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THE TECHNOLOGY OF GENDER

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In the feminist writings and cultural practices of the 1960s and 1970s, the notion of gender as sexual difference was central to the critique of representation, the rereading of cultural images and narratives, the questioning of theories of subjectivity and textuality, of reading, writing, and spectatorship. The notion of gender as sexual difference has grounded and sustained feminist interventions in the arena of formal and abstract knowledge, in the epistemologies and cognitive fields defined by the social and physical sciences as well as the human sciences or humanities. Concurrent and interdependent with those interventions were the elaboration of specific practices and discourses, and the creation of social spaces (gendered spaces, in the sense of the "women's room," such as CR groups, women's caucuses within the disciplines, Women's Studies, feminist journal or media collectives, and so on) in which sexual difference itself could be affirmed, addressed, analyzed, specified, or verified. But that notion of gender as sexual difference and its derivative notions—women's culture, mothering, feminine writing, femininity, etc.—have now become a limitation, something of a liability to feminist thought.

With its emphasis on the sexual, "sexual difference" is in the first and last instance a difference of women from men, female from male; and even the more abstract notion of "sexual differences" resulting not from biology or socialization but from signification and discursive effects (the emphasis here being less on the sexual than on differences as différence), ends up being in the last instance a difference (of woman) from man—or better, the very instance of difference in man. To continue to pose the question of gender in either of these terms, once the critique of patriarchy has been fully outlined, keeps feminist thinking bound to the terms of Western patriarchy itself, contained within the frame of a conceptual opposition that is "always already" inscribed in what Fredric Jameson would call "the political unconscious" of dominant cultural discourses and their underlying "master narratives"—be they biological, medical, legal, philosophical, or
The methodologies of gender are complex and multifaceted, involving various social, linguistic, and cultural discourses. This complexity means that gender is not a simple, static concept but rather a dynamic and ever-evolving force. In the postmodern world, gender is often defined as a social construct rather than a natural attribute.

A starting point in understanding gender theory is Michel Foucault's ideas on the nature of the modern subject. Foucault argues that the modern subject is formed through a process of power/knowledge, where power is not centralized but rather dispersed throughout society. Gender is one of the ways in which power is exercised and knowledge is produced.

However, there are limitations to Foucault's theory. For example, some critics argue that gender is not just a social construct but also a natural category. Others argue that the concept of the 'modern subject' is too narrow and excludes other ways of thinking about subjectivity.

1. I will proceed by stating a series of propositions in decreasing order of self-evident and subsequently will go back to elaborate on each in more detail. (1) Gender is a representation—what is to say that it does not have the deployment of bodies, behaviors, and social relations, but the set of effects produced by and upon bodies, behaviors, and social relations, is to have all gone beyond a Foucauldian understanding of the technology of sex, and to have already become a product and image of a complex political technology. But it must be said first of all that the purchase of this essay, that is to say of the deployment of a complex political technology, is to have already gone beyond Foucauldian understanding of the technology of sex, and to have already become a product and image of a complex political technology.
The second meaning of gender given in the dictionary is "classification of sex; sex." This proximity of grammar and sex, interestingly enough, is not there in Romance languages (which, it is commonly believed, are spoken by people rather more romantic than Anglo-Saxons). The Spanish género, the Italian genere, and the French genre do not carry even the connotation of a person's gender; that is conveyed instead by the word for sex. And for this reason, it would seem, the word genre, adopted from French to refer to the specific classification of artistic and literary forms (in the first place, painting), is also devoid of any sexual denotation, as is the word genus, the Latin etymology of gender, used in English as a classificatory term in biology and logic. An interesting corollary of this linguistic peculiarity of English, i.e., the acceptance of gender which refers to sex, is that the notion of gender I am discussing, and thus the whole tangled question of the relationship of human gender to representation, are totally untranslatable in any Romance language, a sobering thought for anyone who might be still tempted to espouse an internationalist, not to say universal, view of the project of theorizing gender.

Going back to the dictionary, then, we find that the term gender is a representation; and not only a representation in the sense in which every word, every sign, refers to (represents) its referent, be that an object, a thing, or an animate being. The term gender is, actually, the representation of a relation, that of belonging to a class, a group, a category. Gender is the representation of a relation, or, if I may trespass for a moment into my second proposition, gender constructs a relation between one entity and other entities, which are previously constituted as a class, and that relation is one of belonging; thus, gender assigns to one entity, say an individual, a position within a class, and therefore also a position vis-à-vis other pre-constituted classes. (I am using the term class advisedly, although here I do not mean social class(es), because I want to retain Marx's understanding of class as a group of individuals bound together by social determinants and interests—including, very pointedly, ideology—which are neither freely chosen nor arbitrarily set.) So gender represents not an individual but a relation, and a social relation; in other words, it represents an individual for a class.

The neuter gender in English, a language that relies on natural gender (we note, in passing, that "nature" is ever-present in our culture, from the very beginning, which is, precisely, language), is assigned to words referring to sexless or asexual entities, objects or individuals marked by the absence of sex. The exceptions to this rule show the popular wisdom of usage: a child is neuter in gender, and its correct possessive modifier is its as I was taught in learning English many years ago, though most people use his, and some, quite recently and rarely, and even then inconsistently, use his or her. Although a child does have a sex from "nature," it isn't until it becomes (i.e., until it is signified as) a boy or a girl that it acquires a gender. What the popular wisdom knows, then, is that gender is not sex, a state of nature, but the representation of each individual in terms of a particular social relation which pre-exists the individual and is predicated on the conceptual and rigid (structural) opposition of two biological sexes. That conceptual structure is what feminist social scientists have designated "sex-gender system."

The cultural conceptions of male and female as two complementary yet mutually exclusive categories into which all human beings are placed constitute within each culture a gender system, a symbolic system or system of meanings, that correlates sex to cultural contents according to social value and hierarchies. Although the meanings vary with each culture, a sex-gender system is always intimately interconnected with political and economic factors in each society. In this light, the cultural construction of sex into gender and the asymmetry that characterizes all gender systems cross culturally (though each in its particular ways) are understood as systematically linked to the organization of social inequality.

