because they question the differences, Lévi-Strauss, Lacan and their epigones call upon necessities which escape the control of consciousness and therefore the responsibility of individuals.

They call upon unconscious processes, for example, which require the exchange of women as a necessary condition for every society. According to them, that is what the unconscious tells us with authority, and the symbolic order, without which there is no meaning, no language, no society, depends on it. But what does women being exchanged mean if not that they are dominated? No wonder then that there is only one unconscious, and that it is heterosexual. It is an unconscious which looks too consciously after the interests of the masters⁶ in whom it lives for them to be dispossessed of their concepts so easily. Besides, domination is denied; there is no slavery of women, there is difference. To which I will answer with this statement made by a Rumanian peasant at a public meeting in 1848: 'Why do the gentlemen say it was not slavery, for we know it to have been slavery, this sorrow that we have sorrowed.' Yes, we know it, and this science of oppression cannot be taken away from us.

It is from this science that we must track down the 'what goes-without-saying' heterosexual, and (I paraphrase the early Roland Barthes) we must not bear 'seeing Nature and History confused at every turn.'⁷ We must make it brutally apparent that structuralism, psychoanalysis, and particularly Lacan have rigidly turned their concepts into myths – Difference, Desire, the Name-of-the-father, etc. They have even 'over-mythified' the myths, an operation that was necessary for them in order to systematically heterosexualize that personal dimension which suddenly emerged through the dominated individuals into the historical field, particularly through women, who started their struggle almost two centuries ago. And it has been done

systematically, in a concert of interdisciplinarity, never more harmonious than since the heterosexual myths started to circulate with ease from one formal system to another, like sure values that can be invested, in anthropology as well as in psychoanalysis and in all the social sciences.

This ensemble of heterosexual myths is a system of signs which uses figures of speech, and thus it can be politically studied from within the science of our oppression: 'for-we-know-it-to-have-been-slavery' is the dynamic which introduces the diachronism of history into the fixed discourse of eternal essences. This undertaking should somehow be a political semiology, although with 'this sorrow that we have sorrowed' we work also at the level of language/manifesto, of language/action, that which transforms, that which makes history.

In the meantime in the systems that seemed so eternal and universal that laws could be extracted from them, laws that could be stuffed into computers, and in any case for the moment stuffed into the unconscious machinery, in these systems, thanks to our action and our language, shifts are happening. Such a model, as for example, the exchange of women, re-engulfs history in so violent and brutal a way that the whole system, which was believed to be formal, topples over into another dimension of knowledge. This dimension belongs to us, since somehow we have been designated, and since, as Lévi-Strauss said, we talk, let us say that we break off the heterosexual contract.

So, this is what lesbians say everywhere in this country and in some others, if not with theories at least through their social practice, whose repercussions upon straight culture and society are still unenvisionable. An anthropologist might say that we have to wait for fifty years. Yes, if one wants to universalize the functioning of these societies and make their invariants appear. Meanwhile the straight concepts are undermined. What is woman? Panic, general alarm for an active defense. Frankly, it is a problem that the lesbians do not have because of a change of perspective, and it would be incorrect to say that lesbians associate, make love, live with women, for 'woman' has meaning only in heterosexual systems of thought and heterosexual economic systems. Lesbians are not women.⁸

Acknowledgement

This text was first read in New York at the Modern Language Association Convention in 1978 and dedicated to American lesbians.

Notes

- 1 Ti-Grace Atkinson, *Amazon Odyssey* (New York: Links Books, 1974), pp. 13–23.
- 2 Claude Faugeron and Philippe Robert, *La Justice et son public et les représentations sociales du système pénal* (Paris: Masson, 1978).
- 3 See, for her definition of 'social sex', Nicole-Claude Mathieu, 'Notes pour une définition sociologique des catégories de sexe', *Epistemologie Sociologique*, 11 (1971); trans. in Nicole-Claude

Mathieu, *Ignored by Some, Denied by Others: The Social Sex Category in Sociology* (pamphlet), Explorations in Feminism 2 (London: Women's Research and Resources Centre Publications, 1977), pp. 16–37.

4 In the same way as for every other class struggle where the categories of opposition are 'reconciled' by the struggle whose goal is to make them disappear.

