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**ANGLO-AMERICAN SECOND WAVE FEMINISMS:
THE ETHICS OF HETEROGENEITY**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| Abstract | 1 |
| Acknowledgements | 2 |
| Introduction | 3 |
| 1. The 'Second Wave': Emerging Feminisms in the 1970s | 29 |
| 2. Liberal and Marxist Feminisms | 79 |
| 3. Radical, Lesbian and Black Feminisms | 135 |
| 4. Ideology, Discourse and Cultural Productions | 188 |
| 5. The Sexual Self: Feminist Debates on Sexuality and Desire | 240 |
| 6. Identity Crisis?: Men in Feminism, Postmodernism/ 'Post-Feminism' | 295 |
| Conclusion | 345 |
| Notes | 361 |
| Bibliography | 402 |

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates debates and tensions in Second Wave Anglo-American Feminisms since the sixties. It interrogates claims that feminism is in crisis, and that the term 'feminism' itself is now semantically overburdened. Its chief purpose is to show that despite feminism's heterogeneity, there are central features of feminist politics which offer an oppositional identity to theorists concerned with exposing the way meanings of gender still shape society and academic discourse. The scope of this work extends from early Second Wave writings to current scholarly reflections on the interface between feminist and other critical theories. This study emphasizes that even the apparent 'anti-theory' thrust of early writers stand testimony to an abiding concern with theories of knowledge, power and representation. Even feminism's early antagonism to 'high theory' could be interpreted as a challenge to the means by which 'theory' is constructed.

The first three chapters examine the emergence of a 'Second Wave' in feminist thought, and the various investments of its differing 'strands' in existing political and theoretical positions. Chapters Four and Five scrutinize what are deemed gaps or sites of conflict in Second Wave theory: theories of ideology, culture, sexuality and subjectivity. Feminism is arguably at its most radical and contentious where its methodology drifts furthest from the epistemological 'mainstream'. Chapter Six considers recent developments in feminist thought - many of which emerged during the writing of this work - illustrating a growing chasm between academic feminism and political feminism.

The conclusion engages with critical discussions of feminism's alleged 'identity crisis', and the means by which feminist agendas are put to anti-feminist uses in face of a political swing to the Right in Britain and the USA. It suggests that the worst effects of a 'backlash' might be countered by greater attention to feminism's recent past. This is not to advocate nostalgia, but to indicate that feminism can learn from its past and present 'mistakes'. Recent questions are not new, but ones which merit ever more complex solutions, for the sake of feminism's survival as an autonomous and challenging philosophy.

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Imelda Whelehan, March 1993

INTRODUCTION

Feminism embodies many theories rather than being a single discrete theory, and rather than being a politically coherent approach to the subordination of women, is a political commitment - or in some of its forms more an ethical commitment - to giving women their true value. It is not even possible to say that it is a commitment to equality, since some feminists have argued, both in the past and today, for separate spheres of influence, emphasizing difference and complementarity rather than equality.¹

PREAMBLE: THE PROBLEM

The research undertaken for this thesis began in October 1985. At this time I had little background knowledge of feminism; my experiences as a student of English Literature, and later Critical Theory, gave the lie to the notion that feminism as a political stance might be acceptable, but that it lacked the 'rigour' to qualify as scholarly work. Halfway through my studies for a Masters Degree, awash with theories of the Subject, and Michel Foucault's contention that 'Man is only a recent invention',² it occurred to me that 'woman' had yet to find her place in critical theory. I was interested in utopian theories, and determined to write an essay on feminism and utopian writing, with particular reference to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Herland (1916); it was perhaps the worst essay I ever wrote. I lacked a language of feminism, or any means to express how the projection of alternative worlds for women, and the corresponding critique of current social realities was both politically engaging, and theoretically challenging.

For me, it was as if feminism had lain dormant since the

1970s: I was sympathetic to feminist political activities, but the theoretical parameters within which I worked appeared to deny feminism any critical currency. I had read texts such as Germaine Greer's The Female Eunuch (1971), and found ways to articulate the specificity of female experience of everyday life, as well as to contest dominant representations of femininity; but I could not write them into my academic work. It was a long ponderous process for me to realize that modern theoretical critiques of objectivity still did not call into question the grounds for male exclusivity, and that to facilitate feminism's admittance as theory, one had to semantically extend its boundaries. This being the case, all feminist writing, in its challenge to meaning and representation, had theoretical potential.

I was initially daunted to discover the sheer volume of substantial academic texts which fitted loosely into my category of 'feminist theory', and which were multiplying by the year. Later I was simply astounded that such an innovative and exciting body of thought could have been ignored almost completely in an academic environment which had readily got to grips with the more esoteric theories of structuralism, post-structuralism and psychoanalytic theory. My feeling that feminism needed to be theoretically foregrounded, was therefore coupled with an awareness that feminism as discourse had proliferated; perhaps, after all, there could be nothing more to say about feminism.

All research students have, at some time, to face up to the problem of how to narrow down their field: my problem was to decide on what exactly my 'field' was. Feminist literary theory

led me to critical/creative writings and political theory, which in turn drew me to psychoanalytic and social theory. Not to retain at least a flavour of all these approaches in my own work seemed impossible, since all these 'feminisms' had in part a symbiotic relationship. I concluded that the main strength of modern feminist thought was its interdisciplinarity, its resistance to easy categorization, and that to seriously attempt to re-partition fragments of feminism into subject-oriented pigeon-holes would be to perform an act of phallogentric vandalism. This, it turned out, was the least of my worries. All research students probably experience the sensation of 'living' their work; as a feminist and a theorist I find myself doing this repeatedly - not least because interested (and antagonistic) people constantly demand explanations of what feminism is, and what actions it requires.

What I found particularly unnerving during my initial period of research, was the tenor of important feminist works published during the mid-eighties (especially during the years 1985-87). The market seemed to be flooded with summaries, retrospectives and anthologies of pathfinding feminist essays - readers to enable people to 'get by' in feminism. On the face of it this was a gratifying discovery because it seemed to reflect a period of renewed interest in feminist thought by a new generation of readers too young, like myself, to experience the birth of feminism's Second Wave in the late 1960s. Yet at the same time I detected among these writings a note of anxiety, a sense of impending crisis, best illustrated by the publication of Juliet Mitchell's and Ann Oakley's selection of essays entitled What is

Feminism? (1986). The use of the present tense in the title could not conceal the fact that many of the contributors slipped uneasily into the past tense, and seemed to be implicitly asking, 'What was Feminism?'.

This trend for nostalgia is as common in contemporary feminist thought as is the trend for amnesia about the achievements of feminist politics in the seventies. In either case, what current feminists increasingly recognized was the existence of inner tensions that threatened to tear the Women's Movement apart. It became redundant or simply misguided to talk about female experience - or feminism - in the singular. A more positive breakthrough of the eighties was the realization that feminism had come of age; it was beginning to articulate its own position in relation to other academic discourse and in relation to mainstream political thought, in spite of the academic mainstream's rejection of feminism. One problem with feminism's new theoretical awareness has been an increasing disjunction between feminist theory (as an academic growth industry) and feminist politics - any actual development of the social ramifications of feminism as a body of thought (or 'bodies of thoughts', more properly) which is actively engaged in affirming the need for social change.

Perhaps it is in the nature of academic pursuits to suffer to some degree from a theory/practice dichotomy. In the area of feminist theory attempts have been made to heal this rift by arguing that feminist interventions in the academic sphere are themselves political acts - since they expose other inequities within academe, such as the sparsity of female academics in

positions of power, and the failure to address the specific needs of women students. Nevertheless this form of praxis safely occurs within the confines of the classroom: a more pressing concern in face of such a marked cleavage is how to forge a more convincing link between academic and political feminism. To some extent academic forms of discourse are partially recuperated as 'political' in the light of feminist extensions of the term. For critics like Toril Moi the act of producing a feminist reading of a text is a political act in itself:

The radically new impact of feminist criticism is to be found not at the level of theory or methodology, but at the level of politics. Feminists have politicized existing critical methods and approaches. If feminist criticism has subverted established critical judgements it is because of its radically new emphasis on sexual politics.³

Now, at the beginning of the nineties, one needs to realize that Second Wave feminism has undergone a massive epistemological transformation. I shall later argue that feminism was never a site of consensus; but a symptom of latter-day feminist theory has been to interrogate and foreground these divisions as a feature of its critique, particularly in a recognition of the importance of theorizing about/reflecting upon the significance of conflicting subject-positions within feminism.

I came to an early decision to focus upon what has been termed 'Anglo-American' feminism, and in retrospect I think that this decision was both a perverse and fortunate one. Perverse, in that my male colleagues seemed to readily address so-called 'French feminism', and award it at least a notional place within

theory, and I was more interested in theorizing about aspects of feminism which were regarded as stubbornly 'non-theoretical'. Fortunate, in the sense that my attention to Anglo-American theory led me to investigate much of the feminist work that is now casually ignored on the grounds that its work had been superceded, and that its lessons had been learned. My forays into 'confessional' feminism, led me to make critical comparisons which would never have occurred to me had I contented myself with comparing French and Anglo-American feminisms.

English feminist politics has always shown a tendency to operate at one remove from mainstream parliamentary politics - perhaps rightly feminists have regarded the prospect of fully integrating into such a phallogentric stronghold with profound suspicion. American liberal feminists have more successfully entered mainstream politics with reformist zeal, supported by networks such as the National Organization for Women (N.O.W.), founded in 1966. British and American feminisms share many of the same trends and influences, except perhaps that English feminism has traditionally favoured a loosely 'socialist' rather than liberal political position. What is exciting about Anglo-American feminism is the fact of its heterogeneity, because of the many and diverse origins from which it has drawn strength.

The aim of this preamble has been to situate some of the problems I have encountered when endeavouring to gather together extremely diverse and contradictory material into the body of this thesis. It also constitutes an effort on my part to give what follows a clearly definable speaking voice, which required a brief evaluation of the way this work evolved, and indeed why it

evolved at all. My wish to intrude upon my work in this way is firstly a gesture - a tribute to the legacy of radical feminism which has championed the unorthodox and experimental in women's writing since the late sixties, especially encouraging a creative and personal approach to critical writing. The second reason is closely linked to the first: to deal with my subject neutrally and 'authoritatively' would, in one sense, seem to be a betrayal of my commitment to the development of feminism in academic institutions, in social formations, and to the radicalism of critical theory in general. It is also accepted practice for feminists to explicitly declare their particular brand of feminism, although this is something I find increasingly difficult to do. When I embarked upon this research, I was primarily attracted to a socialist feminist position, but have gradually found that some of the boundaries between feminism's '57 varieties' have blurred before my eyes. I have explicitly blurred such boundaries in the latter chapters of this thesis, in my attempt to seek an 'ethics' of heterogeneity, and to argue that even when feminism is considered to be a veritable battleground, its common ground is far more extensive and far more enriching than particular feminist links with other theoretical positions. Because this thesis often explores the common trends and gaps within modern feminist discourses, it is in fact essential to transgress such boundaries. Although it might be true to say that some of the differences in feminist theory and practice are irreconcilable at the present time, on closer inspection it is clear that the common features of the many strands which comprise feminism might be usefully

re-examined in order to seek a way out of the critical impasse that best characterizes feminist writings and feminist politics today.⁴

In order to restrict the scope of this work to some degree, I have found it essential to deal primarily with feminist writings since the late sixties. This has to some extent created an artificial and even debatable hiatus in feminist history, when some critics believe feminism did not die or wane after its so-called First Wave ended in the 1920s.⁵ Nonetheless this particular landmark is widely accepted as a time of new dynamism in feminism (a Second Wave), and as it is also a time remembered as being one of academic and political crisis it serves as an important point of departure. The following sections of this introductory chapter are intended to provide a rationale for the developing argument within the thesis as a whole, as well as gesturing towards its conclusion.

NEGOTIATING FEMINISM'S 'STRANDS'

The first three chapters function, in part, as an extended critical introduction to successive chapters, and evaluate some of the common tendencies and distinguishing features of Anglo-American feminisms. The opening chapter assesses the impact of emergent Second Wave politics, as well as briefly indicating its origins, and the reasons why feminism emerged as a stance autonomous from other radical political positions. It seems to me that there have been three broad stages in the growth of feminist thought from the sixties to the nineties which might

be articulated as a movement from creativity to sophistication to relative stasis.⁶ These 'stages' are however purely artificial - intended as a useful means of critical shorthand for the reader.

The first chapter elucidates some of the issues that seem central to feminism of whatever hue - such as the critical appropriations of the terms 'gender' and 'patriarchy', and critiques of ideology and the familial institution. It will become clear that although feminists in general agree some basic principles about the factors contributing to women's oppression in society and culture, they have very different ideas about how to resolve these problems. These inner tensions in the Women's Movement have lately been characterized as a symptom of the eighties, correlative with the growth of feminism and women's studies into academic disciplines. Juliet Mitchell, for one, harks back with nostalgia to the 'heady days' of sixties protest when sisterhood seemed powerful.⁷

Chapters Two and Three suggest that tensions were always simmering under the surface of feminist politics, and such conflicts came to a head when women of colour, lesbians and working-class women used feminist discourse to articulate their sense of exclusion from its 'mainstream'. Perhaps, therefore, an illusion of solidarity had been briefly created because during the seventies feminism remained, primarily, the province of highly educated, white middle-class heterosexual women. What seems to create the main antagonisms within feminism is the fear that feminism, in common with other radical societal perspectives, will inevitably replicate social hierarchies, thinly veiled by the rhetoric of universal sisterhood. The

increasing presence of black, lesbian and working-class women necessarily shifted the terms for debate - women could no longer be certain that they meant the same thing when discussing oppression in relation to their own experiences. To some extent the glorious slogan of radical feminism, 'the personal is political', had backfired. The development of an increasingly complex 'politics of identity' meant women found they had less not more in common - a bitterness grew which developed an odd hierarchy among the oppressed to discover who had the most 'authentic' voice for the Women's Movement - in other words, who had also been oppressed in terms of her race, class, disability or sexual orientation, by her feminist sisters. Kathryn Harriss observes that by 1983:

An obsession seized the movement for self-labelling and labelling others, not to elucidate debate but to fix a woman somewhere along a predetermined hierarchy of oppressions in order to justify or contest a political opinion by reference to the speaker's identity.⁸

Historically, black women had long been torn between civil rights and women's rights, suffering injustice and prejudice at the hands of both groups, just as lesbians were torn between gay politics and feminist sexual politics. For feminism to reconsolidate and survive these rifts it needs at least to adopt a four-pronged approach to oppression, and to again exploit all that was innovative and refreshing about radical feminist politics of the seventies - its denial of hierarchy of authority within its ranks, its policy of total support via a concept of a fundamental (if not universal) shared oppression. In face of the

legacy of the dominant New Right politics of the eighties (and its emerging pro-female front in the nineties), it is essential for feminists to constantly re-evaluate their critical positions for flaws and contradictions, to accommodate marked ideological and social shifts.

