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Feminism as Critique

On the Politics of Gender

Edited by Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell

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Beyond the Politics of Gender

Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell

The emergence of an independent Women's Movement alongside and in some cases out of the New Left in Europe and North America in the last twenty years has led to a significant restructuring of our theoretical tradition from a feminist perspective. After an initial phase of "deconstructing" the Western intellectual tradition, in which feminist theorists uncovered the gender blindness as well as the gender biases of this heritage, the task of feminist theoretical "reconstruction" began.[1] Focusing on women's concrete experiences across cultures, society and history, feminist theorists asked how the shift in perspective from men's to women's points of view might alter the fundamental categories, methodology and self-understanding of Western science and theory.[2]

The essays collected in this volume emerge from this feminist project of a theoretical reconstruction. They engage in this task by addressing, with various degrees of explicitness, the different strands of twentieth-century Marxism. While some contributions confront the claims of twentieth-century Marxism directly, others seek to extract from the theories of the Frankfurt School, Jürgen Habermas, the phenomenological existentialism of Sartre and de Beauvoir and the critical theory of Michel Foucault, such elements as might illuminate women's experience. Common to all chapters of this volume, however, is the conviction that the confrontation between twentieth-century Marxism and feminist thought requires nothing less than a paradigm-shift of the former. We can describe this shift as the "displacement of the paradigm of production."[3]

Feminist Theory and the Displacement of the Paradigm of Production

At an earlier stage of feminist thinking the confrontation between Marxism and feminism was described as "The Unhappy Marriage" of the two, and "a

more progressive union" between them was demanded.[3] Such calls for a more progressive union, however, were themselves vitiated by the fact that the Marxism appealed to by feminists and considered paradigmatic was itself "orthodox Marxism." By "orthodox Marxism", in this context, we mean a theoretical position that accepts three premises:

1 The theory of historical materialism is to be viewed as a "science" of societies which yields law-like generalizations across culture and history.
2 Such a "science" of society makes production relations determinant in the last instance. In explaining social transformations, it is the dynamics of production relations which are the final and determining causal mechanism.
3 The consciousness of a social group as well as its potential for revolutionary, social transformation is determined by its position in the production process; *social classes* are defined in terms of such positions and are the most important collective actors in history.

Feminist theorists formulated their demands for a more progressive union between feminism and Marxism without challenging the primacy of production implied by the orthodox model. Thus, to characterize women's activities like childbearing and rearing, nursing the sick and the elderly and domestic work, the term "reproduction" was offered. Whereas orthodox Marxist theory had confined itself to an analysis of productive activity and production relations, the task of feminists would now be to enlarge these concepts to include reproductive activities and relations of reproduction. Of course, there were misgivings about the use of the term "reproduction" in this context, since Marx himself had used it to mean the cyclical continuity and persistence of production over time.[4] The more fundamental question which could have been raised however, was omitted: is the concept of production, which is based on the model of an active subject transforming, making and shaping an object given to it, at all adequate for comprehending activities like childbearing and rearing, care of the sick and the elderly? Can nurture, care and the socialization of children be understood in the light of a subject–object model when they are activities which are so thoroughly *intersubjective*? The concept of reproduction does not challenge the primacy of production within Marxism but subsumes typically female activities under the model of work, narrowly understood as the producing and formation of an object.

Along with this attempt to subsume female activities under orthodox Marxist categories, went the efforts of many feminist theorists to unify class and gender. Some feminists maintained that gender was a form of class, while others claimed that one could speak of women as a class by virtue of their position within the network of "sex-affective" production relations.[5] Catherine MacKinnon, for example, in a well-known essay entitled

"Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory", argued as follows:

> As work is to marxism, sexuality is to feminism – socially construed yet constructing, universal as activity yet historically specific, jointly comprised of matter and mind. As the organized expropriation of the work of some for the benefit of others defines a class – workers – the organized expropriation of the sexuality of some for the use of others defines sex, woman. Heterosexuality is its structure, gender and family its congealed forms, sex roles its qualities, generalized to social persona, reproduction a consequence, and control its issue.[6]

While MacKinnon's claim that both sexuality and gender are concerns not only of "private" but of social life in general is a welcome expansion of the horizon of Marxist theory, to grasp the significance of gender and sexuality MacKinnon once again resorts to models of work and reproduction. The "organized expropriation of sexuality" defines a class, namely women, just as the "organized expropriation of surplus product or surplus value" also defines a class, namely the immediate producers. After constructing the position of women as an oppressed class on the basis of this dubious analogy between the expropriation of sexuality and the expropriation of surplus product or value, MacKinnon calls for a "sexual strike" comparable to the "general strike" of the working classes.