5 See Christine Delphy, 'Pour un féminisme matérialiste', *l'Arc* 61, *Simone de Beauvoir et la lutte des femmes*.

6 Are the millions of dollars a year made by the psychoanalysts symbolic?

7 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), p. 11.

8 No more is any woman who is not in a relation of personal dependency with a man.

Isabelle Bernier, 'In the Shadow of Contemporary Art' (1986)

From *Feministe toi-même, féministe quand même*, ed. Nicole Jolicoeur and Isabelle Bernier, trans. S. D. Hassan (Quebec: La Chambre Blanche, 1986), pp. 52–8.

Comments Concerning the Social Connotations of Art Forms

The social connotations (in relation to gender, culture and class, etc.) of art forms are a complex phenomenon, the study of which concerns history, sociology, semiology, psychology, etc. The aim of this article is not to explain in detail these connotations but rather to illustrate their existence and their crucial importance in the construction of the art hierarchy and, subsequently, to the maintenance of the Cultural Order. Consequently, I'll limit myself to several remarks and examples.

[. . .] in the modern Western ideology, an association with women, the working class or non-Western cultures is almost invariably accompanied by a fall in the status of the art form. These connotations can stem from the public and/or the artists with which the form is associated. For instance, jewelry's feminine connotations do not originate in the gender of the jeweler but in that of the client/public. On the other hand, the feminine connotations of quilts are based upon the gender of the maker.

Incidentally, many lesser arts do not have feminine connotations: most forms of carpentry, furniture making, iron foundry, smithery, etc. conjure extremely virile connotations.

It is clear that social connotations are neither fixed nor universal, as is demonstrated in Pollock and Parker's example of the 'connotative' evolution of embroidery, which saw its status decline as its feminine connotations increased. They illustrate the same process in their analysis of flower painting.

Taking up earlier examples, let's compare some of oil painting's connotations with those suggested by ceramics. Although Michelangelo – who was known for his frescoes – considered oil painting 'good for women and the lazy',¹ it now benefits from its association with the works by the Great Masters (men) in art history (Western). Like oil painting, ceramics have often been practiced by men (one need only refer to the

production of Sèvres and Meissen, or the works of Josiah Wedgwood). However, its common connotations are much less glorious than those suggested by oil painting. Older than oil painting, ceramics evoke non-industrialised – therefore supposedly ‘primitive’ – cultures and/or Oriental cultures. One encounters ceramics in museums of ethnology more often than in galleries of contemporary art. Ceramics convey the preparation of food and are by extension associated with the domestic activities of women: like jewelry, dishes have predominantly feminine connotations.

As many authors have observed, whenever an art form is practiced by both men and women, its supposedly superior mode is usually reserved for men while its ‘banal’ mode falls to women. Such is the case of the culinary arts, sewing and tapestry. All of them have feminine connotations because they have often been practiced by women, yet on the most ‘sophisticated’ level they have been controlled by men, and therefore, in their *artistic* mode, conjure masculine associations.

This is demonstrated in the *Petit Robert* (1983) which gives the following definition for *tapisserie* (tapestry):

- 1 Upholstery, generally made of tapestry (2 or 3); . . .
- 2 A work of art using textiles, executed on a loom, in which the design is the result of the weave itself. . . . *Tapestries of Flanders. Tapestries of the Gobelins, of Beauvais, of Aubusson.* . . . The art of these works; . . .
- 3 A work done by women with a needle in which the canvas is entirely covered with woolen or silken threads. *To make a tapestry. ‘Slippers made of tapestry’ (Gautier). Armchairs covered with tapestry.* The art of producing these works. *Tapestry points.* . . .

The word *tapisserie*, thus, refers to two kinds of work: a work of *art* and a work done by *women*. The opposition between art and women is well illustrated by the examples furnished by the *Petit Robert*; it is needless to say that the well-known French and Flemish factories owe their most famous designs (*cartons*) to men (Jan Van Eyck, Rogier Van der Weyden, Poussin, De Troy, Boucher, etc.).