The sex-gender system, in short, is both a sociocultural construct and semiotic apparatus, a system of representation which assigns meaning (identity, value, prestige, location in kinship, status in the social hierarchy etc.) to individuals within the society. If gender representations are sociopolitical positions which carry differential meanings, then for someone to be represented and to represent oneself as male or female implies the assumption of the whole of those meaning effects. Thus, the proposition that the representation of gender is its construction, each term being at once the product and the process of the other, can be restated more accurately: the construction of gender is both the product and the process of its representation.
fundamentally, by means of its engagement of subjectivity ("The category of the subject is constitutive of all ideology," he writes on p. 171). It is, thus, paradoxical and yet quite evident that the connection between gender and ideology—or the understanding of gender as an instance of ideology—could not be made by him. But the connection has been explored by other Marxist thinkers who are feminists, and better still the other way around, by some feminist thinkers who are also Marxists. Michèle Barrett, for one, argues that not only is ideology a primary site of the construction of gender, but "the ideology of gender...has played an important part in the historical construction of the capitalist division of labour and in the reproduction of labour power," and therefore is an accurate demonstration of "the integral connection between ideology and the relations of production." 9

The context of Barrett's argument (originally made in her 1980 book *Women's Oppression Today*) is the debate elicited in England by "discourse theory" and other post-Althusserian developments in the theory of ideology, and more specifically the critique of ideology promoted by the British feminist journal *mif* on the basis of notions of representation and difference drawn from Lacan and Derrida. She quotes Parveen Adams's "A Note on the Distinction between Sexual Division and Sexual Difference," where sexual division refers to the two mutually exclusive categories of men and women as given in reality: "In terms of sexual differences, on the other hand, what has to be grasped is, precisely, the production of differences through systems of representation: the work of representation produces differences that cannot be known in advance." 10

Adams's critique of a feminist (Marxist) theory of ideology that relies on the notion of patriarchy as a given in social reality (in other words, a theory based on the fact of women's oppression by men) is that such a theory is based on an essentialism, whether biological or sociological, which crops up again even in the work of those, such as Juliet Mitchell, who would insist that gender is an effect of representation. "In feminist analyses," Adams maintains, the concept of a feminine subject "relies on a homogeneous oppression of women in a state, reality, given prior to representation practices" (p. 56). By stressing that gender construction is nothing but the effect of a variety of representations and discursive practices which produce sexual differences "not known in advance" (or, in my own paraphrase, gender is nothing but the variable configuration of sexual-discursive positionalities), Adams believes she can avoid the simplicities of an always already antagonistic relation" between the sexes, which is an obstacle, in her eyes, to both feminist analysis and feminist political practice (p. 57). Barrett's response to this point is one I concur with, especially as regards its implications for feminist politics: "We do not need to talk of sexual division
as ‘always already’ there; we can explore the historical construction of the categories of masculinity and femininity without being obliged to deny that, historically specific as they are, they nevertheless exist today in systematic and even predictable terms” (Barrett, pp. 70–71).

However, Barrett’s conceptual framework does not permit an understanding of the ideology of gender in specifically feminist theoretical terms. In a note added to the 1985 reprinting of her essay, from which I have been quoting, she reiterates her conviction that “ideology is an extremely important site of the construction of gender but that it should be understood as part of a social totality rather than as an autonomous practice or discourse” (p. 83). This notion of “social totality” and the thorny problem of the “relative” autonomy of ideology (in general, and presumably of the ideology of gender in particular) from “the means and forces of production” and/or “the social relations of production” remain quite vague and unresolved in Barrett’s argument, which becomes less focused and less engaging as she goes on to discuss the ways in which the ideology of gender is (re)produced in cultural (literary) practice.

Another and potentially more useful way to pose the question of gender ideology is suggested, though not followed through, in Joan Kelly’s 1979 essay “The Doubled Vision of Feminist Theory.” Once we accept the fundamental feminist notion that the personal is political, Kelly argues, it is no longer possible to maintain that there are two spheres of social reality: the private, domestic sphere of the family, sexuality, and affectivity, and the public sphere of work and productivity (which would include all of the forces and most of the relations of production in Barrett’s terms). Instead we can envision several interconnected sets of social relations—relations of work, of class, of race, and of sex/gender: “What we see are not two spheres of social reality, but two (or three) sets of social relations. For now, I would call them relations of work and sex (or class and race, and sex/gender).” Not only are men and women positioned differently in these relations, but—this is an important point—women are affected differently in different sets.

The “doubled” perspective of contemporary feminist analysis, Kelly continues, is one in which we can see the two orders, the sexual and the economic, operate together: “in any of the historical forms that patriarchal society takes (feudal, capitalist, socialist, etc.), a sex/gender system and a system of productive relations operate simultaneously . . . to reproduce the socioeconomic and male-dominant structures of that particular social order” (p. 61). Within that “doubled” perspective, therefore, it is possible to see quite clearly the working of the ideology of gender: “woman’s place,” i.e., the position assigned to women by our sex/gender system, as she en-
add, with some qualifications, humanism) and the ideology of gender in particular—that is to say, heterosexism.

I said complicity, not full adherence, for it is obvious that feminism and a full adherence to the ideology of gender, in male-centered societies, are mutually exclusive. And I would add, further, that the consciousness of our complicity with gender ideology, and the divisions and contradic

My own argument in *Alice Doesn’t* was to that effect: the discrepancy, the tension, and the constant slippage between Woman as representation, as the object and the very condition of representation, and, on the other hand, women as historical beings, subjects of “real relations,” are motivated and sustained by a logical contradiction in our culture and an irreconcilable one: women are both inside and outside gender, at once within and without representation. That women continue to become Woman, continue to be caught in gender as Althusser’s subject is in ideology, and that we persist in that imaginary relation even as we know, as feminists, that we are not that, but we are historical subjects governed by real social relations, which centrally include gender—such is the contradiction that feminist theory must be built on, and its very condition of possibility. Obviously, then, feminism cannot cast itself as science, as a discourse or a reality that is outside of ideology, or outside of gender as an instance of ideology.