Again what these formulations miss is the more radical challenge posed for Marxist theory by the very presence of women not only as an oppressed group but as collective actors in the historical scene since the middle of the nineteenth century: is the position of a social group in the production process either necessary or sufficient to define its *collective identity*? Are production relations fundamental in defining *collective consciousness*? When collective actors emerge on the historical scene is it the memory and consciousness of production alone that moves them to act? What about forms of collective identity and memory rooted in aspects of communal and public life, in legal and public guarantees, or in preindustrial guilds and associations? While many Marxist social theorists have come to see a disjunction in Marxist theory between the *structural model of class* that follows from the primacy of production relations and the *political concept of class* as collective agents of social transformation,[7] feminist theorists have left Marxism with all its problems of class theory intact, and have chosen a language of theory which, in many cases, distorts their own historical experiences.

The methodological primacy of production in orthodox Marxist theory goes hand in hand with a normative utopia that we can name "emancipation through the liberation of work." The ambiguities of Marxist theory in this respect are notorious and need no extensive repetition here. Marx's utopia of labor is compatible both with the universal extension of wage labor to include all – socialism as a republic of wage earners – and with the reduction

of socially necessary labor time to a minimum – *socialism* as a republic of disposable time. As Hannah Arendt has remarked, such antinomies are not the mark of second-rate thinkers, and the ambiguities they express are so deeply rooted in someone's thought as to reveal something essentially paradoxical in their vision. Arendt herself identified this paradox in Marx's vision as follows: on the one hand, Marx followed nineteenth-century myths of progress, growth and production and deified labor as world-constitutive activity; on the other hand, when contemplating models of meaningful and fulfilling human activity, he frequently followed the Western philosophical tradition since Plato in its denigration of labor and saw such fulfillment as lying beyond labor and beyond the realm of necessity in play, aesthetic contemplation, leisure and fantasy.

On the question of the "utopia of labor" as well, feminist theorists failed to challenge Marxism radically. The movement of "wages for housework," for example, true to Marxist logic, demanded that women first become wage earners in the home before they could be emancipated in public as producers. Lost in endless discussions about which came first – the class struggle or the gender struggle – many Marxist feminist theorists missed asking whether the Marxist utopia of labor could accommodate women's desires for self-determination and the feminist vision of human liberation. It is only in the last ten years, and largely through the work of radical feminists, that the vision of human liberation in feminism has come to the fore. Although there is no agreement in the contemporary Women's Movement as to what this vision entails precisely, there is consensus around a *minimal utopia* of social life characterized by nurturant, caring, expressive and nonrepressive relations between self and other, self and nature. This minimal utopia is shared by many radical and socialist feminists, while it is less pervasive in the mainstream, liberal Women's Movement. As this minimal feminist utopia is articulated more fully, it becomes increasingly obvious that the Marxist utopia of labor needs to be subjected to a radical critique from the feminist perspective.

This critique of the primacy of production and its displacement within Marxist theory is a shared assumption of the present collection, and Linda Nicholson's chapter, "Feminism and Marx: Integrating Kinship with the Economic," provides a programmatic statement for the volume as a whole.[8] In her chapter Nicholson deals with a major irony of Marxist theory. On the one hand Marxist theory emphasizes the historical and contingent nature of the capitalist mode of production, which for the first time in history institutionalized a universal system of exchange in the production and consumption of all goods, including labor power itself. With the emergence of capitalism, the economy was constituted as a public, societal sphere in which all could participate. The economy became "defamilialized." Whereas precapitalist modes of production carried on not only the consumption but also the production of large numbers of commodities in the confines of small

or large kinship units (the *oikos* in antiquity, the medieval manor in feudal times), with the advent of capitalism and subsequently industrialization, the family lost its functions of production and became increasingly a unit of reproduction and consumption alone. Feminists can thus find in Marxist theory a powerful framework for analyzing the historicity of kinship relations.

On the other hand, Marx's philosophical anthropology and the cross-cultural generalizations of historical materialism contradict this historically specific approach. Categories of production and the economy, which properly characterize capitalism alone, are generalized across cultures and history. The result, Nicholson argues, is the narrowing down of the concept of production to the production of food objects and commodities alone. This precludes an adequate understanding of traditional female activities like housework, care for the elderly and the sick, childbearing and rearing. A further consequence is that for much Marxist theory "gender" becomes irrelevant as an indicator of class status.

It follows from Nicholson's analysis that we must rehistoricize the categories of Marxist social theory by uncovering their roots in the experience of Western modernity. It is also in the light of such a theory of modernity that we can begin to understand many characteristic divisions between the public and the private; the political, the social, the economic and the familial, within the confines of which women's lives and experiences unfold in our culture and societies.

Gender, Modernity and the Differentiation between the Public and the Private

One of the most comprehensive theories of modernity developed in the last decade and one from which feminist theorists have much to learn in analyzing the institutional splits and dichotomies between the public and private spheres is that of Jürgen Habermas. Seeking a synthesis between Marx and Weber, Habermas distinguishes between two strands of modernization processes: the cultural and the societal. Cultural modernity means in the first place the *decentering* of the worldview of antiquity and the Middle Ages through the achievements of modern natural science and through developments in theology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Second, this process also entails the eventual *differentiation* out of this worldview of separate value spheres like ethics, science, jurisprudence, religion and aesthetics, and the subsequent increase in the *self-reflexivity* of these differentiated value spheres as a result of their autonomous institutionalization.