The same comments can be made about weaving, for the *great* Western designers of fabrics are by definition men. Nonetheless, especially in its most ‘rudimentary’ mode, this art has a strong feminine connotation. In a ludicrous passage, Sigmund Freud attributes the invention of weaving to *penis envy*:

Shame . . . has as its purpose, we believe, concealment of (female) genital deficiency . . . It seems that women have made few contributions to the discoveries and inventions in the history of civilization; there is, however, one technique which they may have invented – that of plaiting and weaving. If that is so, we should be tempted to guess the unconscious motive for the achievement. Nature herself would seem to have given the model which this achievement imitates by causing the growth at maturity of the pubic hair that conceals the genitals. The step that remained to be taken lay in making the threads adhere to one another, while on the body they stick into the skin and are only matted together.²

As for *couture* (sewing), *couturier* (fashion designer, masc.) and *couturière* (dressmaker, fem.), the *Petit Robert* (again in the 1983 edition) defines them in a rather revealing manner:

Couture: 1 The action or the art of sewing. . . . 2 . . . The profession of those who make clothing for women . . . The *couturier's* profession . . .

Couturier: A person who directs a sewing shop, creates original patterns, presents them with the aid of models, and has them made in his studios upon the request of his clients . . .

Couturière: A woman who sews and makes clothing for women at her own expense . . .

Couture clearly has feminine connotations, not only because of its public/clientele but also because it has been practiced by many women in the home or professionally. However, as one might have guessed, *haute couture* is associated with men: the *couturier* directs and creates, whereas the *couturière* sews and makes.

It is interesting to note that although the representation of the human form was situated at the pinnacle of the hierarchy of 'subjects', the arts which come into contact with the body – whether they be useful or not – have a significantly lower status; and as chance would have it, the greater part of them have feminine connotations (weaving, lacework, embroidery, sewing, jewelry, etc.). Several art forms associated with the body, having feminine and/or non-'Western' connotations, barely merit the title of art: for example knitting and make up (in the broad sense of the term). Since the body, a natural element, is frequently perceived in the Western world in opposition to the intellect and to culture, it is not surprising that contact with the body is often linked with a devaluation of an art form. Moreover, the modern bourgeois ideology has attempted to limit the majority of women to a supposedly 'corporeal' or 'biological' role in society (sexuality and procreation, care of the children, daily preparation of food, etc.). Similarly, it has tried to dehumanize non-Western cultures by pushing them into the sphere of nature through the application of specific stereotypes.³

I hope these few remarks provide a better understanding of the subliminal yet paramount presence of the social connotations attached to each of the art forms. [. . .]

Notes

1 Quoted by Jean-Paul Bonnes in *La passionnante histoire de la peinture racontée à tous* (Lausanne: Editions de l'Oeil, 1957), p. 73 (translated by SDH).

2 Sigmund Freud, 'Femininity', *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1965), p. 132.

3 In 1983 I did an installation at La Chambre Blanche entitled *Suzanna and the Elders I*, which included two columns of words written directly on the wall. Here is an extract from the columns:

decorative	significant	manual	intellectual
feeling	thought	group	individual
body	mind	anonymous	renown
nature	culture	repetitive	creative
woman	man	functional	art for art's sake
domestic	public	decorative arts	fine arts
craft	art	low	high
primitive	civilized		

Luce Irigaray, 'Writing as a Woman' (1987)

Luce Irigaray (LI) interviewed by Alice Jardine (AJ) and Anne Menke in *Je tu nous: Towards a Culture of Difference*, trans. A. Martin (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 52–8 (first published in France, 1987).

AJ: Writing as a woman: is this valid and does it enter into your practice as a writer?

LI: I am a woman. I write with who I am. Why wouldn't that be valid, unless out of contempt for the value of women or from a denial of a culture in which the sexual is a significant subjective and objective dimension? But how could I on the one hand be a woman, and on the other, a writer? Only those who are still in a state of verbal automatism or who mimic already existing meaning can maintain such a scission or split between she who is a woman and she who writes. The whole of my body is sexuante. My sexuality isn't restricted to my sex and to the sexual act (in the narrow sense). I think the effects of repression and especially the lack of sexual culture – civil and religious – are still so powerful that they enable such strange statements to be upheld as 'I am a woman' and 'I do not write as a woman.' In these protestations there's also a secret allegiance to the between-men cultures. Indeed, alphabetical writing is linked historically to the civil and religious codification of patriarchal powers. Not to contribute to making language and its writings sexed is to perpetuate the pseudo-neutrality of those laws and traditions that privilege masculine genealogies and their codes of logic.