In fact, the shift in feminist consciousness that has been taking place during this decade may be said to have begun (if a convenient date is needed) with 1981, the year of publication of *This Bridge Called My Back*, the collection of writings by radical women of color edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, which was followed in 1982 by the Feminist Press anthology edited by Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith with the title *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave*. It was these books that first made available to all feminists the feelings, the analyses, and the political positions of feminists of color, and their critiques of white or mainstream feminism. The shift in feminist consciousness that was initially prompted by works such as these is best characterized by the awareness and the effort to work through feminism’s complicity with ideology, both ideology in general (including classism or bourgeois liberalism, racism, colonialism, imperialism, and, I would also...
concern of the state as well; to be more exact, sex became a matter that required the social body as a whole, and virtually all of its individuals, to place themselves under surveillance."^{17}

The sexualization of the female body has indeed been a favorite figure or object of knowledge in the discourses of medical science, religion, art, literature, popular culture, and so on. Since Foucault, several studies have appeared that address the topic, more or less explicitly, in his historical methodological framework;^{18} but the connection between woman and sexuality, and the identification of the sexual with the female body, so pervasive in Western culture, had long been a major concern of feminist criticism and of the women's movement quite independently of Foucault, of course. In particular, feminist film criticism had been addressing itself to that issue in a conceptual framework which, though not derived from Foucault, yet was not altogether dissimilar.

For some time before the publication of volume I of The History of Sexuality in France (La volonté de savoir, 1976), feminist film theorists had been writing on the sexualization of the female star in narrative cinema and analyzing the cinematic techniques (lighting, framing, editing, etc.) and the specific cinematic codes (e.g., the system of the look) that construct woman as image, as the object of the spectator's voyeurist gaze: and they had been developing both an account and a critique of the psycho-social, aesthetic, and philosophical discourses that underlie the representation of the female body as the primary site of sexuality and visual pleasure.^{19} The understanding of cinema as a social technology, as a "cinematic apparatus," was developed in film theory contemporaneously with Foucault's work but independently of it; rather, as the word apparatus suggests, it was directly influenced by the work of Althusser and Lacan.^{20} There is little doubt, at any rate, that cinema—the cinematic apparatus—is a technology of gender, as I have argued throughout Alice Doesn't, if not in these very words, I hope convincingly.

The theory of the cinematic apparatus is more concerned than Foucault's with answering both parts of the question I started from: not only how the representation of gender is constructed by the given technology, but also how it becomes absorbed subjectively by each individual whom that technology addresses. For the second part of the question, the crucial notion is the concept of spectatorship, which feminist film theory has established as a gendered concept; that is to say, the ways in which each individual spectator is addressed by the film, the ways in which his/her identification is solicited and structured in the single film,^{21} are intimately and intentionally, if not usually explicitly, connected to the spectators' gender. Both in the critical writings and in the practices of women's cinema, the exploration of female
spectatorship is giving us a more subtly articulated analysis of the
modalities of film viewing for women and increasingly sophisticated forms
of address in filmmaking (as discussed in chapters 7 and 8).

This critical work is producing a knowledge of cinema and of the technol-
ogy of sex which Foucault's theory could not lead to, on its own terms;
for there, sexuality is not understood as gendered, as having a male form
and a female form, but is taken to be one and the same for all—and
consequently male (further discussion of this point is to be found in
chapter 2). I am not speaking of the libido, which Freud said to be only one,
and I think he may have been right about that. I am speaking here of
sexuality as a construct and a (self-) representation; and that does have both
a male form and a female form, although in the patriarchal or male-
centered frame of mind, the female form is a projection of the male's, its
complementary opposite, its extrapolation—Adam's rib, so to speak. So
that, even when it is located in the woman's body (seen, Foucault wrote, "as
being thoroughly saturated with sexuality," p. 104), sexuality is perceived as
an attribute or a property of the male.

As Lucy Bland states in response to an article on the historical con-
struction of sexuality along Foucauldian lines—an article which not
surprisingly omits what she considers "one of the central aspects of the
historical construction of sexuality, namely its construction as gender spec-
ic"—the various conceptions of sexuality throughout Western history,
however diverse among themselves, have been based on "the perennial
contrast of 'male' to 'female' sexuality."22 In other words, female sexuality
has been invariably defined both in contrast and in relation to the male.
The conception of sexuality held by feminists of the first wave, at the turn
of the century, was no exception: whether they called for "purity" and
opposed all sexual activity for degrading women to the level of men, or
whether they called for a free expression of the "natural" function and
"spiritual" quality of sex on the part of women, sex meant heterosexual
intercourse and primarily penetration. It is only in contemporary feminism
that the notions of a different or autonomous sexuality of women and of
non-male-related sexual identities for women have emerged. But even so,
Bland observes, "the displacement of the sexual act as penetration from the
centre of the sexual stage remains a task still facing us today" (p. 67).

The polarity 'male'/f'male' has been and remains a central theme in nearly
all representations of sexuality. Within 'common-sense', male and female
sexuality stand as distinct: male sexuality is understood as active, sponta-
aneous, genital, easily aroused by 'objects' and fantasy, while female sex-
uality is thought of in terms of its relation to male sexuality, as basically
expressive and responsive to the male. (p. 57)

Hence the paradox that mars Foucault's theory, as it does other contempo-
rary, radical but male-centered, theories: in order to combat the social
technology that produces sexuality and sexual oppression, these theories
(and their respective politics) will deny gender. But to deny gender, first of
all, is to deny the social relations of gender that constitute and validate the
sexual oppression of women; and second, to deny gender is to remain "in
ideology," an ideology which (not coincidentally if, of course, not inten-
donally) is manifestly self-serving to the male-gendered subject.