At first sight these first three chapters might be construed as an attempt at a survey of significant positions in feminist thought. Several such commentaries exist, the most popular being Alison Jaggar's Feminist Politics and Human Nature (1983) and Rosemarie Tong's Feminist Thought (1989). I hope it will become apparent that these chapters are much more than summaries intended to provide the reader with a working knowledge of each strand of feminism. As I have stated earlier, my decision to critically evaluate Anglo-American feminism led me to reappraise the writings of Second Wave pioneers; and while such a re-evaluation led me to identify inconsistencies, it also convinced me of the importance of such work as a revolution in theoretical forms of expression. There has been a tendency among contemporary commentators to over-simplify the scope of early Second Wave work; part of my endeavour in these chapters has been to identify the most challenging and complex aspects of these texts, in order to show how they might be utilized today.

IDEOLOGY, CULTURE, SUBJECTIVITY AND SEXUALITY

Chapters Four and Five comprise a closer focus on theoretical concepts which have either previously been elided by many feminist critics, or have proved to be a massive stumbling block

for them. Firstly, I shall consider the problem of ideology for feminism, using a post-Althusserian model which facilitates a concentration on the processes of State Repressive Apparatuses (for example, education, the law and the welfare state). Such apparatuses raise complex issues for feminist theory because of the ways in which they simultaneously protect and subordinate women. Women's relation to the state has always been a problem for feminists: liberal feminists, who have embraced the traditional individualist elements of liberal doctrine, have always striven to lessen the power of the state, whereas for socialist feminists the state is viewed as both ally and adversary, and its purview extends far beyond education and social services:

Although the state is formally only interested in such 'private' matters as sexuality only in so far as they affect the 'public' good, it is clear that the degree of state involvement in sexuality and procreation renders the public/private distinction untenable.⁹

In its role as supporter of the family-household system (and hence of heterosexuality as the desired social norm), the state effectively institutionalizes the subordination of women. In terms of healthcare and social services women may find the state vital for their welfare and financial support. Any cutback in financial and social support (as witnessed in recent years) drives women back into the home as chief carers in the family relationship. While both liberal and socialist feminists have taken action to review certain laws to afford women more autonomy through equal pay legislation, etc., as long as the state

represents the interests of the family, women will suffer and yet, in times of hardship, be sustained in its 'care'. Socialist feminists, for their part are only too aware that support of the 'family' in essence guarantees support to the male 'breadwinner', at the expense of continued pay inequalities for women. Feminism as oppositional ideology(ies) has to come to terms with the fact that phallogentric ideologies pervade all parliamentary politics and Left-wing groups, and in order to counter the tendency for feminism to be absorbed by or become an adjunct to any of these, feminism needs to maintain an effective and autonomous theoretical framework.

Ideology is also reinforced and perpetuated via cultural productions. Some of the most important early feminist texts (for example Mary Ellmann's Thinking About Women (1969) and Kate Millett's Sexual Politics (1971)) deal with the images of women presented in male-authored texts and demonstrate how these representations contribute to the stereotyping of the female sex, ascribing immutable qualities of femininity and reinscribing gender difference in a quasi-essentialist fashion. However, seeking out such stereotypes risks becoming a circular process. If we accept Ellmann's point that these stereotypes are fundamentally iterative and self-contradictory, what more can we do about them once we have pinpointed their existence? In fact the 'images of women' school of feminist literary criticism has in later years been successfully developed and expanded in conjunction with psychoanalytic theory by feminists working in the area of film/media studies, and has latterly proved attractive to postmodernist theorists.

If women have been pervasively characterized as lacking or inferior in art and the media, they have also historically had their greatest success in influencing cultural history by their specific engagement in literary production.¹⁰ Unsurprisingly, feminist criticism has developed rapidly in the realms of literary theory/cultural studies. With greater access to a wider variety of cultural productions, and armed with increasingly sophisticated feminist tools for analysis, it would appear that women have an ideal opportunity to perpetuate a feminist ideology. Unfortunately this is only the case in a limited context. The dominant phallographic ideology has proved deft at absorbing contradictions: feminist criticism too often becomes a discrete area of study, and by being accorded a marginal 'special interest' status, its potential ideological impact is effectively defused.

Chapter Five focuses on the problem of constructing an effective theory of female sexuality which is able to broach the already sexualized image of women that has been perpetuated during the post-industrial capitalist era. Psychoanalysis has been appropriated by feminists to account for the differing experiences of subjectivity encountered by men and women from childhood to adulthood. Freud, variously interpreted by feminists as a founding father or the enemy incarnate, is an important landmark in the analysis of the sexual identity of the individual and the power of the unconscious. As Michel Foucault points out in his first volume of The History of Sexuality (1976), the analysis of sexuality as being somehow the core of the individual's being led to the hystericization and

medicalization of the female body. Women's sexuality has long been viewed in Western society as a dangerous phenomenon in need of strict control - as has the sexuality of children. Female sexuality is of social and political consequence in a capitalist social organization which feeds off the family structure it zealously protects. In such a social organization it is therefore vital to control women's fertility, as well as to maintain the discrete moral power of the nuclear family system, to ensure legitimacy of future heirs to capital.

Correlative with the birth of the Second Wave in Western Culture was the emergence of the so-called 'permissive society' of the sixties; and the radical left espoused a new era of sexual freedom for women (heterosexual men have always been 'free' in practice if not in theory). In order to live the utopia of choice and freedom in sexual matters, feminists had to canvas the state for free contraception and abortion on demand: in effect nothing ever came 'free' to women. In any case, in the sphere of heterosexual relationships this liberation was prematurely truncated, since within (hetero)sexual politics, gender roles had not undergone any significant transformation - women were still objects of desire for the male gaze - and as objects there were certain 'feminine' standards of sexuality to live up to. The early eighties heralded a period of sexual trauma, with the growing threat posed by AIDS - and men and women on the periphery of acceptable sexual behaviour (for example gay men and prostitutes) - became the first target of public censure. In periods of moral terror in any culture it seems that women and sexual and racial minorities will bear the brunt of social

castigation.

In order to comprehensively address the problems of ideology and sexuality it is necessary to approach the subject via a consideration of the wider mechanisms of power and domination. Although conducted to a large extent in a gender-blind context, Foucault's methodological framework usefully provides a point of departure through which to negotiate an exit from the cul-de-sac of oppositional discourse which Foucault, at times, rather pessimistically elucidates. Foucault separates the two elements of power (as an abstract fluid force) and domination (as the concrete privilege of those in power) to construct a model of the process of power that resembles a pyramidal formation. He argues that the state, through ideology and the acquisition of knowledge (about sexuality, criminality, insanity, etc.), is better equipped to police its members, as well as enrolling some at every level of the social hierarchy to act as ideological/moral 'police' (psychoanalysts, gaolers, parents, teachers) at both a 'national' and localized level.

If we hold with Foucault that an epistemic discursive formation dictates the conditions of existence of any utterance at any given time and that therefore feminism (like Marxism) is a 'fish in water',¹¹ the possibility of effective oppositional discourse seems remote, in that power is viewed as functioning semi-autonomously from those in the dominant position in a social formation. However, Foucault's analysis of oppositional discourse in Power/Knowledge (1980), inconclusive as it is, can be evaluated in relation to radical and later New Right politics in order to attempt to construct an oppositional discourse which

refuses to replicate existing power models. Feminism, in its refusal to engage in hierarchical power roles, or to put forward particular spokespeople, seems to be heading in the right direction - though it is doubtful that a 'revolution in consciousness' will ever be realized without limited intervention in either party politics or the mass media.

RETHINKING FEMINISM

The sixth chapter appraises the future of oppositional discourse as a projected feminist utopia, which has to always bear in mind its origin in politics. Since this chapter delves deeper into theoretical speculation it effectively comprises the 'superstructure' of the thesis; but it also attempts to pull together the issues raised by the foregoing chapters. In this chapter I primarily evaluate theoretical developments which have emerged in tandem with this thesis. It is a perennial problem that any long-term piece of research risks being superceded before it is fully realized, and it is quite possible that had I begun my explorations some years later, my own work would have acquired a quite different shape. However, as my own investigations continued it seemed more appropriate to stand by my original intentions and to use feminism's recent past to reflect upon its present rather than the reverse.

In recent years many feminists have detected what might be regarded as a crisis in feminism - while theory goes on in leaps and bounds, praxis becomes a greater problem. In common with parliamentary opposition parties, the Women's Movement has as yet

been unequal to tackling the subtleties of New Right policies and ideology, which pose a significant threat to the left-wing and arguably an even stronger one to women's rights. It is not altogether surprising that feminists are beginning to more frequently reflect on their past rather than their future, in the wake of a sinister 'new sexism' and 'new racism' which thrive under the rhetoric of cultural and sexual equality. Women and ethnic groups are again encouraged to celebrate their differences and remain a manageable marginalized faction.

Perhaps feminism as it appears today holds the most ironic and dualistic of positions. In theory (literally) feminism is becoming a widespread and respectable academic process (especially in the fields of English and Cultural Studies). I shall select the publication of Men in Feminism (1987)¹² as one recent landmark which concretizes some of the rumblings in the Establishment that had been rising to a head, at least since the publication of Elaine Showalter's article 'Critical Cross-Dressing; Male Feminists and the Woman of the Year'¹³ in 1983. This article summarizes some of the doubts many feminists express in Men in Feminism about the critical intervention of 'male feminists' on the scene, sensing perhaps that women, during this period of crisis, need to resolve a few more of their own critical differences before calling in male reinforcements. I share this unease; that despite the well-intentioned, ideologically sound offerings from Paul Smith, Stephen Heath and others in this publication, direct involvement by men in feminist theory can be politically and academically dangerous. As Elaine Showalter observes:

Feminist criticism has worried too much already, in my opinion, about communicating with the white fathers, even at the price of translating its findings into the warp of their obscure critical languages. If some of them are now learning our language, all the better; but there is more than a hint in some recent critical writing that it's time for men to step in and show the girls how to do it...¹⁴

In common with Showalter, I remain disturbed by the prospect of a substantial intervention in feminism by men, and shall further elucidate my reasons in Chapter Six.

Suffice to say for the present that several years after the publication of Feminist Literary Studies (1984), I am still reeling from some of the assertions made by its author, K.K. Ruthven. Firstly, he rapidly dispenses with all questions of the political impact of feminist criticism by describing it as 'just one more way of talking about books';¹⁵ and then sporadically throughout the book he vents his spleen on feminist 'terrorists' who would perhaps receive his work with trepidation, by a series of cheap shots that seem designed to reinforce current stereotypes of feminism:

Even in its milder forms, feminist discourse strikes men as being accusatory, as it is meant to do; and in its most uncompromising manifestations it is unrelentingly intimidatory.

Feminist terrorism is the mirror image of machismo. Unregenerately separatist - men are the problem, so how could they possibly be part of the solution? - it offers the vicarious satisfactions of retaliation and reprisal in a war of the sexes for which the only acceptable end is unconditional surrender of all power to women.

Terrorism polarises the sexes in such a way that men must either ignore feminism or attack it...¹⁶

Ruthven continually undercuts his professed reasonable and moderate aims in engaging in feminist debate and indulges in the verbal aggression of a veritable storm-trooper. While I do not wish to tar Heath, Smith, et al. with the same brush, Ruthven's brand of male-oriented discourse thinly disguised as 'pro-feminist' is capable of doing more damage than it is of procuring support for the Women's Movement. The authority that a male voice immediately acquires over the female in academic discourse is a related problem that is perhaps too huge and pervasive for even the most gender-conscious of males.

Politically and in the wider public sphere, feminism seems to have died an untimely death - if media pronouncements of the 'post-feminist' age are to be believed. The Old Guard of feminist pioneers are exhumed to support this view - such as Germaine Greer, latter-day doyenne of the chat shows - who gracefully do their bit to kill the cause they once championed. These speakers for womankind are a striking reminder of the New Right transition of 1980s Europe and the USA. Feminists in academia need to turn to this confusing and contradictory blaze of signifiers which pepper the media and constantly remind us that we still have our work cut out if a feminist revolution in consciousness is not to be diverted into a series of pyrrhic victories - such as getting women's studies courses on the critical agenda - no matter how important these individual gains are.

We are seduced by images of career women enjoying their

new-found prosperity; sanitary products may now be advertised on television, showing women wearing tight fitting clothes with the promise that it is their 'secret': both these images of women, however, remain seamlessly 'feminine' - the 'new woman' is almost identical to the old. What is clearly apparent is that women are constantly being reassured that neither 'success' nor biological femaleness need compromise their quintessential femininity - and it is this ever-shifting ideological construct 'the feminine' that has to be critically re-evaluated by feminists.

Returning to the academic institutions themselves we find an attempt at practice - the women's studies courses or options offered on degrees in English, History, etc. Here women of the Second Wave generation attempt to raise the consciousness of younger women who tend to think that to proclaim oneself a 'feminist' is a dirty word - given the current clash of conflicting feminisms there may unfortunately be a grain of truth in their judgement. It is becoming increasingly common for women's studies to be regarded as separate from feminist 'high' theory - a process which seems to be aligning the well-known feminist theorists with male counterparts in the sphere of critical theory.

This is especially true of discourses on postmodernism, couched as they are in the language of resistance and transgression, in a celebration of postmodern aesthetics as an effacement of the boundaries between high and popular culture. The discourses of postmodernism seem to lend themselves to feminism, since in the past cultural productions by women have proliferated or have at times been relegated to the realms of

popular culture; and accordingly a serious approach to forms of popular culture can only (on the face of it) raise the profile of feminist research. Having said this, the forms of analysis and definitions of what constitutes the postmodern moment are as heterogeneous as the variety of feminist positions we witness today.

In the 'feminist' forms of postmodern approaches, postmodernism is defined as the epistemological meeting place of feminism, deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis. E. Ann Kaplan, for one, sees this merger as the point of formation of a 'utopian' manifestation of postmodernism which she describes as involving 'a movement of culture and texts beyond oppressive binary categories and could not be imagined without the work of, among others, Bakhtin, Derrida, Lacan, Cixous, Kristeva and Roland Barthes'.¹⁷ The radical decentring of the subject which a deconstructive reading of a text entails, and the gesture towards an end to the binary oppositions masculinity/femininity is at one level very attractive to modern feminists, just as it seemed to Virginia Woolf in A Room of One's Own (1929). But sixty years on, the moment of that dissolution in opposition seems to me still a utopian moment, and though utopian writing is a useful and undervalued aspect of feminist politics, it must be emphasized that this erosion of the dread binary has yet to be witnessed by current feminists in their personal (political) lives.

Many feminists might wonder whether feminism is to be subsumed in this particular brand of 'utopian' postmodernism, or if feminism is in fact the organizing principle. I suspect the

former trend more likely, given the fate of feminism to date as a marginalized discourse in academic thought - something to be summoned as an interesting and diverting 'perspective', rather than an impressive mode of autonomous discourse. Interestingly (but not surprisingly), the emergence of postmodern culture has been situated as parallel to the rise of the Second Wave of feminism (1968 approximately). Within these theoretical debates of 'men in feminism' and postmodernism, feminism again appears to be conceived as a largely homogeneous evolutionary process which has at its heart a series of well-directed goals. In reality, the minority of published feminists are totally committed to the form of feminism which takes as its condition of existence post-Lacanian psychoanalytic theory or post-structuralism. Perhaps in these years of relative stasis, feminists are more likely to be engaged in an ongoing debate between conflicting feminist approaches - debates which seem to thrive in an atmosphere of measured detente.