AJ: Many women writing today find themselves for the first time historically within institutions, such as universities or psychoanalysis. In your view, will this new place for women help get them into the twentieth-century canon, and will that be at the very heart of this corpus or will they (still) be kept to the footnotes?

LI: At the present time, there aren't that many women working in institutions. Those that do are often restricted in how far they can go in their career. Very few women reach the highest posts and they pay very dearly for it, in one way or another. That this is true is shown by the debates concerning names for occupations.

However, in order to write things that will be inscribed into and remain in the memory of the twentieth century, just being in an institution isn't enough. It sometimes enables thought to be spread rapidly, but that gives no indication of what its historical impact will be. It's quite possible that many of the women who are allowed into institutions talk about a culture that has already passed and not about what will remain as a trace of the elaboration of the present and the future.

Where will this civilization, which is in the course of construction, be expressed? Not just in writing, that's for sure! However, taking the written corpus alone, the footnotes are often the least accessible place for women. Because in these a name has to be

cited, as well as the title of the book or article, and precise references to a text have to be given; at least that's what I understand. Some women's work has already entered into the body of books, but it's often been assimilated without a precise indication of who produced it. Culture has taught us to consume the mother's body – natural and spiritual – without being indebted and, as far as the world of men is concerned, to mark this appropriation with their name. Your question seems to suggest that this cannot change. Women's words are to remain in the main body or in the notes of a text they have neither written nor signed by their name. Unless the way your question has been put or translated is incorrect?

What's most difficult to understand in History are the different contributions men and women make to civilization. A sign of the reality and recognition of this would be the publication of books signed by women that contribute to the elaboration of culture in a manner irreplaceably theirs, not that of men. Another indication of a transformation in the order of symbolic exchanges would be a proliferation of texts showing a real dialogue between women and men.

AJ: Nowadays we are witnessing the production of literary, philosophical, and psycho-analytical theory by women that is recognized as being significant, and at the same time, a new fluidity between the boundaries of disciplines and between styles of writing. Will these two parallel movements lead to women merely being welcomed alongside men or to the definitive blurring of the distinctions between categories?

LI: There is not a great amount of fluidity between disciplines and styles of writing these days. The many fields of knowledge and techniques have made the boundaries between forms of knowledge more watertight now than they were in the past. In previous centuries, there was a dialogue between philosophers and scientists. Nowadays, they are often complete strangers to each other because their languages don't enable them to communicate with one another.

Are there new areas of exchange between disciplines such as philosophy, psychoanalysis, and literature? This is a complex question. There are attempts to pass from one field to another but they are not always successful because they lack the necessary scope. What we are witnessing is a modification in the use of language by certain philosophers who are returning to their cultural origins. Thus, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Hegel before them question their Greek foundations, their religious foundations, Derrida his relationship to the books of the Old Testament. For them this move goes along with using a style which is close to that of tragedy, poetry, the Platonic dialogues, mythical expression, religious acts and parables. This return is a return to the moment when male identity was constituted as patriarchal and phallographic. Is it women's emergence from the home and silence that has forced men to ask themselves a few questions? All the latter philosophers – except Heidegger – are explicitly interested in female identity, sometimes in their own identity as feminine or women. Will this lead to the blurring of the distinctions between categories? Which ones? In the name of what? Or whom? Why? I think what you call categories are areas of knowledge and not the logical categories of discourse and of truth. The establishment of new logical forms or rules has to be accompanied by a new subjective identity, new rules for determining signification. Which is also a prerequisite for women to be able to situate

themselves in cultural production alongside and with men. In turning back toward the moment when they seized sociocultural power(s), are men looking for a way to divest themselves of those powers? I hope so. This would imply that they are inviting women to share in the definition and exercise of truth with them. Writing differently has not, as yet, done much to change the sex of political leaders nor their civil and religious discourses.

Is it just a matter of patience? Should we be patient faced with decisions made on our behalf and in our name? Of course, as far as I'm concerned, there's no question of us turning to violence, but we should investigate ways of giving an identity to the sciences, to religions, and to political policies and of situating ourselves in relation to them as subjects in our own right. Literature is fine. But how can we bring the world of men to govern peoples poetically when what they are interested in above all is money, competition for power, and so on? And how can we govern the world as women if we have not defined our identity, the rules concerning our genealogical relationships, our social, linguistic, and cultural order? Psychoanalysis can be a great help to us in this task if we know how to use it in a way suited to our spiritual and corporeal needs and desires. It can help us to draw away from patriarchal culture, provided we don't allow ourselves to be defined by nor attracted to the male genealogical world's theories and problems.