By "societal rationalization" Habermas means the differentiation between "system" and "lifeworld." As Nancy Fraser explains in this volume in her detailed examination of Habermas's critical social theory from a feminist

perspective, "system" refers to all those ways in which the actions of individuals are coordinated with each other through "the functional interlacing of unintended consequences, while each action is determined by self-interested, utility-maximizing calculations." Prime examples of social systems in this sense are the market, the taxation and income policies of the state and the world economy. Such spheres of social life are governed by their own logic and regularities, which have not been willed by anyone in particular but which result from the cumulative, unintended consequences of the actions of many individuals. The lifeworld, by contrast, is characterized by "socially integrated" action contexts. In socially integrated action contexts, agents act on the basis of some form of implicit or explicit intersubjective consensus about norms, values and ends, a consensus predicated on linguistic speech and interpretation. Examples of such actions would be provided by relations between family members, friends and neighbors but also by democratic debate and participation in the public political sphere.

Institutional differentiation in modernity results in the emergence of two major networks of systematically integrated action contexts: the economy and the administrative–juridical apparatus of the modern state. In these spheres money and power become the media through which actions are coordinated. Even under conditions of modernity and despite increasing encroachment from the economy and the administrative–bureaucratic system, in two spheres the coordination of action continues to be integrated socially rather than systematically. These are the "private–intimate" sphere of the family on the one hand and the sphere of political–public participation on the other – or what Habermas calls the "public space," *Öffentlichkeit*.[9]

As Fraser points out, this model allows us to see the structure as well as the interrelationship between the public and the private spheres in a sophisticated way. At one level, the public/private dichotomy runs between the economy and the administrative state apparatus on the one hand, and the nuclear family on the other. According to this version of the public/private split, the economic, the political and the juridical system of modern societies, in which *all* – ostensibly – *can share equally* as economic agents, political citizens and legal persons, is contrasted with the *closed* and *exclusive* sphere of intimacy, sexuality and affection characterizing the modern nuclear family. While what is public in this sense is what is open to all, "private" in this context means what is exclusive, particularistic and based on nonuniversalizable special ties among individuals. The distinction between the public and the private spheres, therefore, does not run parallel to that between system and lifeworld. Although belonging to the lifeworld, the sphere of political action and opinion formation is the *public* sphere par excellence.

At a second level, the private/public distinction contrasts some shared conception of the general good with partial or individual interests in civil society. The economic sphere, when contrasted with the administrative state apparatus and the sphere of political participation and opinion formation, is "private" in this sense. The norm in the disembedded, capitalist, commodity economy of modern societies is the pursuit of one's private welfare and profit. By contrast, the state and its apparatus are considered to represent some conception of general welfare, a public matter, a *res publica*, which transcends partial and egotistic individual and group concerns.

A major question for contemporary feminist theory is the interaction between these spheres as they develop historically in the West from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries onward, and as they come to shape women's lives in contemporary, late capitalist societies. On this issue, Fraser is less sanguine about the critical potential of Habermas's theory. She argues that this theory, impressive as it is, postulates distinctions between material and symbolic reproduction, system and lifeworld without questioning their "gender subtext." Habermas fails to see how some crucial categories of his social theory (like the social identities of modern individuals as workers, citizens, consumers and clients) are gendered identities. Likewise, by ignoring how the lifeworld and its asymmetrical gender hierarchy shape both the economy and the sphere of public–political participation, Habermas postulates a one-way dynamic proceeding from system to lifeworld alone. This theory also seems to ignore the fact that the modern, nuclear family is not a "haven in a heartless world" but the site of "egocentric, strategic, and instrumental calculation as well as sites of usually exploitative exchanges of service, labor, cash and sex, not to mention sites, frequently, of coercion and violence" (Fraser).

The distinction between a public sphere that is equally open to all, and a private–intimate sphere that is based on exclusive love and affection, and the contrast between a public, common good and conflicting, private, partial interests, are constitutive not only of the institutional structure of modern, Western societies but have shaped the dominant conception of reason and rationality in them as well. Reason has been viewed by the Western philosophical tradition as what is *universal*, and as what transcends the idiosyncracies of partial, individual perspectives. Iris Young characterizes this concept of reason as "deontological":

> This reason, like the scientific reason from which deontology claims to distinguish itself, is impelled by what Theodor Adorno calls the logic of identity. In this logic of identity reason does not merely mean having reasons or an account, or intelligently reflecting on and considering a situation. For the logic of identity reason is *ratio*, the principled reduction of objects of thought to a common measure, to universal laws . . . Through the notion of an essence, thought brings concrete particulars into unity. As long as qualitative difference defies essence, however, the program of identifying thought remains incomplete. Concrete particulars are brought into unity under the universal form, but the forms themselves cannot be reduced to unity.