If I seem to be negative about the contributions acknowledged by feminism to other radical theories of subjectivity, it is because I remain wary about the potential appropriation of feminist achievement within a wider intellectual tradition of radicalism, into which feminism might be neatly slotted and gradually swamped. Feminist theory¹⁸ has drawn strength from its marginal position in academia and politics although conversely, it suffers from this ghettoization. Here I locate one of the most infuriating and exciting of contradictions inherent in feminist discourse: on the one hand it needs to emphasize its separateness from the disciplines, as they are traditionally

defined, because of its nascent interdisciplinarity; and yet on the other hand there exists a profound desire to be credited for attempts to transform and expand those disciplines from within by highlighting the gaps and silences on the subject of women (as subject) in relation to Western social and political thought.

Now that I find myself a part of academia as a teacher, I seem to relive that contradiction daily. I am an English lecturer appointed for my specialism in modern feminist theory and criticism; I teach the traditional canon plus women's writing and feminist perspectives on male authored texts. More recently I have established a course on Western Feminisms which I teach to politics students within a modular degree scheme. Despite the rewards of teaching such a course, it does not appear to me to signify an acceptance of feminism's interventionary impact at an interdisciplinary level. Rather my feminist work is commonly regarded by teachers and students alike as an extra subject, which would be reminiscent of 'women's studies' if such a subject area were identified in my institution. This suggests that even the victory of establishing women's studies as a discipline has its cost and its paradox, that of enabling the academic mainstream to conveniently 'forget' feminism's political function within the academic institution. Nonetheless, feminist academics who share my good fortune to teach their own subject are probably the envy of an older generation of feminists who to some extent fought the most difficult of battles - to achieve recognition at all - for us.

Perhaps the most negative aspect of teaching feminism is the initial and virtually wholesale acceptance by students of the

notion that we have indeed entered a post-feminist age, which has incorporated and refined the basic tenets of feminist thought. (On the positive side, it is rewarding to observe just how many students find feminist criticism exciting and challenging once they have discarded their original preconceptions about it.) New Right politics, it seems, has effected an ideological shift that is an awesome business to attack. Sexism - one of the 'feminist' words incorporated into idiomatic speech today - has gone underground. To doggedly maintain one's feminist politics today is a wearying exercise and in direct conflict with the media images of the successful career women with the world at her feet and her femininity at her fingertips and who, incidentally, does not remind me of me.

ENVOI

In addition to attempting an extension of the parameters of feminist theory by the appropriation and modification of some pre-existing theoretical models, such as Foucault's, and those of socialist and radical feminism, it seemed necessary to review the present tensions operating within feminist theoretical discourse itself. In the wake of such heterogeneity a fundamental question which necessarily arises is whether feminisms can remain 'feminist' - so that the term retains some of its original political resonance.

I argue throughout this thesis that although feminism as an object of study is going forward, feminism as a political methodology engaged in the material and social problems of

women's oppression, has remained depressingly static. Feminism needs to re-emerge from the mire of 'identity politics' in order to fully engage with and interrogate the nature of subtle ideological and material shifts which have occurred since the beginnings of its Second Wave. I would not wish to suggest that a single unifying feminist discourse is either possible or desirable, but rather that feminisms can thrive upon such a diversity of approaches, moving towards a celebration of heterogeneity, and away from the more negative influences of the 'founding fathers' of academic discourse. For this reason, I have made it a policy to limit, as far as is possible, direct references to male-oriented theories and criticisms, when a woman-centred one can serve my purposes equally well. I recognize that in this decision, certain bodies of thought, such as (male) Marxism, only receive scant attention. This is merely to allow more space for what turned out to be a huge enterprise: in an academic environment where feminists often have to retreat two paces in order to move forward, I hope a little theoretical 'skipping' will be accepted.

CHAPTER ONE
THE 'SECOND WAVE': EMERGING FEMINISMS IN THE 1970s

The new women's movement that arose in the late 1960s and early 1970s in most Western countries was not the first feminist movement in history. The term 'second wave feminism' has been attached to the new movement to indicate that we are witnessing the second peak of a feminist movement that has existed for more than 100 years, ever since the second half of the nineteenth century.¹

REFORM TO REVOLUTION

It is impossible and therefore probably inadvisable to pinpoint one year to mark the beginning of feminism's so-called 'Second Wave'; however, 1968 has a certain symbolic resonance, not least as the year of public manifestations of New Left radicalism in Europe and the USA. In the United States, many women, disenchanted by their involvement in male-dominated left-wing politics, were defecting to localized, non-hierarchical women's liberation groups. Such groups were established in order to interrogate the social and material conditions of individual women's existence, often with the longer term aim of creating an agenda for political transformation of the social status of women. Women's participation in left-wing politics, which often involved performing largely menial 'feminine' tasks - such as typing and clerical/domestic support work - alerted them to the stark fact that existing political positions did not take the issue of women's subordination seriously. Furthermore, radical men appeared to be quite happy to exploit a 'natural' sexual

division of labour in order to service their own cause, unaware or unconcerned that they might be themselves perpetuating oppressive power relations. Because mainstream political and social theories focused on 'male' experience in the public sphere of work, women found themselves, paradoxically, 'outside' analyses of class and relations of production, while being nominally contained within such a perspective - as far as male comrades were concerned. Left-wing analyses of social injustice focused on class as the central determinant of power relations, assuming that male and female experiences were identical; and if women's oppression was considered at all it was regarded as an effect of capitalism.

In a speech given at the Free University in New York City on 17 February 1968, Anne Koedt articulated a sense of collective female disillusionment:

Within the last year many radical women's groups have sprung up throughout the country. This was caused by the fact that movement women found themselves playing secondary roles on every level - be it in terms of leadership, or simply in terms of being listened to. They found themselves (and others) afraid to speak up because of self-doubts when in the presence of men. They ended up concentrating on food-making, typing, mimeographing, general assistance work, and serving as a sexual supply for their male comrades after hours.²

Women began to reflect upon feminism's past, and to reconceive the potential for women's liberation outside the parameters of a political discourse which afforded no space for women as a distinct, though unwieldy, category. Their disenchantment with the radical political movements of the sixties led them to

believe that female subordination was more than just an effect of dominant political forces; it was endemic in all social relations with men. Once women began to scrutinize such effects collectively - in the form of consciousness raising groups in particular - they found their suspicions that a Socialist revolution would rapidly metamorphose into a white bourgeois male revolution well-founded. As a consequence revolutionary strategies themselves had to be reviewed: women were not simply militating for material changes, but recognized the need for a profound shift in the dominant ideological representation of femininity:

In 1968 the Women's Liberation Movement announced itself to a startled public by staging a demonstration at the Miss America contest in Atlantic City, protesting, among other points, 'Women in our society are forced daily to compete for male approval, enslaved by ludicrous beauty standards that we ourselves are conditioned to take seriously and to accept.'³

This event signalled a new phase of feminist activism, and initiated other protests in both America and Britain. It also became an object lesson to its organizers about how such demonstrations of sisterly solidarity could be construed as vicious attacks on other women (the contestants in the Beauty pageant in this case), and later protests were more unambiguously directed at the men responsible for producing women as sex objects. More significantly, perhaps, this event framed all future media interpretations of feminists as rabid 'bra burners':

They decided to stage a protest - and to illustrate

their point they dumped bras and girdles into a 'freedom trash bucket'. Imaginary flames were added later by a news agency reporter, and the idea caught on in a big way. The media loved it. Sexy and absurd, it neatly disposed of a phenomenon which would otherwise have proved rather awkward to explain.⁴

Thus the first recorded emergence of Second Wave radicalism on to the public consciousness was successfully defused by the media; such protests could be dismissed as attacks from bitter unattractive females who could never become Miss America themselves. In retrospect, such events signalled a marked tactical shift from the reformist roots of feminism's 'First Wave': radical feminists inaugurated a departure from the mainstream political arena altogether. The primary site of struggle, as characterized by these early demonstrations, was to be the female body itself, and the restraints imposed upon it by contemporary Western notions of femininity.

In Britain 1968 marked fifty years of women's suffrage; a landmark viewed increasingly as at best a Pyrrhic victory. After the First World War the First Wave of feminism had achieved its stated major aim, and the two world wars required a commitment by women to work for the war effort. The side effect of this was, of course, a degree of liberation for women from the constriction of their domestic roles - in times of desperate need it seemed that childcare and catering provisions materialized as an aspect of the state's role in maintaining and streamlining a wartime economy. Elizabeth Wilson describes the British wartime housewife as positively seduced into performing the dual role of carer and worker - roles which had previously been ideologically

cast as mutually in conflict and tension:

The housewife was the heroic figure of the Second World War, and additionally so because she was often a worker as well. The 'glamour band' twisted round her hair served both to protect it as she bent over an industrial war machine, and, as its name suggested, glamorized the utilitarian... This wartime housewife was lapped round with state solicitude and with honeyed praise from the press; a striking contrast with her neglect in prewar years.⁵

The interwar years and the decade after the Second World War are commonly viewed as a period of relative inactivity for feminist politics - hence the distinction made between 'First' and 'Second Wave' movements, which also signified a major transition from the rhetoric of 'rights' to the radicalism of 'liberation'. World events had transformed the lives of working-class and bourgeois women alike, and it seemed possible that this transformation might be permanent. Women - that 'reserve army' of cheap labour - entered the labour market en masse and as a result women's traditional roles as mother and carer had to be redefined, or at least extended to accommodate their new dual identity within/without the home.

However, the years after the Second World War produced a retroactive ideological shift: a revived 'cult of the housewife' was effectively a consolidated attack on women's new-found freedom - devoted to recreating and redefining the domestic space as women's space. Domestic labour was now fully construed within capitalist terms; the housewife of the 1950s and 1960s was constructed and mythologized as a competent

businesswoman surrounded by a wealth of labour-saving devices in the home, so that housewifery could be ideologically packaged as a skilled, highly technologized industry all of its own. The housewife's role was one of autonomy and responsibility; as the major purchaser of commodities in the family household, she was intensively targeted through commercial advertising. The image of the housewife as the purveyor of high standards of domestic organization was fed back to individual women through the media - where it had become increasingly glamorized and correspondingly difficult to live up to, unless this role was adopted as a full-time occupation.

Undoubtedly the twentieth century saw substantial improvements in the quality of women's lives. The wife and mother of the 1950s and 60s no longer closely resembled the 'Angel in the House' of Victorian popular mythology, but the home was again regarded as the proper haven for the 'whole' woman. For 'normal' women - women who married and had children - maintaining the household was to be their proper destiny; indeed it became an identity in itself, to the exclusion of all others. Careers were supposed to be temporary launch pads, abandoned when the 'career' of motherhood was embarked upon. Women who wanted both a family and career had a difficult time juggling work with their domestic and 'true' identity. Career women who eschewed the path of maternity and matrimony confronted the inequities of a labour market where they were neither paid for doing the same work as men nor rewarded with promotion to senior positions for showing equal competence. As Betty Friedan observed, 'It is more than a strange paradox that as all professions are finally open to women

in America, "career woman" has become a dirty word'.⁶ In fact, there remain clear ideological links between the literary image of the 'Angel in the House' and the 1950s magazine projection of the 'modern housewife'. Both images represent a disjunction between the glamorized ideal of the passive, pure and contented homemaker, and the material realities of the role which afforded little glamour and less intellectual and social stimulation. It is well-documented, for instance, that many women in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries found feminine domesticity dull, monotonous and ultimately clinically depressing.⁷

What had happened to the women who spoke out against their secondary status in the early 1900s? Had suffrage really satisfied their demands, or was it more a case of there being no words to express female oppression that didn't conjure up treacherous images of unnaturalness and perversity? Elizabeth Wilson implies that the war years fractured the potential for female collectivization but did not kill feminist fervour altogether:

So feminism did not die in the years after the war. There continued to be women's organizations that made feminist demands, even if there was no movement to combat the general oppression of women, and there were certainly many women who struggled as feminists, although they often felt isolated. What made their struggles difficult and lonely was that this oppression was invisible and was silenced. Feminism led an underground or sleeping beauty existence in a society which claimed to have wiped out that oppression.⁸

It appears that after feminism's First Wave of visible and very public collective action, feminism was sustained primarily as an

intellectual tendency, without a movement to galvanize it into action. So it seems that an etiolated form of feminism survived the war years, but not as a collective movement able to combat a renewed negative ideological onslaught from the establishment. By the time the Second Wave emerged, feminist manifestos demonstrated that the parameters of feminist discourse had been extended beyond recognition. It is almost certain that this transformation in feminist politics was achieved by women departing from the mainstream political arena altogether, and communicating through a network constructed by themselves. While the media attempted to portray such women as petty latter-day hyenas in petticoats, they betrayed a fear that feminists who did not lobby or present petitions through figure-heads offered a more sinister threat to the status quo. How could one really identify those numerous but invisible militants who, for example, festooned advertising posters with stickers in the London Underground, declaring them offensive to women? In their early public appearances, feminists declared their solidarity as women rather than as adherents to a particular political philosophy.

Emergent feminists of the late sixties and early seventies were inclined to be more reflective in their extensive analyses of 'what it meant to be a woman', and less reluctant to rupture existing social/familial relations than their First Wave forebears. One major reason for this new, more radical face of Second Wave feminism was that the women who now joined the broad-based 'movement' came from more diverse backgrounds than the solidly upper middle-class Suffragists. Certain avenues had opened up for women in the public sphere: more women were

gaining access to higher education and consequently finding it less easy to settle into domestic quietude. Many movement women had been involved in radical Left-wing politics; and though they might have become disaffected with the rigidly hierarchical, phallogentric nature of such organizations, they had learnt important political lessons. The radical movements of the late sixties inspired the hope that direct action and attacks on the all-pervasive Establishment might eventually cause substantial material and ideological shifts in the social formation. The most thorny problem for modern feminists remained, however, the unassailable fact that while women could now to some extent redefine their social identity by pursuing a career, they could not shake off the timeless and naturalized association of women with the home.

CONSTRUCTING THEORIES/FINDING AN ORIGIN

In 1963 the publication of Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique appeared to herald a new dynamism for feminist thought, as it tackled many of the issues that were to characterize Second Wave politics in the latter part of the sixties. The scope of her analysis of 'the problem that has no name' - the alienation felt among American housewives dehumanized by the drudgery of domestic labour - confirmed Friedan as one of the pioneers of modern feminism. One reason for the book's resounding success lay in its focus on the experiences of white middle-class women - the same group that were to form the majority in the new women's movement. Nearly thirty years later, that problem still has no

name; or rather, the problem itself has diversified into numerous equally intractable problems. For contemporary feminist theorists the act of naming is almost as difficult as the problems themselves: Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir all observed that 'woman' in Western culture is defined in only negative terms ('man' being the universal or 'norm') - by what they lack: status, independent income, education, history and most of all, the discrete qualities associated with 'masculinity'.