AF: Given the problematic and the politics of the categories of the canon, and given the issues we've touched on here, will your work find a place in the twentieth-century canon, and how will it be presented within it? In your view, what might the contents of this canon be?

LI: [. . .] You seem to ignore the fact that there are several languages and that they evolve. Take the question of gender, for example, which not all languages treat the same way. With your hypothesis we come back to the problem of knowing which language will win out over the others. In that there is very much a cataclysmic horizon to which I couldn't subscribe, no more than I could adhere to the belief that there are universals programming meaning, eternally and globally, for all men and for all women. That being said, I could give the following response to your question: will the future emphasize the subject or the object? Communication and exchanges of meaning or the possession of material goods? To these alternatives, which in part correspond to the different expression of gender in particular Romance and Germanic languages, my response is that I wouldn't wish ancient cultural traditions to be abolished by civilizations that are less developed in terms of subjectivity. I would like the culture of the subject to which I belong, notably owing to my language, to progress toward a culture of the sexed subject and not towards a thoughtless destruction of subjectivity. Looked at in these terms, I very much hope to figure in the cultural memory of the twentieth century and to contribute to the transformations in the forms and contents of discourse. For me this wish goes hand in hand with a hope for a future that is *more* rather than *less* cultured than the past or present, a future in which symbolic exchanges will be more free, more just, and more developed than at present, including in the religious dimension which the word 'canon' evokes. [. . .]

Andrea Blum et al. (eds), 'Art' (1992)

From *WAC Stats: The Facts about Women* (New York: Women's Action Coalition, 1992), pp. 8–9.

51.2% of all artists in the US are women.¹

30.7% of all photographers are women.¹

90% of all artist's models are women.²

67% of bachelor degrees in fine arts go to women.³

46% of bachelor degrees in photography go to women.³

65% of bachelor degrees in painting go to women.³

60% of MFAs in fine arts go to women.³

55% of MFAs in painting go to women.³

47% of MFAs in photography go to women.³

59% of PhDs in fine arts go to women.³

66.5% of PhDs in art history go to women.⁴

59% of trained artists and art historians are women.⁴

33% of art faculty are women.⁴

5% of works in museums are by women.⁵

17% of works in galleries are by women.^{6,4}

26% of artists reviewed in art periodicals are women.²

Women artists' income is 30% that of male artists.²

30% of Guggenheim grants go to women.⁷

42% of \$5,000 NEA grants go to women.⁷

33% of \$10,000 NEA grants go to women.⁷

29% of \$15,000 NEA grants go to women.⁷

25% of \$25,000 NEA grants go to women.⁷

Of the art commissioned by the Department of Cultural Affairs Percent for Art Program in New York City, 70% have been artists of color, 41% women, 39% of the 41% women of color.⁸

Of the 1992 New York Foundation for the Arts awards given, women received 53.4%, men received 46.6%.⁹

Of the world's top 200 collectors approximately 128 are male, 52 are male–female couples, 20 are female.¹⁰

7 out of 36 one–person museum exhibitions in the 1991–2 New York season were by women.¹¹

Notes

1 1990 Statistical Abstract of the United States.

2 Devorah L. Knoff (unpublished manuscript).

3 US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1989–90.

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- 4 Eleanor Dickenson, 'Gender discrimination in the art world', prepared for the College Art Association, Coalition of Women, 15 February 1990 in New York City.
- 5 Guerrilla Girls Poster, New York, 1991.
- 6 National Endowment for the Arts.
- 7 Women's Caucus for Art, Moore College of Art Fact Sheet, citing Randy Rosen and Catherine C. Brawer (eds), *Making their Mark: Women Artists Move into the Mainstream 1970–1985* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1989).
- 8 Department of Cultural Affairs, Percent for Art, 1992.
- 9 New York Foundation for the Arts, 1992.
- 10 *Artnews*, cover article, January 1992, pp. 79–91.
- 11 *Art in America* 1991–92.