The normative concept of public space most compatible with deontological reason, according to Young, is that of the "civic public of citizenship," which is based on an opposition "between public and private dimensions of human life, and which corresponds to an opposition between reason on the one hand, and the body, affectivity, and desire, on the other." Emerging in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this conception has justified – and to some extent still does – the exclusion of women, nonwhites, homosexuals and some white, adult, nonpropertied males. While Young sees in Habermas's theory of communicative ethics the beginnings of a critique of impartial reason, she maintains, using Julia Kristeva's theory of language, that a discourse theory of ethics has not wholly jettisoned the standpoint of deontological reason and its illusions.

Like Young, Benhabib is also concerned with criticizing the epistemological and normative implications of dominant Western conceptions of reason and rationality. She describes the standpoint represented by "deontological reason" as that of the "generalized other," and argues that from the "state of nature" fiction of early contract theories to the "original position" of John Rawls, the perspective of the "generalized other" comes to define the moral point of view as such. Whereas Young locates the epistemological pitfalls of deontological reason in the inability to think through difference and particularity without reducing them to irrationality, Benhabib sees in the identification of the moral point of view with the standpoint of the "generalized other" the source of an incoherent conception of self (the self as mushroom in Hobbesian language), a faulty notion of autonomy, and an unreciprocal conception of moral universalizability.

Benhabib views more positively than either Fraser or Young the possibility of integrating normative aspects of Habermas's theory with feminist concerns. She sees embedded in conditions of "practical discourse," as specified by the theory of communicative or discourse ethics, the necessary but insufficient conditions of a universalistic moral point of view. Against the background of the Kohlberg–Gilligan controversy, she suggests that communicative ethics, properly formulated, can mediate between the standpoint of the "generalized" and the "concrete" other(s) by synthesizing justice with care, autonomy with connectedness.

The analysis and critique of the dichotomy between an "impartial," "objective" public reason and the ostensibly "pre-" or "antirational" intimate, domestic or familial sphere is at the center of Young's and Benhabib's chapters. In her chapter "Women, Success and Civil Society," Maria Markus addresses the second aspect of the public/private dichotomy, namely the disjunction between the public as representative of the *common good* and the private as representative of *particularistic* social and economic interests. Drawing on empirical work conducted with Hungarian women engineers, Markus offers a new approach to the question of whether women fear success. Her answer is that it is more adequate to attribute women's

apparent lack of professional and career ambition, lack of strategic scheming, not to a fear of success but to a standard of excellence in achievement which is very much at odds with the society around them. The majority of adult women, she notes, are involved in activities which presuppose *internal* standards of excellence rather than external criteria of success: "The activities of mothering and/or housekeeping, which have no socially fixed standards of excellence, and which, at the same time, especially in the case of 'mothering,' due to its emotional embeddedness, involve a self-imposed aspiration to excellence," may dispose women to a subversion of the performance principle rather than submission to it. But this indifference to socially sanctioned success may have the ironic consequence of further aggravating women's already low-salary, low-authority and low-professional status when compared with their male peers. The dichotomy between a public sphere of the economic, and a private, personal realm, assigned "naturally" to women, in fact places women in a double bind. Markus suggests that the solution to this double bind may come through the realization that the Women's Movement cannot simply mean "raising" women to a level defined by men, but through challenging the "uniformization and prescription of aspirations and socially accepted and rewarded modes of life and career-pursuits." This would imply not only changing the definition of success but also introducing into public life patterns of behavior and emotionality previously confined to the domain of typically female activities: the importance of personal relationships for life-fulfillment, the value of work done well for its own sake, helpfulness to others and the like. Markus identifies such a future reconstitution of the public sphere as "existing or potential civil society," and describes it as "the more or less fluid self-organization of a public committed to principles of equality, plurality and democratic forms."

There is considerable consensus among Fraser, Young, Benhabib and Markus that the public/private dichotomy as a principle of social organization, and its ideological articulation in various conceptions of reason and justice are detrimental to women. According to Fraser the result is a mystification of the gender–power relations that constitute the subtext of the modern economy and of the state; Young sees a repression of women's difference and their exclusion from the public; Benhabib criticizes the resulting trivialization of women's moral aspirations and perspectives, while Markus discloses the double bind between home and work resulting from this dichotomy. Beyond this consensus, however, lies the important question: what kind of a restructuring of the public/private realms is possible and desirable in our societies such as would further women's emancipation as well as create a more humane society for all?

The Feminist Critique of the Unencumbered Self

Previously we stated that the displacement of the paradigm of production within Marxist theory was a shared assumption of all contributions to this volume. A second shared assumption is the critique of the "unencumbered self" advocated by liberalism. Let us now contrast this feminist critique of the self with that of some recent "communitarian thinkers," in order to highlight the distinctiveness of the solutions being worked toward by the authors of this volume.