In their collective book, the authors of Changing the Subject discuss the
importance and the limits of discourse theory, and develop their own
theoretical proposals from a critique as well as an acceptance of the basic
premises of poststructuralism and deconstruction.23 For example, they
accept "the post-structuralist displacement of the unitary subject, and the
revelation of its constituted and not constitutive character" (p. 204), but
maintain that the deconstruction of the unified subject, the bourgeois
individual ("the subject-as-agent"), is not sufficient for an accurate under-
standing of subjectivity. In particular, Wendy Hollway's chapter "Gender
difference and the production of subjectivity" postulates that what accounts
for the content of gender difference is gender-differentiated meanings and
the positions differentially made available to men and women in discourse.
Thus, for example, since all discourses on sexuality are gender-differen-
tiated and therefore multiple (there are at the very least two in each specific
instance or historical moment), the same practices of (hetero)sexuality are
likely to "signify differently for women and men, because they are being
read through different discourses" (p. 237).

Hollway's work concerns the study of heterosexual relations as "the
primary site where gender difference is re-produced" (p. 228), and is based
on the analysis of empirical materials drawn from individual people's
accounts of their own heterosexual relationships. Her theoretical project is,
"How can we understand gender difference in a way which can account for
changes?"

If we do not ask this question the change of paradigm from a biologicist to a
discourse theory of gender difference does not constitute much of an ad-
vance. If the concept of discourses is just a replacement for the notion of
ideology, then we are left with one of two possibilities. Either the account sees
discourses as mechanically repeating themselves, or—and this is the tend-
ency of materialist theory of ideology—changes in ideology follow from
changes in material conditions. According to such a use of discourse theory
people are the victims of certain systems of ideas which are outside of them.
Discourse determinism comes up against the old problem of agency typical
of all sorts of social determinisms. (p. 237)
The "gap" in Foucault's theory, as she sees it, consists in his account of
historical changes in discourses. "He stresses the mutually constitutive
relation between power and knowledge: how each constitutes the other to
produce the truths of a particular epoch." Rather than equating power with
oppression, Foucault sees it as productive of meanings, values, knowledges,
and practices, but inherently neither positive nor negative. However, Holl-
way remarks, "he still does not account for how people are constituted as a
result of certain truths being current rather than others" (p. 237). She then
reformulates, and redistributes, Foucault's notion of power by suggesting
that power is what motivates (and not necessarily in a conscious or rational
manner) individuals' "investments" in discursive positions. If at any one
time there are several competing, even contradictory, discourses on sex-
uality—rather than a single, all-encompassing or monolithic, ideology—
then what makes one take up a position in a certain discourse rather than
another is an "investment" (this term translates the German Besetzung, a
word used by Freud and rendered in English as caitheus), something be-
tween an emotional commitment and a vested interest, in the relative
power (satisfaction, reward, payoff) which that position promises (but does
not necessarily fulfill).

Hollway's is an interesting attempt to reconceptualize power in such a
manner that agency (rather than choice) may be seen to exist for the
subject, and especially for those subjects who have been (perceived as)
"victims" of social oppression or especially disempowered by the discursive
monopoly of power-knowledge. It not only may explain why, for example,
women (who are people of one gender) have historically made different
investments and thus have taken up different positions in gender and
sexual practices and identities (celibacy, monogamy, non-monogamy, frigid-
ity, sexual-role playing, lesbianism, heterosexuality, feminism, anti-
feminism, postfeminism, etc.); but it may explain, as well, the fact that
"other major dimensions of social difference such as class, race and age
intersect with gender to favor or disfavor certain positions" (p. 239), as
Hollway suggests. However, her conclusion that "every relation and every
practice is a site of potential change as much as it is a site of reproduction"
does not say what relation the potential for change in gender relations—if it
is a change both in consciousness and in social reality—may bear to the
hegemony of discourses.

How do changes in consciousness affect or effect changes in dominant
discourses? Or, put another way, whose investments yield more relative
power? For example, if we say that certain discourses and practices, even
though marginal with regard to institutions, but nonetheless disruptive or
oppositional (e.g., women's cinema and health collectives, Women's Studies'
and Afro-American Studies' revisions of the literary canon and college
curricula, the developing critique of colonial discourse), do have the power
to "implant" new objects and modes of knowledge in individual subjects.

...does it follow that these oppositional discourses or counter-practices (as
Claire Johnston called women's cinema in the early 1970's "counter-cin-
ema") can become dominant or hegemonic? And if so, how? Or need they
not become dominant in order for social relations to change? And if not,
how will the social relations of gender change? I may restate these ques-
tions into one, as follows: If, as Hollway writes, "gender difference is . . .
reproduced in day-to-day interactions in heterosexual couples, through the
denial of the non-unitary, non-rational, relational character of subjectivity"
(p. 252), what will persuade women to invest in other positions, in other
sources of power capable of changing gender relations, when they have
assumed the current position (of female in the couple), in the first place,
because that position afforded them, as women, a certain relative power?

The point I am trying to make, much as I agree with Hollway in most of
her argument, and much as I like her effort to redistribute power among
most of us, is that to theorize as positive the "relative" power of those
oppressed by current social relations necessitates something more radical,
or perhaps more drastic, than she seems willing to stake. The problem is
compounded by the fact that the investments studied by Hollway are
secured and bonded by a heterosexual contract: that is to say, her object of
study is the very site in which the social relations of gender and thus gender
ideology are re-produced in everyday life. Any changes that may result
therein, however they may occur, are likely to be changes in "gender
difference," precisely, rather than changes in the social relations of gender:
changes, in short, in the direction of more or less "equality" of women to
men.