In the eighteenth century, Mary Wollstonecraft championed the as yet unborn 'rights of woman', by challenging the veracity of the characteristics traditionally ascribed as 'feminine'. She argued instead that culture and not nature or biological essence had constructed the image of the trifling, over-emotional, irrational and fragile female:

Men complain, and with reason, of the follies and caprices of our sex. when they do not keenly satirize our headstrong passions and grovelling vices. Behold, I should answer, the natural effect of ignorance! The mind will ever be unstable that has only prejudices to rest on, and the current will run with destructive fury when there are no barriers to break its force.⁹

Virginia Woolf, in A Room of One's Own (1929) examines the literal and ideological exclusion of women from all that comprises Western culture, using as analogy the plight of the woman writer. She seems to anticipate Simone de Beauvoir's ground-breaking concept of woman as Other, in her description of women's experience of cultural alienation:

...if one is a woman one is often surprised by a sudden splitting off of consciousness, say in walking down Whitehall, when from being the natural inheritor of that civilization, she becomes, on the contrary, outside of it, alien and critical.¹⁰

In contrast to Wollstonecraft's liberal aims, Woolf's solution is a utopian one, where sexual equality might be attained by a fusion of the two sexes - mind and body - in a state of androgyny. However, a closer reading suggests that her vision of androgyny is a future where cultural definitions of what it is to be 'masculine' or 'feminine' could be broached and ascribed as free-floating human qualities: 'If one is a man, still the woman part of his brain must have effect; and woman also must have intercourse with the man in her.'¹¹ Simone de Beauvoir, writing twenty years after Woolf, takes this embryonic notion of woman as Other further in her refutation of biologicistic arguments in relation to sexual difference. She categorically asserts that the power to describe/define essential characteristics peculiar to the female of the species has always been the male preserve:

Men have always held the lot of woman in their hands; and they have determined what it should be, not according to her interest, but rather with regard to their own projects, their fears and their needs.¹²

The implication, therefore, is that pleas for reform within the existing social order are futile, if such an order is constructed and determined by male interests.

Both Woolf and Wollstonecraft seem to share a conviction that woman as equal could be integrated into civilization as it is now

ordered, whereas de Beauvoir implies that civilization has been constructed and perpetuated on principles which do not allow for the emergence of woman in fully 'human' terms, who is defined by virtue of her not being man:

One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine.¹³

In this famous statement which locates the category woman as lying uneasily between the concepts of male (phallic) and 'not-male' (castrated), de Beauvoir offers a critique of male-oriented discourses - such as Freud's - which typify women as essentially the representation of lack. In an earlier chapter she attacks the foundations of Freud's theory of the castration complex within the Oedipal framework of desire with an iconoclastic verve reminiscent of latter-day radical feminist critiques offered by Germaine Greer and Kate Millett.¹⁴ In other words The Second Sex lays theoretical ground which Second Wave radicals were to profit and learn from. Significantly, de Beauvoir clearly associates the identity of woman as Other with the means by which biology has been summoned to concretize female subordination as a social necessity. Woman's 'lack', in de Beauvoir's view, is not anatomical, but cultural and ideological - gaining credence from the fact of woman's unique role as reproducer of the species.¹⁵ This heralds the radical feminist exhortation to women to re-examine their own relationship to

their bodies, not least to counter the mythification of the female form which male-oriented knowledge has propagated. For de Beauvoir, a correlative problem is the means by which women themselves act in 'bad faith', internalizing ideas of their own cultural inferiority - 'It must be admitted that the males find in woman more complicity than the oppressor usually finds in the oppressed'.¹⁶ This foreshadows the radical feminist project of consciousness raising which in part serves the purpose of alerting women to the means by which they contribute to their own subordination.

Perhaps de Beauvoir's notion of woman as eunuch inspired the title of Greer's The Female Eunuch (1970) - although it remains an unacknowledged legacy. Greer locates the cultural status of woman as in fact equivalent to the eunuch, interrogating Freud's representation of the child's perception of herself as castrated:

In traditional psychological theory, which is after all only another way of describing and rationalizing the status quo, the desexualization of women is illustrated in the Freudian theory of the female sex as lacking a sexual organ.¹⁷

As is implied above, Greer characterizes Freudian theory as affirming women's inferiority by defining them by what they lack - a penis - and as a consequence lacking a sexual organ/sexual feelings altogether. For radical feminists generally, Freud not only endorses patriarchal power by foregrounding the phallus as the symbol of culture and civilization; he also affirms the view that 'normal' women have no demonstrable sexuality at all. Her brief critique of Freud is one which Juliet Mitchell, in

Psychoanalysis and Feminism (1974), takes much further in an attempt to salvage psychoanalytic theory for feminist purposes. She argues that Freudian theory can be used to aid understanding of patriarchal processes, in that Freud's work might be interpreted as symptomatic of the existing social organization, describing the effects of culturally oriented gender difference rather than prescribing them as absolute.¹⁸

From the comparatively simple analysis of women's oppression offered by Wollstonecraft, grounded in a High Liberal faith in the power of reason and the justice of civilization, through to the reformist zeal of Suffragettes and Abolitionists in the UK and USA, to Woolf and de Beauvoir, we can observe that the focus for analysis of women's oppression was constantly shifting and finding new roots. Since feminists had discovered that woman could only be defined as 'not-man' - outside or invisible in mainstream forms of knowledge - a central problematic lay in finding a language which could articulate the specificity of female experience of civilization as both critique and manifesto for change. Modern feminists were more likely to have access to higher education, which made available privileged discursive networks, but which nonetheless continued to marginalize them as women.

At times, early theoretical explorations of the subject seem nebulous and diffuse, especially as modern feminists lacked Wollstonecraft's confidence that female subordination lay at the heart of specific social institutions that might be modified. De Beauvoir's suspicion that 'civilization as a whole' is at fault, constructed as it is along masculine principles, required more

detailed research. Feminists certainly concurred with de Beauvoir's assertion that male discourse is essentially resistant to pleas that women be incorporated into 'humanity' on the grounds of rational argument. The fact of female marginalization was a priori sedimented in an epistemological framework which nonetheless could on occasion summon the nominally inclusive rhetoric of generic 'man'. Confronted by the absence of an available academic/political space for a 'discourse of feminism', it is perhaps not at all surprising that Second Wave feminists expended much of their energy challenging the veracity of each other's assertions, rather than structuring debates around shared and well-defined agendas.

As a result of sometimes conflicting feminist analyses appearing to spring up independent of each other's theoretical contributions, it has become a commonplace to characterize modern feminism by its different and heterogeneous 'strands', rather than its common aims. Later feminist commentators no longer work on the assumption that the Second Wave emerged from a position of unity and consensus; since modern feminists draw strength and inspiration from a multiplicity of sources from the eighteenth century onwards, it is idealistic and simplistic to talk about feminism as if it was a singular oppositional strategy:

Indeed, the history of the women's movement in the 1970s, a time of apparent unity, was marked by bitter, at times virulent, internal disputes over what it was possible or permissible for a feminist to do, say, think or feel.¹⁹

Certainly, a cursory glance at the various manifestos reprinted

in Radical Feminism²⁰ illustrates this point vividly.

From the mid-eighties onwards, to utilize a feminist position without locating it within a particular strand is to invite criticism of inaccuracy or oversimplification. But despite evidence that the Second Wave was founded upon active tensions, feminists of the early seventies did construct networks of communication via collectives, conferences, demonstrations and newsletters, which crossed such boundaries and emphasized feminism's commonality. There may not have been one interpretation of feminism, but all strands were rooted in the belief that women suffer social injustice because of their sex; and the emergence of Women's Liberation as both a movement and an intellectual tendency proved attractive to many women. Emphasis on consciousness raising and direct action meant that feminist politics emanated from the individual and the private sphere of experiential and emotional responses to oppression. This dictated the shape of early feminist agendas - concentrating on issues such as paid housework, abortion, contraception, the family, and the sexual division of labour. There appeared to be no clear-cut divide between theory and practice within the nascent movement which - by virtue of its broad-based structure - implicitly conceived of itself as a theory in perpetual process, rather than a doctrine to be disseminated to willing converts. Writings from this period devote most of their energy to pinpointing gaps in contemporary knowledge, rather than offering authoritative solutions or dogma. In this sense all strands were constantly in a state of transformation and modification - to identify oneself as a radical, for example, would not guarantee a

consensus among radicals as a whole as to how radical feminism could be defined.

The Women's Liberation Movement remained loosely structured and decentralized in its determination not to produce 'stars' or leaders to speak for its 'members'. This was one of the most striking and positive features of sexual politics, as well as being, arguably, the cause of its later decline. The feminist 'cells' which sprung up independently throughout the US and later in Britain, produced tentative manifestos focusing on issues of particular concern to women, but tended on the whole to shy away from anything that can be described as pure 'theory'. It was only later that the urgent need for a theoretical framework from which to review such issues was acknowledged, not least because the popular consciousness was of feminists as terrorists, which alienated women who might otherwise have profited by identifying themselves with the Women's Movement. Personal memoirs confirm that feminism changed the lives of individual women,²¹ but had still not succeeded in breaching the gaps in mainstream knowledge that Woolf and de Beauvoir highlighted. Western epistemology is indeed centred upon 'public man' and his reasoned quest for a theory of identity, meaning and truth,²² and in the public sphere female experience was apt to become buried under the weight of more 'important' considerations.

In short, when women collected to talk about problems affecting women they found themselves curiously and ambiguously outside language: a melange of personal experiences collated and shared did not qualify as fully-rounded political or theoretical discourse. It was relatively easy for (male) commentators to

suppress some of the most cogent feminist arguments by virtue of them lacking the 'correct' discursive apparatus; they bore no relation to 'public man' debates and therefore lacked theoretical and political credibility. From its birth feminist discourse was outlawed from pre-established intellectual theories because Western thought could not conceptualize a discourse whose difference hinged primarily on its gender specificity, but whose effects questioned and conflated existing academic disciplinary frameworks. At the same time it was already contained within such criteria - there being no 'outside', no neutral women's space - just as the term 'woman' was contained and compressed legally and philosophically within generic 'man'.

Of course the women who collected together to fight for gendered issues were mainly white and middle-class, and this necessarily affected the way they compiled agendas for change. It seems, in retrospect, that feminism constructed itself around a core of 'issues' which were assumed to represent the worse effects of sexual subordination. Despite disagreements about the shape of feminist thought and the nature of the utopia it projected, there appeared to be tacit agreement about what these issues were, and most of them centred around the direct social effects of women being defined as biologically weaker, and naturally destined for quite different roles than men. Such a focus demanded a closer scrutiny and a concerted attack on images of femininity which distorted or glamorized women's real experiences and homogenized their multifarious identities.

What made the Women's Movement distinct from other radical movements of the late sixties can be summed up by one of its most

famous slogans, 'the personal is political'. The more this simple statement has been reiterated, the more power it seems to yield. It indicated the concentration of feminism upon women's personal experiences of femaleness, and the developing of the notion that the private was of very public concern.

Consciousness raising groups sought not only to awaken women to the injustices of their secondary social position. They encouraged them to reassess their personal and emotional lives in terms of subordination and coercion; and in highlighting their own position in relation to their families, their lovers and their work, allowed them to negotiate an autonomous identity beyond the normalizing categories of carer and nurturer.

Although its initial processes focused upon the personal and individual, the ultimate aim of consciousness raising is an analytical one, enabling the members of a group to view women's oppression in more abstract, even theoretical terms. There were of course dangers that such sexual politics becomes personal therapy;²³ but the value of viewing personal problems from a collective standpoint should not be underestimated, and was one of the particular strengths of radical feminism.

This emphasis upon experience in order to expose the misery that many women felt within their private lives created a very different form of politics, and yet made perfect sense since the evasion of 'domestic' issues in politics had excluded women for centuries. Nonetheless it meant that the actual status of feminism as perceived by other political groups was problematic. Left-wingers felt that a concentration on gender-specific issues acted as a diversion from the main business of a consolidated

attack against the ruling classes. At the US National Conference for a New Politics in 1967 New Left men denied women's issues any political currency:²⁴ it remained a commonplace thereafter to argue that a revolution in class consciousness would liberate both women and men from the oppressive effects of a capitalist social organization. To liberal and conservative eyes the views of feminists represented the views of the unrepresentative few; and it is true that feminists alienated many potentially sympathetic women by what was viewed as their extremism - especially by their questioning of one of the most central institutions of society, the family.

There was substantial agreement between both radical and socialist feminists about what the main issues for feminism were. However, clear splits are evident in their analyses of the roots of female oppression: while they were quite certain of the effects of female subordination, there tended to be sharp disagreements about where the origins of male power were located. Before going on to examine the heterogeneous nature of Second Wave feminism, I shall briefly survey some of the features central to all feminist attacks upon the status quo.

POLITICAL AGENDAS OF THE SECOND WAVE

Emergent Second Wave feminist thought tended to distance itself from the academic mainstream, concentrating instead upon the development of political activity and expression. This provoked internal debate about identifying and describing major oppressive mechanisms in society which shaped women's lives, but did not

correlate with radical male-oriented political analyses of social divisions. Certain terms became common feminist parlance in radical, liberal and socialist contexts, and the issues focused upon can be deemed, to some extent, to reflect shared concerns. The activities of feminism as a movement brought together differing strands in the establishment of centres and communication networks, which represented Women's Liberation at its broadest base.

If the 1968 Miss America protest in Atlantic City brought feminism out into the public gaze, the British awakening to Second Wave feminism was far more sedate. In February 1970 Ruskin College, Oxford saw the first Women's Liberation conference in Britain, attended by at least six hundred people. It is viewed by many as a moment of political awakening;²⁵ yet regrettably, just as the Miss America Protest is most memorable for initiating the myth of feminists as bra burners, the Ruskin conference is remembered for the graffiti daubed all over the college walls.²⁶ This conference was followed by a protest in November 1970 at the Miss World Competition at the Albert Hall, as a means to communicate to other women directly - beyond the distorting effects of the mass media. Unfortunately, in common with the Miss America protest, the reasons behind the disruption were hostilely misrepresented by the press as a destructive act by the disaffected few.