In so far as recent feminist theory challenges the public/private dichotomy both as a normative principle and as an institutional arrangement, it comes into conflict with liberal political theory. For the latter, some form of this distinction is essential to uphold principles of individual right and justice. Whether it be welfare liberals like John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin, or libertarian, market liberals like Friedrich Hayek and Robert Nozick, both groups proceed from a conception of the self as *public persona*, as a bearer of individual rights; both groups view society as a system of mutually advantageous arrangements, and argue that the just is prior to the good. The public system of rights and justice must be clearly distinguished from individual conceptions of the good life, from those life-plans and aspirations that form the substance of our dreams and wishes, joys and miseries in private life. Foremost among such conceptions of the good life, of course, are those emotional – sexual – domestic relations and attachments within or outside a familial framework.

Feminists argue, however, that the system of priorities developed by liberal political thought is belied by the inequality and hierarchy at the root of the dichotomies it so cherishes. For example, the *public* conception of the self as the equal and abstract bearer of rights from which liberalism proceeds, is belied by the inequality, asymmetry and domination permeating the *private* identity of this self as a gendered subject. The conception of society as a system of mutually advantageous arrangements has never been extended in liberal political thought to subsume the family; the family has always remained a precontractual institution, still located in the "state of nature," or lost behind the thickness of the "veil of ignorance" in the original position.[10] Also, the distinction between the right and the good defines the domain of public justice in such a limited way that the socially and culturally constituted character of gender relations and interactions is wholly obscured. For example, although the sanctity of one's bodily integrity and the prevention of arbitrary bodily harm has been a major staple of liberal political thought since Hobbes and Locke, the recognition of women's bodily integrity, and the development of effective legal sanctions against rape, violence and enforced sex in domestic life, are still far from being universally accepted in Western democracies. The indifference of conceptions of public

right *vis-à-vis* the private good may all too easily result in obfuscating the violation of right and justice in the family.

If the feminist critique of this version of liberal thought rested with these points alone, it could easily be accommodated by the liberal framework. The response to the feminist charge that one's public identity as an equal legal and political subject is violated in the private sphere by the hierarchy of gender relations would be to demand full equality of rights for women, and the protection of this equality by special legislative measures, including affirmative action legislation. The feminist critique that the family has never been the object of social contract can be met by encouraging legislation that allows a woman to keep her maiden name, her property and assets, and even by the formulation of a publicly recognized marriage contract, violated if one or both of the parties failed to live up to its terms. Finally, to the charge that the distinction between the right and the good, justice and the good life has privatized women's concerns and has protected the private sphere from public legislation, the liberal can respond as follows: if we take the priority of the right over the good seriously, it is clear that all instances of injury to a woman's body contradict the public dignity of the person as a right-bearer, and must be combatted by overruling private conceptions of the good in the name of public justice. The priority of the right over the good permits such overruling. However, if feminists are concerned not only with rape, woman-battering, domestic violence and abuse but also with sexual and pornographic practices – like sadomasochism for example – among consenting adults, the liberal would insist that it is both normatively correct and politically wise for public legislation to stop at the bedroom door – provided, of course, that the consent of the parties is genuine.

Undoubtedly, this capacity of liberal political thought to accommodate many demands of the contemporary Women's Movement should neither be taken lightly nor ignored. Nor can we overlook the fact that some of the most important reform legislation concerning women and their status in this century was framed by legislators and thinkers who self-consciously appropriated what they took to be the liberal tradition. However, because liberalism focuses so much on legislative practices, it ignores invisible societal constraints that defy such practices while continuing to influence them. The liberal view of the self essentially as a public persona has little understanding of the psychosexual constitution of the human subject as a gendered self, and is blind to the gender subtext of our societies. Yet the latter influences economic and public life (as argued by Fraser and Markus), as well as obfuscating the extent to which liberal conceptions of reason and rationality have rendered the women's point of view either irrational or particularistic (Young) or concretistic and trivial (Benhabib).

In this respect, the criticisms of prevalent liberal conceptions of self and rationality voiced in the chapters of this volume, run parallel to a set of concerns raised by recent communitarians like Charles Taylor, Roberto

Unger, Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Walzer and Michael Sandel.[11] The feminist theorists represented in this volume and communitarian critics of liberalism share first and foremost a rejection of the liberal conception of the self as a "disengaged self" (Taylor) or an "unencumbered subject" (Sandel). These conflicting visions of the self are captured well by Sandel:

> Communitarian critics of rights-based liberalism say we cannot conceive ourselves as independent in this way, as bearers of selves wholly detached from our aims and attachments. They say that certain of our roles are partly constitutive of the persons we are – as citizens of a country, or members of a movement, or partisans of a cause. But if we are partly defined by the communities we inhabit, then we must also be implicated in the purposes and ends characteristic of those communities. As Alasdair MacIntyre writes: 'What is good for me has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles.' Open-ended though it be, the story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity – whether family or city, tribe or nation, party or cause. On the communitarian view, these stories make a moral difference, not only a psychological one. They situate us in the world, and give our lives their moral particularity.[12]

Feminist theorists argue that the vision of the atomic, "unencumbered self," criticized by communitarians, is a male one, since the degree of separateness and independence it postulates among individuals has never been the case for women. Feminist psychoanalytic theorists, like Chodorow and Dinnerstein, would hold that the psychosexual dynamics of gender constitution in our societies result more often than not in unencumbered *male* selves and *situated* female ones.[13] Whether one relies upon the social and cultural history of gender roles and their institutional organization or upon a psychoanalytic feminist theory of gender constitution, it is clear that the feminist and communitarian critiques of the unencumbered self converge.