Here is, clearly in evidence, the problem in the notion of sexual dif-
ference(s), its conservative force limiting and working against the effort to
rethink its very representations. I believe that to envision gender (men and
women) otherwise, and to (re)construct it in terms other than those dictated
by the patriarchal contract, we must walk out of the male-centered frame of
reference in which gender and sexuality are (re)produced by the discourse
of male sexuality—or, as Luce Irigaray has so well written it, of hom(mo)
sexuality. This essay would like to be a rough map of the first steps of the
way out.

Taking up position in quite another frame of reference, Monique Wittig
has stressed the power of discourses to "do violence" to people, a violence
which is material and physical, although produced by abstract and scientif-
cdiscourses as well as the discourses of the mass media.

If the discourse of modern theoretical systems and social science exer-
s[es] power upon us, it is because it works with concepts which closely touch
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 indelibility 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."  

In arguing that the "discourses of heterosexuality oppress us in the sense that they prevent us from speaking unless we speak in their terms" (p. 105), Wittig is recovering the sense of the oppressiveness of power as it is imbricated in institutionally controlled knowledges, a sense which has somehow been lost in placing the emphasis on the Foucauldian view of power as productive, and hence as positive. While it would be difficult to disprove that power is productive of knowledges, meanings, and values, it seems obvious enough that we have to make distinctions between the positive effects and the oppressive effects of such production. And that is not an issue for political practice alone, but, as Wittig forcefully reminds us, it is especially a question to be asked of theory.

I will then rewrite my third proposition: The construction of gender goes on today through the various technologies of gender (e.g., cinema) and institutional discourses (e.g., theory) with power to control the field of social meaning and thus produce, promote, and "implant" representations of gender. But the terms of a different construction of gender also exist, in the margins of hegemonic discourses. Positioned outside the heterosexual social contract, and inscribed in micropolitical practices, these terms can also be part in the construction of gender, and their effects are rather at the "local" level of resistances, in subjectivity and self-representation. I will return to this last point in section 4.

In the last chapter of Alice Doesn't, I used the term experience to designate the process by which, for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed. I sought to define experience more precisely as a complex of meaning effects, habits, dispositions, associations, and perceptions resulting from the semiotic interaction of self and outer world (in C. S. Peirce's words). The constellation or configuration of meaning effects which I call experience shifts and is reformed continually, for each subject, with her or his continuous engagement in social reality, a reality that includes—and for women centrally—the social relations of gender. For, as I began to argue in that book, following through the critical insights of Virginia Woolf and Catharine MacKinnon, female subjectivity and experience are necessarily couched in a specific relation to sexuality. And however insufficiently deve-
privileged condition, a nearness to nature, the body, the side of the maternal, or the unconscious. However, we are cautioned, this femininity is purely a representation, a positionality within the phallic model of desire and signification; it is not a quality or a property of women. Which all amounts to saying that woman, as subject of desire or of signification, is unrepresentable; or, better, that in the phallic order of patriarchal culture and in its theory, woman is unrepresentable except as representation.

But even when it diverges from the Lacanian version that is predominant in literary criticism and film theory, and when it does pose the question of how one becomes a woman (as does, for instance, object-relations theory, which has appealed to feminists as much as if not more than Lacan or Freud), psychoanalysis defines woman in relation to man, from within the same frame of reference and with the analytical categories elaborated to account for the psychosocial development of the male. That is why psychoanalysis does not address, cannot address, the complex and contradictory relation of women to Woman, which it instead defines as a simple equation: women = Woman = Mother. And that, as I have suggested, is one of the most deeply rooted effects of the ideology of gender.

Before I go on to consider the representations of gender that are contained in other current discourses of interest to feminism, I want to return briefly to my own position vis-à-vis the problem of understanding gender both through a critical reading of theory and through the shifting configurations of my experience as a feminist and a theorist. If I could not but see, although I was unable to formulate it in my earlier work, that cinema and narrative theories were technologies of gender, it was not only that I had read Foucault and Althusser (they had said nothing about gender) and Woolf and MacKinnon (they had), but also that I had absorbed as my experience (through my own history and engagement in social reality and in the gendered spaces of feminist communities) the analytical and critical method of feminism, the practice of self-consciousness. For the understanding of one's personal condition as a woman in terms social and political, and the constant revision, reevaluation, and reconceptualization of that condition in relation to other women's understanding of their sociosexual positions, generate a mode of apprehension of all social reality that derives from the consciousness of gender. And from that apprehension, from that personal, intimate, analytical, and political knowledge of the pervasiveness of gender, there is no going back to the innocence of "biology."

That is why I find it impossible to share some women's belief in a patriarchal past or a contemporary "matristic" realm presided over by the Goddess, a realm of female tradition, marginal and subterranean and yet all positive and good, peace-loving, ecologically correct, matrilineal, matriarchal, non-Indo-European, and so forth; in short, a world untouched by ideology, class and racial struggle, television—a world untroubled by the contradictory demands and oppressive rewards of gender as I, and surely those women, too, have daily experienced it. On the other hand, and much for the same reasons, I find it equally impossible to dismiss gender either as an essentialist and mythical idea of the kind I have just described, or as the liberal-bourgeois idea encouraged by media advertisers: someday soon, somehow, women will have careers, their own last names and property, children, husbands, and/or female lovers according to preference—and all that without altering the existing social relations and the heterosexual structures to which our society, and most others, are securely screwed.

Even this scenario, which, honestly I must admit, looms often enough in the background of a certain feminist discourse on gender, even this Ideal State of gender equality is not sufficient to deter me from claiming gender as a radical issue for feminist theory. And so I come to the last of the four propositions.

4.

The ideal state of gender equality, as I have just described it, is an easy target for deconstructors. Granted. (Although it is not altogether a straw man, because it is a real representation, as it were: just go to the movies on your next date, and you may see it.) But besides the blatant examples of ideological representation of gender in cinema, where the technology's intentionality is virtually foregrounded on the screen; and besides psychoanalysis, whose medical practice is much more a technology of gender than its theory, there are other, subtler efforts to contain the trauma of gender—the potential disruption of the social fabric and of white male privilege that could ensue if this feminist critique of gender as ideologically technological production were to become widespread.