The major success of the Ruskin Conference was to establish a National Women's Coordinating Committee which encompassed the variety of feminisms rather than appearing to stand for one party line; and a structure of small autonomous groups was adopted:

Our first priority isn't to get over information, but to know what everyone in the room thinks. We believe in getting people to interact, not to listen to experts. We want them to themselves make an analysis of their situation, which will lead them to action...²⁷

Feminists expended much of their energy creating centres which would help women, as well as forge a consciousness that such support networks were essential and were precisely what was unavailable in state provision of female welfare. Women's centres with various facilities were set up in many cities in both Britain and the states. In Britain Erin Pizzey set up the the first Refuge for battered women in Chiswick which spawned many others nationwide, establishing a Women's Aid Federation.²⁸ Women's health centres promoted self-awareness about the female body and female sexuality, and Rape Crisis Centres began to emerge in Britain from 1976. From the late 1960s in America Women's Studies courses or options became available within higher education institutions. Such centres and areas of study focused feminist concerns upon male violence and the family, female sexuality, and the need to establish a women's 'sub-culture' of mutual support. All these aims were underpinned by the shared assumption that society was constructed and perpetuated along patriarchal lines, peculiarly resistant to the needs of half the population.

The Women's National Coordinating Committee in Britain tabled four basic demands: equal pay, equal education and job opportunities, free contraception and abortion on demand and free twenty-four hour nurseries.²⁹ These demands themselves prompted

a reinterpretation of the reasons for women's special or unequal treatment in such areas - not least a re-evaluation of what 'patriarchy' could mean. The term patriarchy often rather loosely connoted the universal and timeless oppression of women by men - and is currently so semantically overburdened as to be virtually meaningless as a tool of feminist debate, unless it is afforded a degree of specificity - not least to indicate awareness that certain groups of men have unequal access to dominant power networks. In Patriarchal Precedents (1983), Rosalind Coward demonstrates that debates around the issue of patriarchy and its historical emergence have been in existence since at least the nineteenth century. Such debates comprised a search for proof that the relations between the sexes had changed drastically from the 'natural' and primitive family organization of matriarchy to the highly complex and 'artificial' structure of the patriarchal nuclear family. However the notion of the existence of a prehistoric system of 'mother-right' suggested a system of female domination of which intellectuals deemed the 'weaker sex' to be scarcely capable. Instead matriarchy was deemed to be based on kinship organization rather than power relations. The central concern of these debates was in considering the origins of the modern family form and seeking justification for the validity of 'father-right' - not least to determine the question of whether there were innate definable qualities discrete to either sex. As a consequence, Coward asserts, 'this period saw the construction of very definite categories of masculinity and femininity'.³⁰ Matriarchal hypotheses became associated with primitivism; whereas

patriarchal dominance is seen as analogous to the formation of civilization itself. Patriarchy, for commentators such as Engels, was inextricably linked to the family form as the 'natural' basic unit in a civilized social formation - it takes on a highly culturally specific form where qualities of masculinity and femininity are deemed to have precise separate social functions (women as 'carers', men as breadwinners/protectors of family property). Indeed Engels argues that there existed a sexual division of labour even within 'primitive' family forms, and that women's crucial role as reproducers and carers versus men's as hunter/gatherers (guardians of the most basic forms of economic exchange) contributed to the 'world historical defeat of the female sex'.³¹ Thus gendered roles of labour and reproduction are consolidated as 'natural' - in the sense that they are perceived to be intrinsic to civilization itself.

Max Weber's sociological definition of the term patriarchy is of a household organization where the father dominates members of an extended kinship network, and thereby controls the economic production of the household. While this particular family form is not representative of contemporary Western culture, which is associated with nuclear families of closer kinship ties, feminists have argued, however, that our society still bears the vestiges of patriarchal organization. Kate Millett in Sexual Politics (1971) did much to popularize the usage of the term patriarchy for feminists. For her patriarchy was the dominant oppressive force, despite differing class and ethnic origins embedding individuals in various relations of power, and causing

local distinctions between forms of patriarchy. She argues that it is a system of power which encompasses all these distinctions.

If one takes patriarchal government to be the institution whereby that half of the populace which is female is controlled by that half which is male, the principles of patriarchy appear to be two fold: male shall dominate female, elder male shall dominate younger. However, just as with any human institution, there is frequently a distance between the real and the ideal; contradictions and exceptions do exist within the system. While patriarchy as an institution is a social constant so deeply entrenched as to run through all other political, social, or economic forms, whether of caste or class, feudality or bureaucracy, just as it pervades all major religions, it also exhibits great variety in history and locale.³²

Millett has been frequently criticized by latter-day feminists for her ahistorical position on women's oppression. I think that this passage demonstrates that she does on one level take such factors into account; in addition she attempts to analyse mechanisms of patriarchy as acting primarily at the level of ideology. Juliet Mitchell described patriarchy in psychoanalytic terms as the Law of the Father (following Lacan) - meaning that entry into civilization (via language or the Symbolic order) necessitates entry into a pre-defined patriarchal system; and in common with Millett suggests that patriarchy informs our perception of social reality by being entrenched in knowledge itself. It is easy to understand the attraction of the notion of patriarchy for feminists, but patriarchy simply defined as the rule of all men over all women often assumes a transhistorical character which obstructs historically specific and materialist

analyses of oppression. The liberal usage of the term as an 'explanation' for male domination sometimes obscures the possibility of a more detailed examination of the ubiquitous nature of female subordination in contemporary Western societies.

Roisin McDonough and Rachel Harrison assert that 'capitalism has made patriarchal law redundant. That is the basic contradiction.'³³ In common with many socialist feminists, they imply that the structure of the nuclear family and the organization of relations of production are set in opposition: while men enter directly into class-oriented, historically determined forms of wage labour, women remain identified through the 'timeless' patterns of kinship.³⁴ Nevertheless the family fulfils an economic role within capitalism in the relations of commodity production and human reproduction. Patriarchy in its traditional meaning of (elder) father right may have waned as a significant social force, but feminists crucially recognized a reduced form of patriarchal relations at work within the family - a form which utilizes women's procreative functions and similarly provides justification for sexual division of labour in the workplace. Patriarchy is undoubtedly a confused and confusing concept. Clearly one is able to identify vestiges of patriarchal rule in familial structures, similar to those which predate capitalism; but capitalism has ideologically exaggerated the observable differences of biological sex in order to maintain its own conditions of possibility. Even if patriarchal rule does not operate as a perceived material reality, there is a need to invoke the concept at the level of representation, as Michele Barrett does, by allowing that a 'patriarchal ideology' is still

effective.³⁵

For feminists the effects of a patriarchal ideology are most keenly felt within the family environment - which is precisely the sphere that has been largely ignored by Marxist theorists. The family has been simply seen as instrumental in the perpetuation of capitalism, or women's roles within this domain are naturalized as functional by many sociologists. Talcott Parsons's classic functionalist sociological argument was that contemporary families have two major roles to perform: a) to socialize children into societal norms and correct status expectations; b) to provide a stable emotional environment to cushion the (male) worker from the psychological damage caused by the alienation of work. It is clear that the wife, not the family as an entity, perform both these functions, while the husband/father's position in the public sphere determines the family's class status. It is immediately apparent that it is women's role that is theoretically elided, although in many ways she guarantees the existence of the familial form - hence the work done by modern feminists to construct a broader theoretical perspective better able to question the traditional demarcation between the public and private spheres. Analyses of the family as an economic/sociological unit tend to result in the 'woman question' disappearing behind the facade of The Family.³⁶ Therefore feminists have emphasized the impact of a particular familial ideology upon women's domestic role and the sexual division of waged labour, which naturalizes women's place in the home, and ignores her social contributions in public spheres of economics.

The family, although in definition fluid and changeable to suit the ideological demands of differing epochs and cultures, is reified as an institution, indestructible despite the vicissitudes of time; more than that, it is accepted as part of the natural order of things, strengthened by ideologies of religion, the law and popular morality. If patriarchy is conceived as synonymous with civilization then the family is viewed as civilization's cornerstone. This naturalization of the family has prompted many feminists to pinpoint it as the crucial site of women's oppression. However sociological perspectives on the family as a repository of social forces (whose 'real' operations, nonetheless, lie outside its confines) do little to enlighten us about the nature of its complex relation to networks of power.

In common with patriarchy, it appears that the most vital role of the family in contemporary Western society is as an ideological construct, which structures the forces of socialization. It has been argued, for example, that the bourgeois ideology of the family (the husband the only financial support, with the 'housewife' confined to the home) has become dominant, and internalized by the working class - although it bears little resemblance to their observable conditions of existence. It is important, therefore, to examine the effects of this disjunction between the economic organization of a household and its familial ideology upon the lives of women. This ambiguity at the heart of 'the family' means that 'much of the pressure exerted on individuals to conform to various indices of behaviour relate more to fear of social disapproval of "the

family" than to strictly internal family demands'.³⁷ Adherence to gender identity, for instance, is something endorsed and reinforced by schools, media, peers and other ideological agencies outside the household domain.

Patriarchy and the family are therefore chief concepts under interrogation by feminists since the late sixties, in face of gender blind analysis offered by male critics. The feminist appropriation of the term gender underpins all such analysis, and one of feminism's major theoretical contributions is to review the meanings connoted by the term gender, primarily by divorcing biological determinants from cultural representations of gender difference and arguing that the social construction of gender bears a tenuous relation to biological sex differences. This in itself is not a position peculiar to Second Wave thinkers: since Mary Wollstonecraft it has been observed that the social construction of gender difference substantially limits female potential in social and public life. Liberal feminists such as Wollstonecraft would, however, retain an investment in the supposedly common-sense knowledge that some aspects of gender difference are nascent to men and women. It is only relatively recently that feminists have posed the artificiality of gender dichotomies to examine all elements of social life presumed to be informed by the natural instincts of men and women. Therefore existing forms of order, if predicated upon the assumptions that women and men's roles were necessarily polarized, could be completely renegotiated - and needed to be - to ensure a future of human equality. Radical feminists observed that in their everyday life women seem trapped within a vicious circle of

biologism which operates most effectively at an ideological level (in terms of acceptable images of women), but also affects their material position in society (in terms of their perceptions of their potential, career choices, the sexual division of labour within/without the home, etc.).

It seems that the operation of sexual difference which ideologically borrows and exaggerates the bare facts of biological difference is initiated virtually from birth and reinforced at every level of social organization from the smallest (the family) to a meta-level (the state). Michel Foucault's analysis of the way structures of power operate and filter down to permeate the entire social hierarchy offers us a useful analogy to establish the way ideology reinforces our perceptions of our material lived experiences, where an abstract notion of normality guides our concept of the limits of social behaviour, which can be enforced by coercion to varying degrees if necessary. I quote as an example from Discipline and Punish (1979):

The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the 'social-worker'-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects it to his body, his gestures, his behaviour, his aptitudes, his achievements.³⁸

This, if one substituted the 'generic' he for 'she', is a useful summary of the effects of gender socialization and the means by which women unconsciously internalize notions of normative feminine behaviour. According to Foucault's analysis, the

workings of power over individual behaviour remain chimerical: it is not a 'thing', yet it operates: it is not identical to domination (a dominant class/faction can be overthrown in favour of an opposing class/faction, but abstract power structures remain the same), since it exerts its force on the dominated and dominant alike - and recently there has been a proliferation of writings on the oppressiveness of masculinity, for example. Normative structures ironically situate the 'individual' at the centre of their concern while at the same time indirectly restricting real individual potential.

When examining the relations between the ideological and economic bases, the means by which gender is constructed and reproduced is a central issue for feminists. The assertion that it is gender and not biological sex difference which informs oppressive mechanisms has been an important step forward for Second Wave feminism. Although of course writers such as Simone De Beauvoir in The Second Sex and Virginia Woolf in A Room of One's Own made similar claims, it was not until the late sixties that feminists launched a concerted attack on the fusion of nature and nurture. Although there is an internal tension in radical feminist writings between a critique of the social construction of femininity in Western culture and a celebration of the 'feminine' as a political stance, most feminists greet essentialistic anti-feminist arguments with the contempt they deserve. 'Scientific' research on biological difference largely concentrates on the facts of the female life cycle as a series of handicaps that beset women throughout their adult lives - for example, childbirth, lactation, menstruation, menopause and

associated clinical disorders arising from hormonal changes - although the 'inconvenience' of such functions can be either physical or social and can vary enormously in different cultures. A technological age has rendered the graver risks of, for example, childbirth, minimal. It seems that men have no analogous biological obstacle course to overcome, but it might be argued that this in part is due to the fact that it is only women's bodies that have been medicalized to such an extent, and that this medicalization accomplishes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The rational man of liberal humanist ideology can transcend 'his' animal physicality to attain spiritual heights; women's minds are documented as ruled by their bodily functions. As Michele Barrett observes:

The pattern of gender relations in our society is overwhelmingly a social rather than a natural one, but it is a social construction that caricatures biological difference in the most grotesque way and then appeals to this misrepresented natural world for its own justification.³⁹

Gender construction undoubtedly influences perceptions of male and female sexuality - another vital area of feminist discussion. The familial ideology not only effectively sorts the boys from the girls, it also encourages in each a disposition towards 'appropriate' forms of eroticism. In the past there have been severe sanctions on 'non-productive' forms of sexual behaviour, such as homosexuality, and legal restrictions which denied women the right to control their reproductive capacity. Such normative procedures arguably deeply affect our choices within our personal

relationships - towards, for example, marriage and life-long monogamy. The biology of human reproduction becomes a political issue for feminists because of the means by which it has been inserted into social relations. While questioning 'scientific' explanations for socially constructed forms of sexual difference, feminists still need to challenge the meanings that are conferred upon biological difference, and the way biological 'fact' is 'quoted' in cultural productions.

Grassroots feminist work, including direct action and public protests, urges women to reconceive their social realities and to think in terms of future utopian possibilities. Although it does not constitute a doctrine to which we can ascribe key figures as mouthpieces for the movement, feminism needs to recognize its role as an educative process. Changing the consciousness of adult women is an important immediate aim, but the power of gender-divided society works primarily at the level of ideology - and if gender socialization begins from early childhood, a long term feminist agenda must be to scrutinize the state education system as a tool of gendered patriarchal ideology. Schooling is one of the most effective state institutions through which gender socialization is reproduced: even the implementation of widespread co-educational schooling, and the practice of introducing non-discriminatory curricula have done little to remedy the inequality of gendered expectations of academic success:

The way in which the subjects are presented and their actual content frequently make them gender specific. For example the raison d'être for boys to do home economics

is seen, by staff and pupils alike, in terms of boys 'helping out' at some future date when their wives are incapacitated, or prior to marriage during their bachelor days; or for boys, home economics is sometimes linked to cookery which may be seen in terms of future employment in the catering industry. On the other hand, for girls home economics is justified in terms of their future roles as wives and mothers...Where girls are allowed, or even encouraged, to do woodwork or metalwork, this is justified again in terms of domestic duties - mending a broken toy or putting up shelves.⁴⁰

Although girls are now unlikely to be forced to take 'feminine' subjects or be denied the opportunity to take as many subjects at GCSE or 'A' level as their male peers, the tradition that girls should take subjects related to their assumed future domestic role still affects their eventual subject choices in many cases. It is indeed likely that young girls' restrictive subject and therefore future career choices reflects their realistic awareness that the labour market itself operates upon gender lines. Furthermore 'peer group pressure' is probably likely to cause girls to be self-deprecating about their academic prowess since aggressiveness and competitiveness are deemed to be masculine traits, and therefore 'unhealthy' when observed in women. In addition girls may respond to pressures from parents and families who have internalized social sexual divisions as the norm, and not pursue their education - or congregate in the areas of the arts and social sciences, rather than the natural and physical sciences.