The view, however, that "our roles are partly constitutive of the persons we are" – the situated vision of the self as member of a family, community, etc. – is also problematic for feminists. Precisely because to be a biological female has always been interpreted in gendered terms as dictating a certain psychosexual and cultural identity, the individual woman has always been "situated" in a world of roles, expectations and social fantasies. Indeed, her individuality has been sacrificed to the "constitutive definitions" of her identity as member of a family, as someone's daughter, someone's wife and someone's mother. The feminine subjects have disappeared behind their social and communal persona. If unencumbered males have difficulties in recognizing those social relations constitutive of their ego identity, situated females often find it impossible to recognize their true selves amidst the constitutive roles that attach to their persons. Despite many common elements in their critique of the liberal concept of the self, feminist and communitarian perspectives differ: whereas communitarians emphasize the situatedness of the disembedded self in a network of relations and narratives,

feminists also begin with the situated self but view the *renegotiation* of our psychosexual identities, and their *autonomous reconstitution* by individuals as essential to women's and human liberation. Whereas in their emphasis upon the constitutive character of social roles, some communitarians come close to a sociological conventionalism that does not distinguish between the self and its roles, or, worse still, to a traditionalism that accepts social roles uncritically, feminists reject both. The self is not defined exhaustively by the roles that constitute its identity; nor are social roles to be accepted uncritically. The simple identification of the subject with its social roles reinstates the very logic of identity that feminists have sought to critique in their examinations of the psychosexual constitution of gender. The project is to develop post-traditional forms of gender identity on the basis of insights into the uniqueness of the female experience. How can feminists root their insights in the uniqueness of the female experience and still challenge the dictates of the genderized subject? The chapters by Balbus, Butler and Cornell and Thurschwell examine the psychosexual constitution of gender, and discuss various political projects of renegotiating gender identity at the present.

The Constitution of the Female Subject and the Deconstitution of Gender Identity

Underlying the idea that there is an essential connection between feminist theory and the unique experience of women as women, is the seemingly unproblematical assumption that this experience can be identified and found to yield conclusions generalizable on the basis of gender. Third World women have challenged precisely the assumption that there is a generalizable, identifiable and collectively shared experience of womanhood. To be Black and to be a woman, is to be a Black woman, a woman whose identity is constituted differently from that of white women. The challenge of Third World feminists brings to the fore the complex nature of gender identification, as well as highlighting the dilemma of feminine/feminist identity. This dilemma is expressed by the question: how can feminist theory base itself upon the uniqueness of the female experience without reifying thereby one single definition of femaleness as the paradigmatic one – without succumbing, that is, to an essentialist discourse on gender?

Isaac Balbus is concerned with defending the metanarrative of the development of the violent, self-preserving, masculine subjectivity, as told by theorists Dorothy Dinnerstein and Nancy Chodorow, for example, against the challenge of a Foucauldian discourse that would reject both the possibility and indeed desirability of a metanarrative of this type. In order to conduct his defense, Balbus stages a confrontation between the kind of feminist psychoanalytic approach that he endorses and Foucauldian discourse. He focuses his discussion on the concepts of subjectivity, totality

and history – concepts on which feminist psychoanalytic theory can be understood to rely and which Foucauldian discourse, with its Nietzschean overtones, seeks to undermine. Balbus concludes, however, that Foucauldian discourse itself reinstates a True Discourse with three constituent elements. These are: a concept of continuous but nondevelopmental history; a concept of a heterogeneous totality and a concept of embodied subjectivity. For Balbus the danger of a thoroughgoing Nietzschean interpretation of Foucaldian discourse is its ultimate neutralization of what are in reality gender-biased categories. By offering us a reading of Foucault which can be reconciled with the theoretical framework of object-relations theory, Balbus hopes to open up the possibility of a dialogue that would otherwise be foreclosed.