Consider, for one, the new wave of critical writings by men on feminism that have appeared of late. Male philosophers writing as woman, male critics reading as a woman, men on feminism—what is it all about? Clearly it is an hommage (the pun is too tempting not to save it), but to what end? For the most part in the form of short mentions or occasional papers, these works do not support or valorize within the academy the feminist project per se. What they valorize and legitimate are certain positions within academic feminism, those positions that accommodate either or both the critic's personal interests and male-centered theoretical concerns.

As the introduction to a recent collection of essays on Gender and Reading remarks, there is evidence that men are "resisting readers" of women's fiction. More precisely, "it is not that men can't read women's texts: it is,
rather, that they won’t.” As far as theory goes, the evidence is very easy to check by a quick glance through the index of names of any book that does not specifically identify itself as feminist. The poverty of references to both feminist and female critics there is so consistent that one may be tempted, as Elaine Showalter was, to welcome “the move to feminist criticism on the part of [prominent] male theorists.” And the temptation may be irresistible if, like the editors of Gender and Reading, one is concerned “that discussions of gender difference do not foreclose the recognition of individual variability and of the common ground shared by all humans” (p. xxix; emphasis added).

The limits and the liability of this view of gender as “gender difference” become especially apparent when, in one of the essays of the collection, which proposes “A Theory for Lesbian Readers,” Jean Kennard finds herself in agreement with Jonathan Culler (quoting Showalter) and re-inscribes his-and-her words directly into her own: “Reading as a lesbian is not necessarily what happens when a lesbian reads. . . . The hypothesis of a lesbian reader [is what] changes our apprehension of a given text.”31 Ironically, or, I should rather say, thanks to poetic justice, this last statement contradicts and runs in the opposite direction of Kennard’s own critical project, clearly stated a few pages earlier: “What I wish to suggest here is a theory of reading which will not oversimplify the concept of identification, which will not subsume lesbian difference under a universal female. . . . It is an attempt to suggest a way in which lesbians could reread and write about texts” (p. 66).

The irony is in that Culler’s statement—in line with Derridean deconstruction, which is the context of his statement—is intended to make gender synonymous with discursive difference(s), differences that are effects of language or positions in discourse, and thus indeed independent of the reader’s gender (this notion of difference was already mentioned à propos of Michelle Barrett’s critique of it). What Kennard is suggesting, then, is that Culler can read not only as a woman but also as a lesbian, and that would “subsume lesbian difference” not only “under a universal female” but also under the universal male (which Jonathan Culler himself might not accept to represent, in the name of différence). The poetic justice is welcome in that Kennard’s critical hunch and initial assumption (that lesbians read differently from committedly heterosexual women as well as men) are quite correct, in my opinion: only, they need to be justified, or rendered justice to, by other means than male theories of reading or Gestalt psychology (for in addition to Lacan and Derrida, via Culler, Kennard draws her theory of “polar reading” from Joseph Zinker’s theory of opposing characteristics or “polarieties”). For the purposes of the matter at hand, poetic justice may be impersonated by Tania Modleski’s critical assessment of the Showalter-Culler “hypothesis”:

For Culler, each stage of feminist criticism renders increasingly problematic the idea of “women’s experience.” By calling this notion into question, Culler manages to clear a space for male feminist interpretations of literary texts. Thus, at one point he quotes Peggy Kamuf’s remark about feminism as a way of reading, and he borrows a term, ironically enough, from Elaine Showalter in order to suggest that “reading as a woman” is ultimately not a matter of any actual reader’s gender: over and over again, Culler speaks of the need for the critic to adopt what Showalter has called the “hypothesis” of a woman reader in lieu of appealing to the experience of real readers.32

Then, showing how Culler accepts Freud’s account in Moses and Monotheism, and hence speculates that a literary criticism bent on ascertaining the legitimate meanings of a text must be seen as “patriarchal,” Modleski suggests that Culler is himself patriarchal “just at the point when he seems to be most feminist—when he arrogates to himself and to other male critics the ability to read as women by ‘hypothesizing’ women readers” (p. 133). A feminist criticism, she concludes, should reject “the hypothesis of a woman reader” and instead promote the “actual female reader.”33

Paradoxically, as I point out in chapter 2 with regard to Foucault’s stance on the issue of rape, some of the more subtle attempts to contain this trauma of gender are inscribed in the theoretical discourses that most explicitly aim to deconstruct the status quo in the Text of Western Culture: antihumanist philosophy and Derridean deconstruction itself, as re-fashioned in literary and textual studies in the Anglo-American academy. In her analysis of the notion of femininity in contemporary French philosophy, Rosi Braidotti sees that notion as central to its foremost preoccupations: the critique of rationality, the demystification of unified subjectivity (the individual as subject of knowledge), and the investigation of the complicity between knowledge and power. The radical critique of subjectivity, she argues, “has become focused on a number of questions concerning the role and the status of ‘femininity’ in the conceptual frame of philosophic discourse.”34 This interest appears to be “an extraordinary co-occurrence of phenomena: the rebirth of the women’s movement, on the one hand, and the need to reexamine the foundations of rational discourse left by the majority of European philosophers,” on the other. Braidotti then goes on to discuss the various forms that femininity assumes in the work of Deleuze, Foucault, Lyotard, and Derrida, and, concurrently, the consistent refusal by each philosopher to identify femininity with real women. On the contrary, it is only by giving up the insistence on sexual specificity (gender) that women, in their eyes, would be the social group best qualified (because they
are oppressed by sexuality) to foster a radically “other” subject, de-centered and de-sexualized.