Arthur Brittan and Mary Maynard argue in Sexism, Racism, and Oppression (1984) that coercion is mediated through gender, rather than gender itself being the instrument of force:

To socialize a girl into gender...entails more than her internalizing role scripts and expectations - it entails taking into account the power situation of the socializers and the socialized. And in our society, power and control are not usually in the hands of women.⁴¹

In other words gender socialization is partial rather than total, and is not simply a prison for the subject. One can conceivably adopt the oppositional strategy of gender reinterpretation, but usually this option of resistance is only available to the privileged. White, middle-class educated women (or men) are better able to distance themselves from the operations of gender since the limits of 'individuality' themselves seem to be largely class-determined: identity crisis is in some sense itself a privilege. Even if a woman recognizes the nature of her oppression through gender mechanisms, she cannot simply overcome it as an individual - she will still be judged and made accountable through gender/class expectations in social relations. Questions of gender are further confused through the fact that gender does not constitute rigid universal categories, and is often context-specific: people act out different roles in different situations. All gender constructions are derived from an unquestioned belief in the superiority of the male sex, but they are by no means inflexible or non-contradictory. The ability of gender ideology (all ideology) to incorporate 'deviance' - such as the 'career woman' - is the most sinister and pervasive aspect of its strength.

Thus gender and patriarchy - unwieldy terms though they are -

are fundamental points of departure for feminists in constructing an oppositional strategy, whether reformist or revolutionary. All Second Wave 'strands' consider these aspects to be central to their critical agenda; even Marxist feminists, emerging from a tradition which perceives power relations in terms of an ongoing class struggle, recognize the need to shift the main focus into the 'private' sphere of social/sexual relations. Their critical conclusions and the utopias that they formulate may conflict; but such tensions and contradictions seem to echo above all the contradictions and tensions lying at the heart of an ideology of gender or patriarchy. As a movement, however, there is a sphere of activity in grassroots struggle which we can identify as 'feminist' in the singular - a commitment to changing gendered inequality by attempting to unearth its roots. Feminist politics is in this respect unusual and possibly unique in its refusal to lay down doctrinal givens - all feminist research is offered as work in progress, a small contribution to a huge and growing epistemological concern which has yet to determine itself.

THE ETHICS OF HETEROGENEITY

Any political movement will face internal power struggles which threaten to destabilize and undercut its vitality. Moreover, Second Wave feminism did not emerge from a common political base - its philosophical roots lie in diverse schools of thought, and there has been substantial disagreement over the extent to which such 'patriarchal' roots should, or could, be shed. One of the earliest and most significant debates for Women's Liberation was

whether men should feature in its ranks. At early conferences and protests in both the USA and Britain men attended and were allowed a voice, but many women felt that the presence of men altered the nature and quality of debates, and that they often dominated discussion. Debates centred upon the question of whether men could be ousted if one accepted that 'the creation of a new woman of necessity demands the creation of a new man'.⁴² Although perhaps the majority of feminists did not foresee total separatism as a workable long-term solution, they craved the autonomy to construct a movement for women - 'They wanted their movement not to reject men so much as to be independent from them.'⁴³

Radical feminists had characterized patriarchy rather loosely as an expression of male power over all women, and socialist and liberals alike turned their gaze to women's private lives and personal experiences, which seemed to affirm that women's problem was, generally speaking, men - not just those who held the reins of power in government, but also fathers, partners and contemporaries. The idea that the 'personal is political' gained impetus among feminists, and the scrutiny of their own life histories was seen as enabling and potentially liberating. 'Sexual politics' must at one level relate to sex and an awareness that power relationships exist and are perpetuated in the most private domains of a woman's life:

'Sexual politics' held together the idea of women as a social group dominated by men as a social group (male domination/female oppression), at the same time as turning back to the issue of women as sex outside of the bounds of reproduction. It threw political focus onto

the most intimate transactions of the bedroom: this became one of the meanings of 'the personal is political'.⁴⁴

Although heterosexual women could not conceive of total separatism as a viable feminist alternative, feminist critiques of the means by which prevailing norms within heterosexual practices reaffirm female subordination demanded that heterosexual relations be scrutinized and revised. No matter how well-meaning pro-feminist men appeared to be, at the level of sexuality and relationships they were all implicated as having a vested interest in the status quo. One of the single most important pamphlets in circulation during the late sixties was Anne Koedt's 'The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm' (1968), which cited the findings of Kinsey and Masters and Johnson that the clitoris and not the vagina was the site of orgasmic pleasure in women. If penetrative intercourse was viewed as the central determining feature of heterosexual union, it could now be conceived as a sexual practice defined only in terms of male desire - a focus which had not appeared to shift during the 'permissive' era. The logical conclusion of the observation that penetration was of secondary importance to women was that men were, theoretically at least, sexually expendable; more than this, that definitions of heterosexuality were open to renegotiation:

Many have described the impact of Koedt's paper as 'revolutionary'. It didn't tally with every woman's experience, nor did it lead to wholesale abandonment of heterosexuality. But it did enable women to talk about their sexuality in their own terms, to escape from male definitions of 'normality' and 'frigidity', to feel they

had a right to make demands, and to perceive what had previously seemed to be their own individual 'problems' as part of a pattern which was essentially political.⁴⁵

Radical feminists emphasized the repercussions of sexism in women's domestic and sexual lives. If family life most effectively perpetuated male domination - in that it empowered individual men to recognize social/sexual hegemony over women - degrees of separatism merited serious attention. Radicals unquestionably perceived the work of redefining the limits of biologist defences of male power, and mapping out the effects of culture and ideology upon the individual woman, as women's work. Separatism in the sphere of political debate was, then, a fundamental requirement.

For socialist (or materialist) feminists there were clear political alliances and aims which automatically linked them with the (patriarchal) political establishment. Even accepting that the inception of socialist feminist discourse marks a point of disjunction with mainstream Marxist analysis, there are nonetheless clear shared links with Marxism and its prioritizing of class factors in any social analysis of power and inequality. As the years have passed, socialist feminists have created an analytical structure quite distinct in several ways from more traditional Marxist perspectives and often antagonistic to the gender-blindness of Marxist writings, but their strategic priorities remain quite distinct from those of radical feminists. While different cells of radicals expended energy creating manifestos, socialist feminists endeavoured to expand the Marxist one, focusing upon the arena of ideological struggle, which of

necessity would perceive radicals' 'lightning strike' protests and raids as ultimately counterproductive. Nonetheless the attention of radical feminists to consciousness raising draws an implicit parallel with socialist feminist theorizing, since the purpose of both activities is to challenge and transform women's perceptions of their social status. Liberal feminists were in the most paradoxical position of defending the value of institutional political processes as a viable site for change, while their campaigns over such issues as wages for housework effectively demanded a very radical transformation of the social status quo.

These divergent 'schools' of thought became synonymous with the two main features of women's liberation: radical feminism was a major force as the vanguard of the movement, whereas socialist feminism developed a sophisticated theoretical response to the problem of male domination.⁴⁶ A closer scrutiny of radical and socialist writings actually demonstrates that the two tendencies were fuelled by each other, and that many major feminist writers of the time tapped into both positions.⁴⁷ These superficial oppositions, coupled with the diverse contributions of lesbian, black and liberal feminists make for a politics which is multifarious in its manifestations. One clear reason why heterogeneity fuels the dynamics of Women's Liberation is that 'Women, in a sense, are feminism's greatest problem. The assumption of a potential identity between women, rather than solving the problem, became a condition of increasing tensions'.⁴⁸ Part of feminism's success has been to establish woman as an object of study, by freeing her from the distortions

of male-oriented knowledge. But since the chief proponents of early Second Wave politics were white, middle-class, educated women, there was always a grave risk that female identity would become as homogenized as it is in male discourse, and that countless women would be marginalized by a movement which claimed to champion their rights.

Bell Hooks argues that the majority of white feminists have done little but pay lip service to the idea of the diversity of women's lived experience, even though she agrees that the political interrogation of the personal is enabling for all women, 'because it challenges each of us to alter our person, our personal engagement (either as victims or perpetrators or both) in a system of domination.'⁴⁹ Latterly many feminists have taken up black women's critical challenge, and have investigated how sex, race and class function as factors which together structure the social meanings of femininity, and in which women themselves constitute hierarchies of power and privilege. Hooks argues that it is necessary to forge a theory which can account for the shared experiences of all women, as well as acknowledging their differences. She cautions that white feminists' well-meaning refusal to 'speak for' black women serves to reinforce the polarity between black and white female experience, and could itself result in a perpetuation of racism, in that 'It helps...take the burden of accountability away from white women and places it solely onto women of colour'.⁵⁰

At first sight lesbians in the Women's Movement have fared better than black women; since the late sixties they have been visibly present as activists and contributors to Second Wave

writings. Indeed depending upon what account of the early years one reads, lesbian feminists are sometimes characterized as about to wrest feminism from its heterosexual guardians. It is still a commonplace to associate radical politics with lesbianism, even though this scarcely appears to be the case.⁵¹ One method by which the mass media has consistently attempted to undermine the power of feminist discourse and alienate potential recruits is to characterize all feminists as lesbians. It is disturbing, therefore, that many early feminists propagated homophobic sentiments and, moreover, perceived a lesbian presence in feminism as necessarily negative. Ginette Castro's account of these formative years of Second Wave militancy suggest that lesbians were commonly seen as a disruptive force within the movement, using it as a vehicle for proselytization. She further recounts rumours that lesbians were used by the FBI to discredit feminism; and that an anonymous force within the ranks successfully 'outed' Kate Millett as a bisexual.⁵² Castro's description of Second Wave American feminism emphasizes discontinuities rather than consensus, and characterizes the movement as in the throes of a struggle for power between warring strands, but more particularly between feminist 'stars'. Although Castro's survey seems at times to delight in charting the acrimony within the movement, she appears to regard such power struggles as inevitable: 'born out of powerlessness and lack of experience in holding power, internal dissensions thus are part of the pathology of oppression.'⁵³

The strengths of feminism were its commitment to alternative forms of political organization, summarized in the following

statement from the Women's Liberation Workshop:

We reject a structure based on the concept of leaders and led. For this reason, groups small enough for all to take part in discussion are basic units of our movement. We feel that the small group makes personal commitment a possibility and a necessity and that it provides understanding and solidarity... As a federation of a number of different groups, Women's Liberation Workshop is essentially heterogeneous, incorporating within it a wide range of opinions and plans for action.⁵⁴

Feminism studiously avoided the pitfalls of leadership by making it an explicit policy to allow every woman who joined to have a voice at a local level. The more negative side-effect of this, however, was that no one could veto the views of women who were foregrounded by the media as spokespeople, thus allowing the creation of an unofficial star system, including such figures as Betty Friedan and Germaine Greer - who have since recanted their earlier views. 'Joreen', writing in 1972, conceives feminism's 'structurelessness' as itself tyrannical, in that after the exhilaration felt by individual women in small 'rap groups' there is a sense of aimlessness and anticlimax. She also claims that a denial of organizational structure enables elite groups of women to gain power by subterfuge - 'The more Unstructured a group is, the more lacking it is in informal structures, and the more it adheres to an ideology of "structurelessness", the more vulnerable it is to be taken over by a group of political comrades.'⁵⁵ Her solution to this problem is to institutionalize modified democratic procedures, on the assumption that 'structures' are instituted unofficially in any case.

In this chapter I have attempted to show that the Second Wave was founded upon heterogeneity, and current claims that the movement has since become riven by irreconcilable tensions might therefore be considered inaccurate, and certainly debatable. Heterogeneity could conversely be considered a strength, if we accept that feminist theory conceives of itself as largely a work in progress which challenges existing social visions, rather than chiefly trying to impose a new singular 'correct' viewpoint. Interventions by black and lesbian feminists, for example, have been instrumental in extending the scope of the feminist purview, contributing in an ideological war waged against the homogenized representation of woman offered in mainstream society. It would be misleading, not to say offensive to suggest that such debates have disrupted feminism's unity - which implies a defection from a concretized dogma. Feminism today may allow privileged space to the privileged; but its strength essentially lies in its commitment to creating a politics which offers a form of knowledge where 'women are its subjects, its enunciators, the creators of its theory, of its practice and of its language.'⁵⁶

CONCLUSION

This thesis is founded upon the conviction that feminism's heterogeneity and elusivity is its strength. Dissension need not amount to a disavowal of its central principles, but could rather be interpreted as maintaining its dynamism. Neither does the acceptance of heterogeneity preclude a consideration of the shared features of such strands, and more importantly an

examination of common epistemological gaps. The existence of such heated debates (which now tend to take place within the confines of the academic institution) confirms the richness of feminist discourse which is constantly diversifying, shifting ground in an effort to undercut the hegemony of male discourse.

For the purposes of opening up the complexities of this discussion I shall spend the following two chapters offering a critical survey of dominant feminist 'strands'. One must acknowledge that Second Wave feminism has lost the impetus of grassroots activity; but as an intellectual tendency it has shored up the vestiges of this radicalism - even if it is now more often put to cerebral uses. As a theory it has lost its commitment to heterogeneity as a positive foil against patriarchal homogenizing influences. More than that, feminism of the present day occasionally appears to suffer from amnesia about its own past, where pioneer Second Wavers acted as veritable bricoleurs, making use of the analytical means to hand, in the absence of a pre-existing feminist orthodoxy. Annette Kolodny, in 'Some notes on Defining a "Feminist Literary Criticism"' (1975) suggests that in the sphere of literary studies, a feminist perspective can only be developed by such a process of bricolage:

Let us, rather, use what we can from the past, embracing that which is, in fact illuminating and persuasive; let us refine or add to, in order to perfect those tools; and were the previous critical methods are found wanting, let us there expend our energies in inventing new questions and new methods of analysis.⁵⁷

Feminists of the nineties are in a position to draw upon a tradition of thought which has transgressed the boundaries of phallogentric discourse. To perceive heterogeneity as a necessary evil is to accept the contemporary popular wisdom that feminism lost its direction, or has gone as far as it could. The gaps in Second Wave discourse are sustained if strands are seen as autonomous; once we reassess their shared history, we can begin to further supplement feminist epistemology.

As I hinted early on, in one sense such a separation (artificial as it may seem) is necessary and inevitable to counter accusations of homogenizing the Women's Movement, giving the lie that it is, or ever was a coherent set of doctrines. Much of its generative thrust is due, arguably, to the high degree of dissent which continues to prompt fierce debate within the movement, even though, ironically, such debates imply that women remain feminism's greatest problem. 'Woman' as political category is itself a site of contestation, once we consider questions of differences among women forged by other social divisions such as class, ethnicity or sexual orientation. There is a much more pragmatic reason, however, for considering the main strands of feminist thought in isolation. However misleading such generalizations may be in the case of theorists who seem to straddle such boundaries, or form sub-groups within a particular major strand, it is essential to have in mind a provisional 'map' of developments and distinctions in feminist thought so that gaps, links, common tendencies and the possibility of reconcilable differences can be comprehensively examined. As with all theoretical approaches with common aims,

to imply that feminism falls into several rigid categories is to produce a partial analysis of the power of feminist politics over the last two decades - this forced separation is only undertaken to forge more critical links between these tendencies. It also allows my work to conform to the approaches of the majority of contemporary feminist commentators who have understandably found that referring to 'strands' has given scope for developments in feminist scholarly practices that would otherwise risk remaining static as if immutable, if one were to ignore the intense debates within the ranks and attempt to discuss feminist discourse as if it were a unified dogma.