For Balbus the question of what constitutes the difference between the sexes has been given a provisional answer by feminist psychoanalytic theory. Thus he defends an already given narration of gender identity. For Butler, on the other hand, the very notion of gender identity is itself problematical. Butler begins her discussion of the process through which one becomes genderized, with her reflections on de Beauvoir's epitaph, "One is not born but becomes a woman." For de Beauvoir gender is not given just as a fact of embodiment, it is assumed as a "project" in the Sartrian sense. Yet Butler suggests that de Beauvoir interprets Sartre to take him at his non-Cartesian best. According to Butler, de Beauvoir operates within a concept of embodied subjectivity antithetical to all versions of the Cartesian idea of the sovereign self. Thus for de Beauvoir, the project of genderization must be understood to take place within a field of social relations that constrain the freedom of the subject from the start. For de Beauvoir, the body of woman is itself a social situation and not a simple biological fact. Wittig, according to Butler, extends de Beauvoir's challenge to essentialist narrations of gender differentiation. For Wittig the female body is given meaning within the hierarchized gender difference of heterosexual reproduction. The binary framework itself constrains choice. The lesbian, for Wittig, can potentially live beyond the sexual definition imposed upon her by the gender hierarchy. She can in this sense choose her body by engaging in the erotic struggle against the distinctions constitutive of sexual identity. Butler hears Wittig's call to dismantle the gender hierarchy in the name of multiplicity to be echoed by Foucault.

For Foucault, the category of gender differentiation takes its meaning from a juridical model of power that cannot simply be surpassed, but which can be dispersed to the point that the binary oppositions lose their rigidity. It is the way that anatomy is socially invested that defines gender identity and not the body itself. The tragedy of a rigid, hierarchized investment in the body is graphically presented in the journals of Herculine Barbin, a hermaphrodite, who suffers so terribly because under our current definition of sexual identity she is neither here nor there. For Butler what all three writers – de Beauvoir,

Wittig and Foucault – share is the challenge to essentialist theorists of gender identity. Butler concludes her chapter by wondering whether the challenge of psychoanalysis can successfully undermine a utopian dispersion of gender identity, which is explicit in Wittig's work and which can be drawn out of Foucault.

Cornell and Thurschwell begin where Butler leaves off. For Cornell and Thurschwell the psychoanalytic framework deconstructs the very gender divide that it makes the hallmark of its theory. They show via critiques of Lacan and Kristeva that the rigid binary opposition, masculine/feminine, is itself constituted only as an effect of multigendered, intersubjective relations that leave traces in every gendered subject. Despite their crucial differences, the Lacanian designation of woman as the "excluded other" of discourse, and the affirmative identification of woman as the "revolutionary moment" of social life and language, share the suggestion that the gender division articulated within the oedipal narrative is *fate*. Relying on Hegel's account of the intersubjective constitution of identity and Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, Cornell and Thurschwell attempts to show that the rigid gender dichotomy serves as ideology by obscuring the immanent possibility of a world in which the "code of sexual marks would no longer be discriminating."

The dilemma of feminine/feminist identity is fully expressed in the disagreement on the status of psychoanalysis and Foucault's theory permeating these three chapters. Against the reification of the bipolar categories of gender identity – male and female – Cornell, Thurschwell and Butler argue for a critique of binary logic, for the proliferation of difference and for the constitution of identity via the recognition and letting be of true difference. Feminist psychoanalytic theorists like Dinnerstein, Chodorow and Balbus would not so much disagree with this call for difference as maintain that aspects of female socialization in our cultures contain traces of such memories and practices as would dispose women to realize and respect such differences more readily than their male counterparts.

This dilemma of feminine/feminist identity brings to light a tension inherent in the chapters of the first part of this volume as well. Whereas Fraser and Young join Cornell, Thurschwell and Butler in their critiques of the identitary logic of binary oppositions, Benhabib and Markus, like Balbus, see in present forms of gender constitution utopian traces of a future mode of otherness. Rather than resolve this dilemma the current collection documents it, and rather than provide clear-cut solutions the following chapters intimate the various options faced by the theory and practice of feminism at the present. We would like to end this Introduction with a question: where do we go beyond the politics of gender? To a radical transcendence of the logic of binary oppositions altogether or to a utopian realization of forms of otherness, immanent in present psychosexual arrangements, but currently frozen within the confines of rigid genderized thinking?

multiplicity of sexually marked voices. I would like to believe in the masses, this indeterminable number of blended voices, this mobile of nonsexual marks whose choreography can carry, divide, multiply the body of each "individual," whether he be classified as "man" or "woman" according to the criteria of usage.[67]

Notes

Introduction

1 See Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka, eds, *Discovering Reality, Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science* (Boston: D. Reidel, 1983), x.

2 For some recent statements see G. Lloyd, *The Man of Reason. "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); and E. F. Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985).

3 Heidi Hartmann, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Toward a More Progressive Union," in Lydia Sargent, ed., *Women and Revolution* (Boston: South End Press, 1981).

4 For an argument to enlarge the concept of production to include that of reproduction, see Mary O'Brien, "Reproducing Marxist Man," in Lorenne M. G. Clark and Lynda Lange, eds, *The Sexism of Social and Political Theory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 107ff.; for misgivings about this particular use of the term reproduction, cf. Ann Ferguson and Nancy Folbre, "The Unhappy Marriage of Patriarchy and Capitalism," in Sargent, ed., *Women and Revolution*, 318.