So it is that, by displacing the question of gender onto another, purely textual figure of femininity (Derrida); or by shifting the sexual basis of gender quite beyond sexual difference, onto a body of diffuse pleasures (Foucault) and libidinally invested surfaces (Lyotard), or a body-site of undifferentiated affectivity, and hence a subject freed from (self-)representation and the constraints of identity (Deleuze); and finally by displacing the ideology, but also the reality—the historicity—of gender onto this diffuse, decentered, or deconstructed (but certainly not female) subject—so it is that, paradoxically again, these theories make their appeal to women, naming the process of such displacing with the term becoming woman (Devenir-femme).

In other words, only by denying sexual difference (and gender) as components of subjectivity in real women, and hence by denying the history of women’s political oppression and resistance, as well as the epistemological contribution to feminism to the redefinition of subjectivity and sociality, can the philosophers see in “women” the privileged repository of “the future of mankind.” That, Braidotti observes, is “nothing but the old mental habit [of philosophers] of thinking the masculine as synonymous with universal . . . the mental habit of translating women into metaphor” (pp. 34–35). That this habit is older, and so harder to break than the Cartesian subject, may account for the predominant disregard, when it is not outright contempt, that male intellectuals have for feminist theorizing, in spite of occasional gestures in the direction of “women’s struggles” or the granting of political status to the women’s movement. That should not, and does not, prevent feminist theorists from reading, rereading and rewriting their works.

On the contrary, the need for feminist theory to continue its radical critique of dominant discourses on gender, such as these are, even as they attempt to do away with sexual difference altogether, is all the more pressing since the word postfeminism has been spoken, and not in vain. This kind of deconstruction of the subject is effectively a way to recontain women in femininity (Woman) and to reposition female subjectivity in the male subject, however that will be defined. Furthermore, it closes the door in the face of the emergent social subject which these discourses are purportedly seeking to address, a subject constituted across a multiplicity of differences in discursive and material heterogeneity. Again, then, I rewrite: If the deconstruction of gender inevitably effects its (re)construction, the question is, in which terms and in whose interest is the de-re-construction being effected?

Returning now to the problem I tried to elucidate in discussing Jean

Kennard’s essay, the difficulty we find in theorizing the construction of subjectivity in textuality is greatly increased, and the task proportionately more urgent, when the subjectivity in question is en-gendered in a relation to sexuality that is altogether unrepresentable in the terms of hegemonic discourses on sexuality and gender. The problem, which is a problem for all feminist scholars and teachers, is one we face almost daily in our work, namely, that most of the available theories of reading, writing, sexuality, ideology, or any other cultural production are built on male narratives of gender, whether oedipal or anti-oedipal, bound by the heteroerotic contract; narratives which persistently tend to re-produce themselves in feminist theories. They tend, and will do so unless one constantly resists, suspicious of their drift. Which is why the critique of all discourses concerning gender, including those produced or promoted as feminist, continues to be as vital a part of feminism as is the ongoing effort to create new spaces of discourse, to rewrite cultural narratives, and to define the terms of another perspective—a view from “elsewhere.”

For, if this view is nowhere to be seen, not given in a single text, not recognizable as a representation, it is not that we—feminists, women—have not yet succeeded in producing it. It is, rather, that what we have produced is not recognizable, precisely, as a representation, for that “elsewhere” is not some mythic distant past or some utopian future history: it is the elsewhere of discourse here and now, the blind spots, or the space-off, of its representations. I think of it as spaces in the margins of hegemonic discourses, social spaces carved in the interstices of institutions and in the cracks and cracks of the power-knowledge apparatus. And it is there that the terms of a different construction of gender can be posed—terms that do have effect and take hold at the level of subjectivity and self-representation; in the micropolitical practices of daily life and daily resistances that afford both agency and sources of power or empowering investments; and in the cultural productions of women, feminists, which inscribe that movement in, and out of ideology, that crossing back and forth of the boundaries—and of the limits—of sexual difference(s).

I want to be very clear about this movement back and forth across the boundaries of sexual difference. I do not mean a movement from one to another beyond it, or outside; say, the space of a representation, the image produced by representation in a discursive or visual field, to the space outside the representation, the space outside discourse, which would then be thought of as “real”; or, as Althusser would say, from the space of ideology to the space of scientific and real knowledge; or again, from the symbolic space constructed by the sex-gender system to a “reality” external to it. For, clearly, no social reality exists for a given society outside of it;
particular sex-gender system (the mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories of male and female). What I mean, instead, is a movement from the space represented by/in a representation, by/in a discourse, by/in a sex-gender system, to the space not represented yet implied (unseen) in them.

A while ago I used the expression “space-off,” borrowed from film theory: the space not visible in the frame but inferable from what the frame makes visible. In classical and commercial cinema, the space-off is, in fact, erased, or, better, recontextualized and sealed into the image by the cinematic rules of narrativizing (first among them, the shot/reverse-shot system). But avant-garde cinema has shown the space-off to exist concurrently and alongside the represented space, has made it visible by remarking its absence in the frame or in the succession of frames, and has shown it to include not only the camera (the point of articulation and perspective from which the image is constructed) but also the spectator (the point where the image is received, re-constructed, and re-produced in/as subjectivity).

Now, the movement in and out of gender as ideological representation, which I propose characterizes the subject of feminism, is a movement back and forth between the representation of gender (in its male-centered frame of reference) and what that representation leaves out or, more pointedly, makes unrepresentable. It is a movement between the (represented) discursive space of the positions made available by hegemonic discourses and the space-off, the elsewhere, of those discourses: those other spaces both discursive and social that exist, since feminist practices have (re)constructed them, in the margins (or “between the lines,” or “against the grain”) of hegemonic discourses and in the interstices of institutions, in counterpractices and new forms of community. These two kinds of spaces are neither in opposition to one another nor strung along a chain of signification, but they coexist concurrently and in contradiction. The movement between them, therefore, is not that of a dialectic of integration, of a combinatory, or of différence, but is the tension of contradiction, multiplicity, and heteronomy.