I have accordingly chosen to split five main tendencies within feminism's Second Wave into two chapters; discussing liberal and socialist feminism and then radical, black and lesbian feminism. This split has few hidden critical agendas, except that it allows me to discuss the two feminist approaches which retained quite solid links with the mainstream political arena, versus the three tendencies which found a pressing need to remain outside the traditional realm of politics in order to redefine politics and extend social analysis by breaking all the 'rules' of political and academic analysis. It is self-evident that black and lesbian feminists can be socialists or liberals; but they also had to confront the fact that if mainstream politics had been gender-blind, middle-class feminism of whatever hue had been correspondingly race-blind and heterosexist in its bias. Even when feminist pioneers from the Enlightenment to the 1970s had inserted questions of gender into social analysis, it was largely left up to black, lesbian and working-class feminists to consider

the many levels and guises that gendered oppression could take, and link these to racism and homophobia which are just as endemic to Western thought.

Juliet Mitchell is one of many current theorists who questions whether a development in feminist politics has effected any real social change;⁵⁸ and this question is especially pertinent when we note the increased fragmentation of the movement in the last decade and its transition from 'action' to relative inactivity as it filtered into the rarefied atmosphere of academe. Despite legal reforms on matters such as abortion, sex discrimination and equal pay, the real position of women has changed very little. It is vital that feminists investigate why these reforms have had such a negligible effect upon the material status of the majority of women (whether at work or in the home), and devote more attention to the problems of ideology and gender socialization - changing the law is relatively easy when compared to transforming a nation's social consciousness.

The political atmosphere of the eighties and nineties can be characterized by its concentration on protecting the family structure. Both major political parties in Britain profess to be 'family' parties, which necessarily involves supporting and defending the right of the (male) breadwinner to earn a 'family wage': where women might fit into this equation is a challenge to which mainstream politics has proved itself unequal. The phenomenon of a 'New Right' swing in both British and American political structures has signified a gradual erosion of state support, and increasing ideological pressure upon women to resume their position in the home as carers for children and the

elderly. As the eighties drew to a close there was a great deal of rhetoric about attracting women back into full-time work in face of a falling number of school leavers. Nonetheless women wanting a career still face almost inexorable problems if they have children or dependants, since childcare provisions are still relatively scarce and expensive, and healthcare cutbacks mean that more women have total responsibility for caring for the sick and elderly.

It still seems that women are being pulled in two opposing directions: the attractions of a profession and a degree of financial autonomy have to be weighed against domestic responsibilities, which still tend to rest with the woman. Materially the government had to respond to a shrinking young workforce and call on the 'reserve army' of female labour - until, of course, the effects of the recession were keenly felt. Ideologically 'family politics' constantly reinforce the image of the wife/mother as the figure which binds the family together, as the stabilizing and most fundamental institution of civilized society. Over the years the media has produced a plethora of stories dealing with juvenile delinquency, drug and solvent abuse, and child molestation: women, traditionally viewed as the guardians of a nation's morality, are often more than indirectly held accountable for the sins of an advanced capitalist society. With the AIDS epidemic, the end of the 'permissive society' has long been proclaimed. The resulting moral backlash endangers the hard-won sexual liberty of women, who are encouraged to return to lifelong monogamous relationships, despite the fact that the terms upon which they are constructed have not changed

significantly.

The unease felt among contemporary feminists that feminist politics proved unable to unseat mainstream political agendas, or that 'post-feminist' women (often pro-family proponents) have colonized the public media space of 'women's issues', are to some extent well-founded. Both parliamentary politics and 'post-feminism' have hijacked feminist issues and perverted their meanings to serve the interests of a patriarchal status quo. Feminism's heterogeneity signals its potential for transgressive and unpredictable action, despite the unfortunate truth that 'even the term that signifies its rejection - "post-feminism" incorporates it.'⁵⁹ Feminism's retreat 'off the streets' into academic/political quasi-respectability has rendered it partially innured to the effects of a New Right swing in Western countries. Now the theoretical sophistication of modern feminist discourse needs to be fed back into popular women's consciousness. Women's issues are common media currency these days, and it is essential that feminists challenge the extent to which these issues are being resolved in women's favour. Arguably there is less, not more room, for pessimism about the future of a chameleon-like organization which, in Dahlerup's words, 'has been declared dead many times.'⁶⁰

CHAPTER TWO
LIBERAL AND MARXIST FEMINISMS

As feminists we need to reclaim our history and understand the complex construction of what we now know as feminism. It is also necessary to analyse those ideologies which have shaped our thinking and structured our experience of gender and our explanation of women's oppression. It seems to me that all of this is part of the project of building a feminist political theory.¹

Having accepted that the term feminism is itself problematic because the theories that inform it are heterogeneous, it is perhaps useful to posit a very basic description of the feminist endeavour which embraces the most influential strands to be elucidated in this and the following chapter. All feminist positions are founded upon the belief that women suffer from systematic social injustices because of their sex and therefore, 'any feminist is, at the very minimum, committed to some form of reappraisal of the position of women in society'.² One of the major sites of difference is in defining the 'oppressor' and locating the source of oppression - and indeed the term 'oppression' might be exchanged for something less emotive, conjuring up, as it does, images of tyranny unpalatable to some moderates. The sometimes conflicting positions within feminism tend nonetheless to foreground the same substantive issues: it is when it comes to isolating 'causes' that there seems to be little or no agreement.

An initial problem lies in the definition of 'politics' itself - a term most memorably appropriated and extended by radical feminists. Since politics and political theory are usually defined as the science of government and civic order, there can

clearly be no obvious critical space for feminist commentators, if we accept that this is a public sphere still largely closed to women. As many feminists have insisted upon grounding feminist analysis in female experience and therefore contesting male meanings, it seems reasonable to view all feminist positions - even the most entrenched in liberal orthodoxy - as transgressing such a definition. Despite the fact that since the seventies most feminists have determined their stance to be political, they have been regularly excluded from the corpus of political theory. The fear is, presumably, that politics as an academic discipline will lose some of its 'rigour', and that the broader sphere of institutional politics will be confronted by new agendas which further stretch the boundaries of democracy.

I include liberal and Marxist feminism together in this chapter because, by virtue of their alliances with pre-existing political orthodoxies, we might tentatively regard them as having a degree of analytical investment within male-oriented meanings of politics and social transformation. As will be seen, however, the insertion of gender-based issues into such well-established bodies of knowledge of necessity extends the limits of such knowledge, and places both liberal and Marxist feminists in a degree of conflict with the original analytical framework of both political positions. It could be argued that Marxism yields greater possibilities as a model which potentially exposes the dependency of Western civilization upon perpetuating class distinctions, and therefore might be 'stretched', following Engels, to expose the utility of gender difference to capitalist social relations. However, the hegemony of liberal³

philosophical positions in Western society, which stretch back to at least the seventeenth century, and looks to its origins in 'natural laws' (such is Thomas Hobbes's position⁴), makes it an even more diffuse and unwieldy socio-political stance than Marxism. Both liberal and Marxist feminists, therefore, occupy positions simultaneously within/without the patriarchal mainstream - a mainstream that has itself defined and redefined the notion of politics. Both strands are sites of internal tension and debate; but within the limits of this thesis, I can only gesture towards the most important of these divisions. I am more directly concerned with the effects upon these stances of inheriting 'orthodoxies' (by feminist standards), and in questioning to what extent these uneasy alliances have enriched feminist thought, despite evidence that hegemonic political influences often prove stultifying and contradictory for female dissenters.

THE LIBERAL FEMINIST TRADITION

It is often argued that the origins of liberal philosophy are co-existent with the rise of capitalism, so that the language of autonomy and self-improvement becomes inextricably linked to the property interests of the middle classes.⁵ Liberal investment in a concept of metaphysical dualism separated 'man' from other animals as distinct because of the ability to reason: thus conceptually resulting in a mind/body split - the mind associated with rationality, and the body with all things base and physical shared with other living creatures. The ability to reason and

the consequent capacity for humans to conceive of themselves as unique individuals, and therefore the basic constituents of all social groups, is foregrounded by classic liberals. This guiding notion of abstract individualism immediately creates fissures in the liberal political position, since:

logically, if not empirically, human individuals could exist outside a social context; their essential characteristics, their needs and interests, their capacities and desires, are given independently of their social context and are not created or even fundamentally altered by that context.⁶

Nonetheless liberal philosophy is concerned with providing political justification for the existence of a hierarchical civilization, in which many members must accept their lack of privilege as natural and immutable. Liberal political philosophy regards such a model of civilization as natural; and in doing so writers such as Thomas Hobbes in The Citizen (1651) project a view of Man in the bare state of nature as constantly in a state of conflict with all other men, who require contracts of citizenship and rules of morality and government which will satisfy the citizen's nascent self-interest. Society therefore facilitates institutionalization of rules for free competition within the state, by reasoning that the unbridled pursuit of self-interest at the expense of all others logically results in self-destruction. Hobbes thus asserts that though 'nature hath given to every one a right to all',⁷ for the sake of the protection offered by civic rule, 'the right of all men to all things ought not to be retained'.⁸ Although Hobbes maintains

that in their natural (uncivilized) state all men would be equal, in terms of their right to pursue their own self-interest, this right is relinquished under civil laws in the name of higher reason:

I know that Aristotle, in his first book of Politics, affirms as a foundation of the whole political science, that some men by nature are made worthy to command, others only to serve; as if lord and servant were distinguished not by consent of men, but by an aptness, that is, a certain kind of natural knowledge or ignorance.⁹

Hobbes, in common with other liberal philosophers, seems to utilize two conflicting views of nature: one which avers that man, abstracted from society and forced to thrive upon his instinct for self-preservation, would need to be esteemed equal; one which espouses rationality as itself a natural human quality engendering a recognition within all humans of the need for social groupings governed by rules and contracts, which some enforce and some have enforced upon them. Although later writers conceive of individuals acting upon principles of moral impartiality as opposed to naked self-interest, liberal thinkers tend to picture social cohesion as based upon individual competitiveness. They assert, therefore, that civilization demands limited powers of the state to introduce a shared agreement of mutual respect and civic rights, and to counter the likelihood of conflict.

This rhetoric of nature conjures up images of biological and social determinism simultaneously, especially in the liberal belief that there are timeless and universal principles which

inform the regulation of harmonious society. But in the above summary of the classic liberal position I have been using the term 'man' advisedly. Liberalism tends to cast female nature as separate, an adjunct to the male principle, which derives its meaning only as different from masculinity, yet contained within such a category. The concepts of the public and private sphere are used to identify the limits of state intervention in individual existence. The 'public' comes to mean aspects of social life where state intervention is legitimate; whereas the 'private sphere' is the realm of abstract individualism - where 'man' maintains his own dominion free from the fetters of civic intervention. Male nature - the idealized public face of masculinity - becomes the paradigm of social interaction by default; female nature belongs to the home and to the irrational side of human nature, associated with qualities such as nurturance and emotion.

Accordingly the chief aim of liberal feminism - a tendency whose history is almost as long and as chequered as the history of liberal thought - has been to accord to women the rights that men hold 'naturally'. Liberal feminism has a long tradition of gender-based interventions in Western thought, and we have the legacy of such writers as Mary Wollstonecraft, and later John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor, who set out to show that all social categories are structured by the fact of gender; and that 'femininity' is a prison rather than a quality of healthy femaleness. The language of liberty, rights and legal equality is the currency of liberal feminism, witnessed clearly in the works of the Suffragists; but few, perhaps, have argued more

passionately than Wollstonecraft that femininity is a condition akin to slavery. The seemingly neutral and inclusive term 'human nature' needed to be re-examined to demonstrate that while 'human nature' obliterates social/biological difference by conjuring up an impression of collectivity, it in fact marginalizes female experience by characterizing men and women as quite different and of conflicting 'natures'. This essential contradiction between an overarching but simultaneously bifurcated concept of human nature which is summoned by early liberal feminists, reflects wider tensions within the liberal notion of human nature altogether. It is perhaps worth emphasizing that 'human' powers of reason did not unequivocally extend to women; rather, the liberal concept of female nature assumed women's innate irrationality.

Enlightenment feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft asserted that women too possessed the innate capacity for reason, but that this capability had been quelled by their lack of education:

Women are everywhere in this deplorable state; for, in order to preserve their innocence, as ignorance is courteously termed, truth is hidden from them, and they are made to assume an artificial character before their faculties have acquired any strength. Taught from their infancy that beauty is woman's sceptre, the mind shapes itself to the body, and roaming round its gilt cage, only seeks to adore its prison. Men have various employments and pursuits which engage their attention, and give a character to the opening mind; but women, confined to one, and having their thoughts constantly directed to the most insignificant part of themselves, seldom extend their views beyond the triumph of the hour. But were their understanding once emancipated from the slavery to which the pride and sensuality of man and their

short-sighted desire, like that of dominion in tyrants, of present sway, has subjected them, we should probably read of their weaknesses with surprise.¹⁰

In Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792), Wollstonecraft is perhaps the earliest feminist thinker to challenge essentialist notions of femininity - qualities which seemed to neatly oppose those rational virtues of human (or male) nature. Wollstonecraft demonstrated that women were commonly viewed as ruled by the pull of their bodily functions (notably reproduction) and physical attributes, and therefore mentally incapacitated. Though wary of asserting that, given the opportunity to realize their full potential through the discipline of education, women could achieve full equality with men, Wollstonecraft firmly posits what will become a vital distinction for latter-day feminists; that the bare physical facts of biological difference should not be unquestionably extended to create distinctions between the mental or rational capability of men and women.

On one level, Wollstonecraft's plea is one in keeping with liberal philosophy where individuals are autonomous agents who 'freely' engage in a social contract which determines their societal position. Her book charts in detail the experience of the (middle-class) woman trapped in the private sphere of domesticity and encumbent moral/ethical ignorance. Even though she emphasized the social effects of women's incarceration in the home - their lack of access to formal education, their gendered socialization into the trappings of femininity - her text focused implicitly on the realm of the personal relations between a woman and her father or husband. As Ursula Vogel argues:

Discrimination against women differed from the treatment suffered by other under-privileged groups in the eighteenth century...in that the reasons for exclusion cannot easily be rendered transparent. They are sunk in, and obscured by, personal relations which resist identification as forms of domination and subjugation.¹¹

This institutionalization of gender difference is grounded in the summoning up of natural and immutable differences. And if the 'natural' is used by liberal philosophers to legitimate existing civic and social order, as it is for example by Thomas Hobbes, to argue for change is to summon up images of unnaturalness and irrationality. Wollstonecraft's case, it seems, is a priori denounced by the epistemological foundations of liberalism. Yet Wollstonecraft arguably exposes basic contradictions within liberal thought itself - in that its universal moral principles of liberty, justice and citizenship cannot be applied equitably to all human beings, even accepting that certain inequities, such as hierarchies of privilege, are built into liberal values. Given that certain institutions are formalized as the sites within which such concepts operate, the private sphere is sustained informally and qualities of justice or liberty cannot properly be gauged within its purview.