5 Ferguson and Folbre, "The Unhappy Marriage," 318.

6 Catherine A. MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory," *Signs*, 7, 3 (Spring 1982), 516.

7 Cf. C. Castoriadis, *Crossroads in the Labyrinth* (Boston: MIT Press, 1984); and Jean L. Cohen, *Class and Civil Society: The Limits of Marxian Social Theory* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983); A. Giddens, *Contemporary Problems of Historical Materialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

8 Cf. also Linda J. Nicholson, *Gender and History. The Limits Of Social Theory in the Age of the Family* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

9 Some of the difficulties in Habermas's characterization of politics in light of these two spheres are explored by T. A. McCarthy in "Complexity and Democracy, or The Seducements of Systems Theory," *New German Critique*, 35 (Spring/Summer 1985), 27–55.

10 Although it is included in the "basic structure" of society, there is no sustained discussion of the family in Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).
11 See Charles Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences, Philosophical Papers* vol. 2: *Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985), part II; Roberto Unger, *Knowledge and Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 1975); Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defence of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
12 Michael J. Sandel, "Introduction," in Michael J. Sandel, ed., *Liberalism and its Critics* (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 5–6.
13 Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* (New York: Harper Books, 1976).

Chapter 1

1 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968), 41.
2 Jürgen Habermas has made a similar objection to Marx's work. Habermas notes that while Marx does claim to incorporate the aspect of symbolic interaction, understood under the concept of "relations of production," within his theory, this aspect is ultimately eliminated within Marx's basic frame of reference. This point replicates the criticism of feminists in that in both cases Marx is cited for an ambiguity in his concept of "production." In the problems pointed to by Habermas there is an ambiguity in Marx's inclusion under "production" of either "the forces and the relations of production" or more narrowly of only "the forces of production." In the problems pointed to by feminists, there is an ambiguity concerning even what "forces of production" might include. In all cases, such ambiguity is made possible by Marx's moving from broader to more narrow meanings of "production." For Habermas's critique see *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trs. Jeremy Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972; Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 19), 25–63.
3 Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, ed. and intro. by Maurice Dobb (New York: International Publishers, 1920), 20–1.
4 Marshall Sahlins, *Culture and Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 212.
5 Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 60.
6 Ibid., 66.
7 As Polanyi argues, the absence of some regulation does not mean the absence of all regulation. On the contrary he claims that markets and regulations grew up together.
8 Polanyi, *The Greek Transformation*, 20.
9 Ibid., 71.
10 *Idem.*
11 Ibid., 57.

12 Mary O'Brien, "Reproducing Man," in Lorenne M. G. Clark and Lynda Lange, eds, *The Sexism of Social and Political Theory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 107.
13 Ibid., 102 and 111.
14 Ibid., 105.
15 Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (New York: International Publishers, 1963), 180.
16 This point of the progression of kinship to state to market has been made often in the Marxist literature. See, for example, Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, ed. and with an intro. by Eleanor Burke Leacock (New York: International Publishers, 1972), 72–3.
17 O'Brien, "Reproducing Marxist Man," 114.
18 Ann Ferguson and Nancy Folbre, "The Unhappy Marriage of Patriarchy and Capitalism," in Lydia Sargent, ed., *Women and Revolution* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), 318.
19 Iris Young, "Beyond the Unhappy Marriage: A Critique of Dual Systems Theory," in Sargent, ed., *Women and Revolution*, 52.
20 Ibid., 49.
21 *Idem.*
22 Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, tr. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1971), Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 42.

Chapter 2

1 Karl Marx, "Letter to A. Ruge, September 1843," in *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, tr. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), 209.
2 © Nancy Fraser 1986. This is a revised version of a paper that appeared in *New German Critique*, 35 (Spring/Summer 1985), 97–131. I am grateful to John Brenkman, Thomas McCarthy, Carole Pateman and Martin Schwab for helpful comments and criticism; to Dee Marquez for crackerjack word processing; and to the Stanford Humanities Center for financial support.
3 Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984; Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 19), vol. I: *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, tr. Thomas McCarthy. Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, 1981; Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 19), (Frankfurt am Main: Surhkamp Verlag, vol. II: *Zur Kritik der funktionalistischen Vernunft*. I have consulted the following English translations of portions of *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, vol. II: Habermas "New Social Movements," (excerpt from ch. VIII, section 3), tr. *Telos*, 49 (1981), 33–7; "Marx and the Thesis of Inner Colonization," (excerpt from ch. VIII, section 2, 522–47), tr. Christa Hildebrand and Barbara Correll, unpublished typescript; "Tendencies of Juridification," (excerpt from ch. VIII, section 2, 522ff), unpublished typescript.

Other texts by Habermas: *Legitimation Crisis*, tr. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975; Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 19); "Introduction," in Jürgen Habermas, ed., *Observations on "The Spiritual Situation of the Age": Contemporary German Perspectives*, tr. Andrew Buchwalter (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984; Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 19); "A Reply to my Critics," in David Held and John B. Thompson, eds,