If in the master narratives, cinematic and otherwise, the two kinds of spaces are reconciled and integrated, as man recontextualizes woman in his (man)kind, his homosexuality, nevertheless the cultural productions and micropolitical practices of feminism have shown them to be separate and heteronomous spaces. Thus, to inhabit both kinds of spaces at once is to live the contradiction which, I have suggested, is the condition of feminism here and now: the tension of a twofold pull in contrary directions—the critical negativity of its theory, and the affirmative positivity of its politics—is both the historical condition of existence of feminism and its theoretical condition of possibility. The subject of feminism is en-gendered there. That is to say, elsewhere.

Notes

I wish to thank my students in the History of Consciousness seminar in “Topic’s Feminist Theory: Technologies of Gender” for their comments and observation and my colleague Hayden White for his careful reading of this essay, all of which helped me formulate more clearly some of the issues discussed here.

1. For further discussion of these terms, see Teresa de Lauretis, ed., Feminist Studies/Critical Studies (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), especially the essays by Sondra O’Neale and Mary Russo.


3. I need not detail other well-known exceptions in English usage, such as shi and automobile and countries’ being feminine. See Dale Spender, Men’s Work Language (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), for a very useful survey of issues raised in Anglo-American feminist sociolinguistic research. On the philosophical issue of gender in language, and especially its subversion in practices writing by the strategic employ of personal pronouns, see Monique Wittig, “T: Mark of Gender,” Feminist Issues 5, no. 2 (Fall 1985): 3-12.


The Technology of Gender

21. In the single film text, but always by way of the entire apparatus, including cinematic genres, the "film industry," and the whole "history of the cinematic machine," as Stephen Heath has defined it ("The Cinematic Apparatus: Technology, History, and Cultural Form," in de Lauretis and Heath, The Cinematic Apparatus, 1987). Subsequent references to this work are included in the text.

22. Lucy Bland, "The Domain of the Sexual: A Response," Seven Education, no. 39 (Summer 1981): 36-41. Subsequent references to this work are included in the text.

23. Julian Henriquez, Wendy Hollis, Cathy Urwin, Cosey Fanni, and Valери Walker (London: Methuen, 1984). Subsequent references to this work are included in the text.


25. It may also sound paradoxical to assert that theory is a social technology—a view of the common belief that theory (and similarly science) is the opposite (a technique, empirical knowledge, "hands-on" expertise, practical and applied knowledge)—in short, that all is associated with the term technology. But I trust this; everything said so far in the essay absolves me from the burden of again defining what I mean by technology.


27. I find that I wrote the following, for example: "Narrative cinema and the cinema of women's consent and by a surplus of pleasure hope to seduce women into feminity" (Alice Doesn't, p. 10).


29. Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patricio P. Schweickart, eds., Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. viii. This passage in the introduction refers specifically to the essay by Judith Fetterley "Reading about Reading," pp. 147-64. Subsequent references to this volume are included in the text. The programmatic emphasis of that refusal corroborates the historical evidence that Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1985) document "the reaction formation of intensified misogyny with which male [modernist] writers greeted the entrance of women into the literary marketplace since the end of the nineteenth century," in their essay "Sexual Linguistics: Gender Language, Sexuality," New Literary History 16, no. 3 (Spring 1985): 524.

30. Showalter, "Critical Cross-Dressing," p. 131. However, as Gilbert and Gubar point out, such a move is not unprecedented or necessarily disinterested, may well be—and why not—that the effort of European (male) writers since the Middle Ages to transform the matrimonial union, or mother tongue (the vernacular into a cultivated patria sermo, or father speech) in Walker (Ong's term), as a more suitable instrument for art, has been an effort to cure what Gilbert and Gubar call "the male linguistic wound": "Mourning and wakening a lost patria sermo, male modernists and postmodernists transform the maternal vernacular into a new morning of patriarchy in which they can wake the and powers of the 'Allfather Word'" (Gilbert and Gubar, Sexual Linguistics, pp. 332-334).

31. Jean E. Kennard, "Ourself, behind Ourselves: A Theory for Lesbian Readers," in Flynn and Schweickart, Gender and Reading, p. 71. Here Kennard is quot from Jonatha


33. Modleski’s “actual female reader” seems to parallel Kennard’s “individual lesbian readers.” For example, and I quote from her conclusion. Kennard states: “Polar reading, then, is not a theory of lesbian reading, but a method particularly appropriate to lesbian readers” (p. 77). This sentence, however, is also put into question by the author’s preoccupation, a few lines above, with satisfying all possible readers: “Polar reading permits the participation of any reader in any text and thus opens up the possibility of enjoying the widest range of literary experience.” In the end, this reader remains confused.

34. Rosi Braidotti, “Modelli di dissonanza: donne e/in filosofia,” in Patrizia Magli, ed., *Le donne e i segni* (Urbino: II lavoro editoriale, 1985), p. 25. Although, as I understand, an English version of this paper is available, this and subsequent references included in the text are to the Italian version, in my translation.

2

THE VIOLENCE OF RHETORIC
Considerations on Representation and Gender

Older women are more skeptical in the heart of hearts than any man; they believe in the superficiality of existence as in its essence and all virtue and profundity, in them merely a way to cover up this “true a very welcome veil over a pudendum—a in other words, a matter of decency and shame, and nothing more!"—FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, *The Gay Science*

Even the healthiest woman runs a zigzag course between sexual and individual identity, straining herself now as a person, now a woman.
—LOU ANDREAS-SALOMÉ, *Zur Psychol. der F*

Woman’s skepticism, Nietzsche suggests, comes from her disregard for truth. Truth does not concern her. Therefore, paradoxically, woman is the symbol of Truth, of that which constantly eludes man and which he is not able to capture. This skepticism, this truth of nontruth, is the “affirmation of woman” Nietzsche loved and was. Derrida suggests. It is the philosopher who occupies and speaks from position in which Derrida locates in the terms of a rhetoric, “between the ‘enigma of solution’ and the ‘solution of this enigma’” (1976b, p. 51). The place where he speaks, the locus of his enunciation, is a constantly shifting...

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