Wollstonecraft appeals to reason - an inclusion of women within the 'Rights of Man' - which is effectively a claim for women's inclusion as part of the higher order of the human species, and to eschew the worst effects of biological reductionism. She argues, instead, that women at the present time lack the capacity to engage actively in political processes

(accepting the possibility of greater physical frailty, but not intellectual weakness as a correlative). More than this, in her concluding remarks to Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Wollstonecraft forcefully lays much of the blame for women's enslaved state in the hands of man:

From the tyranny of man, I firmly believe, the greater number of female follies proceed; and the cunning, which I allow makes at present a part of their character, I likewise have repeatedly endeavoured to prove, is produced by oppression.¹²

The language used here is more unequivocal than that used by twentieth century liberals, where the relationship between men and women is clearly situated as a power relationship, where men hold sway, not by virtue of their greater ability to rule, but by maintaining tyrannous subjection over women in their homes and marriages.

I have argued briefly in this section that liberal philosophy is predicated upon a basic conceptual contradiction, where natural qualities are summoned to: (a) endorse man's superiority over the rest of the animal kingdom by virtue of reason; and (b) legitimate existing forms of social order in Western capitalism as most properly compatible with the human temperament of self-interest and competitiveness. There is evidently a degree of slippage between these two uses of the term 'natural', which occlude the nature/culture divide. To some extent this usage is adopted uncritically by liberal feminists such as Wollstonecraft in order to argue in similar rationalistic terms for women's right of access to fully determined qualities of human nature.

If man can transcend his animalistic instinctual origins to create a world of reason, culture and social order, then surely women should also be credited for the faculty of mental transcendence, rather than being conceived as trapped inside their bodies which are traditionally seen to dictate the limits of their cerebral responses; so like animals, they too must be kept under restraint.

On the whole Wollstonecraft's plea for the rights of woman, is a plea for the chance for women to fulfil their socially endowed functions as wife, mother and moral guardian with self-control, and freed from the emotionalism she sees as endemic to the female sex in their present enslaved situation. While rationality, then, is conceived to be potentially genderless, Wollstonecraft still fundamentally accepts that sexual divisions determine differing social roles for men and women, and that given the opportunity for proper education women would be able to discharge their duties more effectively. In terms of 'natural' human instincts, Wollstonecraft seems to subscribe to the view that women, properly educated into their moral and civic responsibilities, would be able to curb men's unbridled and corrupt sexual appetites - in this central features associated with masculinity and femininity remain unexamined. Yet her primary demand - for the same education to be provided for women as is provided for men - necessarily gestures towards a future where women, equal in intellectual attainments, might deserve, as individuals, the right to enter the civil domain and to be economically autonomous. Her underlying argument that the inclusion of the rights of woman within civic rights would enable

women to be truly useful members of society belies the fact that a 'revolution in female manners'¹³ might pave the way for a more groundbreaking form of revolution.

THE LIBERAL ELEMENT OF SECOND WAVE THINKING

Modern liberal feminism has reaped the benefits of centuries of liberal feminist writings, and in a sense, all current feminist positions derive impetus and inspiration from such writers, so that this tradition lies at the heart of feminist knowledge. With this legacy lies the inheritance of certain tensions at the heart of liberalism, particularly evident in attempts by feminists to posit a model of female equality within a system of beliefs that operate on the assumed right to participate in the free market economy, which often overlooked the fact that for many women, free engagement in the economy was not viable. The liberal perspective on state intervention in people's lives also proved problematic, since state support was crucial to many women's lives, and any shrinkage of its services would probably mean that women's lives deteriorated. Most importantly liberal feminists were still caught in the double-bind of appealing for women's right to personhood, whilst attempting to expose the means by which women were victims of their biological sex. Underlying these calls, as we shall see in relation to Friedan's work, is an implicit affirmation that 'women's work' - mothering, domestic management, and nurturance, is still women's work, but that women should be encouraged to realize their true potential in public spheres in addition to these commitments.

Feminist writings on individuality, the state and the constraints of femininity reflect the continuing middle-class bias of liberal feminism. Friedan's portrait of the bored housewife, who having given up higher education for domesticity finds herself entrapped in self-absorption and neurosis, echoes Wollstonecraft's vain frail and ignorant domestic angel, and both only have resonance in their particular cultural/historical contexts as representations of privileged middle-class existence. The liberal belief in the universal and static qualities of human nature mean that the direction of liberal feminist energies is towards reform; and educational reform, as in Wollstonecraft's day, is high upon the agenda. A concept of equality is clearly central to liberal feminist thinking, although given that equality in liberal terms means equal access to a meritocracy, the concept demands further scrutiny.

Betty Friedan is an important writer in the feminist tradition not least because of her crucial role in the formation of America's National Organization for Women. Writing The Feminine Mystique in 1963, she was to characterize the effect of nurture rather than nature upon women as 'sex role conditioning'. Friedan's analysis of what she provocatively terms 'The Problem that has No Name' that beset countless middle-class American housewives, illustrates that despite increased opportunities for higher education and entry into rewarding careers, women were turning back to the hearth in their droves. And that this urge to return to domesticity might have deeper resonances than the superficial 'answers' that were proffered by the American popular mass media - that women had been encouraged to transcend their

'natural' aspirations through education, and other 'masculine' goals. Friedan termed this chimerical problem the 'feminine mystique', which she characterizes early on in her book:

The feminine mystique says that the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfilment of their own femininity. It says that the great mistake of Western culture, through most of its history, has been the undervaluation of this femininity. It says this femininity is so mysterious and intuitive and close to the creation and origin of life that man-made science may never be able to understand it. But however special and different, it is in no way inferior to the nature of man; it may even in certain respects be superior. The mistake, says the mystique, the root of women's troubles in the past is that women envied men, women tried to be like men, instead of accepting their own nature, which can find fulfilment only in sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love... Beneath the sophisticated trappings, it simply makes certain concrete, finite domestic aspects of feminine existence...into a religion, a pattern by which all women must now live or deny their femininity.¹⁴

Friedan's description of the feminine mystique has disturbing similarities with Wollstonecraft's analysis made over one hundred and fifty years earlier. Yet many of the women that Friedan interviewed had received an education that Wollstonecraft would have envied. Where the two women differ is that Friedan, in common with many feminists of the period, pinpointed a subtler, less tangible oppressive force at work, which while having a profound effect on such women's material existence, seemed to stem from and operate effectively and semi-autonomously at an ideological level. Nonetheless Friedan does not pursue the ideological factors at stake to anything like the degree that

radical and Marxist feminists do. Liberal feminists, like all liberals, concentrate on individual autonomy and the right to self-determination with the result that although on the face of it Friedan is attacking the patriarchal status quo which exhorts women to give all their efforts to childcare and housewifery, there is a subtext that seems to be blaming the women themselves. The book is in some sense a part of the consciousness-raising tradition, in that she charts the reasons behind the problem that has no name and poses solutions which are largely related to the efforts of women to reconstitute their own identities. But unlike radical feminist efforts which focus upon individual female identity and experience as the first step to collective revolution, Friedan's revolution remains largely an individual one; if not achieved, she implies, women only have themselves to blame. While she entreated women to find creative work outside the home, she assumed that they would find methods to continue their domestic responsibilities as well. Rosemary Tong cogently summarizes the thrust of Friedan's argument, observing that:

The Feminine Mystique failed to consider just how difficult it would be for even privileged women to combine marriage and motherhood with a career unless major structural changes were made within, as well as outside the family. Like Wollstonecraft, [Harriet] Taylor and [John Stuart] Mill before her, Friedan sent women out into the public realm without summoning men into the private domain.¹⁵

Liberal feminist thought commonly displays a wariness to affirm women's full potential for total equality, while maintaining that women's potential has never been fully realized.

Here we can identify traces of male-oriented liberal thought; that while the rights of the individual are sacrosanct in liberal philosophy, it is up to the individual to realize their own potential. This construction quite blatantly chooses to ignore the existence of other social or cultural factors which might make it quite impossible for an individual to acquire the means to realize such potential. This concept of 'Abstract Individualism' - that essential human qualities belong to the individual regardless of social context - reifies notions of freedom and autonomy and tends to assume that people always act in their own best interests. What modern liberal feminists have been anxious to point out is that liberalism's favourite mind/body binary opposition has become correlative with male/female distinctions contained within the blanket term 'human nature'. In such an equation women become synonymous with nature and physicality (and as such are conceived as trapped within the fact of their biology), whereas men are equated with the mind and rationality, and are therefore construed as the progenitors of culture. Unless such oppositions are fully interrogated and deconstructed the logic of liberalism dictates that women straddle the man/beast divide, recreating the necessary epistemological conditions for female subordination.

Since liberalism has been a highly influential Western philosophical position, it is unsurprising that liberal feminists have played an important part in the formation of a specifically feminist discourse. Indeed, it is Alison Jaggar's conviction that feminism owes a great deal to the liberal tradition: 'indeed, it owes so much that some Marxists characterize feminism

as an essentially bourgeois phenomenon'.¹⁶ In order to establish a specifically liberal feminist political perspective it is evidently necessary to call into question some of the most fundamental precepts of liberalism - notably the slippage of the mind/body divide to connote discrete qualities of sexual difference. In addition, something which potentially sets classic liberal feminists in opposition to socialist and radical feminists is the notion of the inviolable 'private sphere': in theory this would disallow them from any thorough politicization of women's existence in the domestic sphere, including issues such as marital rape and domestic violence. In practice, critics since Betty Friedan have found it necessary to exhibit the tensions present in women's domestic and sexual lives in order to bring issues of gender inequality to the surface. However, strictly speaking, liberal feminists - by virtue of their commitment to freedom of expression - are unable to take a hard line on issues such as pornography.¹⁷

Because of liberalism's long history of links with industrial capitalism, liberal feminists tend to be reluctant to pose any direct challenge to capitalism, which effectively leaves the option of a limited intervention in the institutions which maintain it. This might well preclude detailed analyses of the family - not only as an institution which functions effectively for capitalism, but also as belonging to the sacred 'private sphere'. The liberal feminist's strategy for social change is hence tightly restricted by the liberal's desire not to overturn the status quo; liberal feminists prefer the tactics of reasoned argument via non-coercive demonstrations and lobbying for legal

and civil reforms. Since liberals have always staunchly protected the individual's right to self-advancement, liberal feminists would generally assert that a meritocracy is not sexist as long as women acquired the same social and legal status as male citizens. Inevitably, as Friedan's book readily illustrates, liberal feminism is centred on the needs of middle-class women, and would possibly not accept class or racial difference as a significant handicap in the path to self-advancement.

The above overview suggests that liberal feminism's powerful links with classic liberalism prevent any productive discussion of the root causes of women's oppression, since the guiding structures of contemporary Western society are not really questioned. Indeed, there is little evidence that liberal feminists of the past have wanted to achieve a significant break with traditional liberalism by calling any of its central precepts into question, even though their stance as feminists effectively does this. But liberal feminism has had an abiding effect on American feminist politics; especially through NOW it has achieved a substantial degree of success through its policy of 'soft' lobbying. It has never become such an influential political stance in Britain or in the rest of Europe, in terms of mainstream political engagement, though this is not to underestimate the impact of liberal feminist writings upon the embryonic stages of the Second Wave across the Atlantic.

LIBERAL FEMINISM AS 'SCEPTICAL FEMINISM'?

In Britain in 1980 Janet Radcliffe Richards' The Sceptical Feminist was published. Offering a stance that derives its impetus from the liberal philosophical tradition, she adopts the guise of an objective commentator on contemporary feminism, appraising the flaws in its logic and arguments that render it an unpopular and therefore 'failed' movement. Although she does not announce herself as a liberal thinker, her mode of argument assigns her to such a position. Moreover, her repeated use of the first person plural pronoun indicates that to some extent she perceives herself as a feminist, however sceptical. Richards sees her task as a corrective one - upbraiding the more 'extreme' and unattractive aspects of feminism, notably lamenting many feminists' refusal to train their powers of reason and logic in debate. Richards assumes that the mode of reasoning she utilizes is universally accepted as the only way to solve a philosophical problem - she ignores many feminists' contention that reason itself is compounded upon a patriarchal logic which has as a central premise the intellectual/moral inferiority of women.¹⁸ Her alarm at a tendency to celebrate 'unreason' within the women's movement, is based on her suspicion that such a stance merely reinforces existing masculine and feminine divisions. However, other feminists might interpret such a position as a means by which to redefine what constitutes reasonable argument within a social order which denies women any such capacity. Effectively she argues that rather than engaging in our own peculiar brand of 'unreason', we should take time to learn the

forms of philosophical and discursive enquiry that are usually the male preserve. Many feminist academics might well respond by observing that women are steeped in such knowledges which have inscribed within them precepts which inhibit a thorough investigation of the particular experiences of the female, and that one of feminism's victories has been the provision of the opportunity to extend the boundaries of such a preserve.

Richards is concerned that feminism's conviction of female intellectual and social equality ignores the possibility that, since we cannot know women's true potential at present, there may be a necessity in the future to allow for the existence of inherent sexual difference:

There may be very few feminists, for instance, who would even admit to considering the possibility that women might on the whole be less capable of works of genius than men: for most feminists, the inherent equality of the sexes in all such matters is part of the official doctrine.¹⁹

If it is the case that women are handicapped in certain matters (through childbirth and so forth), she argues that it would be foolish to try to obscure these facts, since they need not prevent women from occupying positions of power in a feminist utopia. One of the central premises of her overall argument is that feminism needs to be more flexible in the alternatives it offers to women, in order to encourage a flowering as of yet unknown potential - a criticism that many contemporary feminists might accept. But she is uncomfortable with feminism's chief focus upon injustices against women, and argues that 'to fight

with nothing in view but the good of women is to fight for an unjust society'.²⁰ Much of her discussion is underpinned by fairly conventional discussions of the nature of justice, based on the rather inaccurate premise that feminists spend little time considering other forms of social inequality and their relation to gender. Justice is of course a thorny problem for feminists, and clashes between differing strands are most manifestly felt in debates around class, race and sexual orientation. She recognizes that feminism's primary intention is to hold up to question all existing social institutions and customs, but underestimates the scope of that intention, which assumes that projected social transformations incorporate a changing status for men as well. Feminist utopias are necessarily woman-centred in their concerns, since one of their most important functions is to reflect upon the present - to gesture at ways in which things could be otherwise.

Richards criticizes the Women's Movement for what she perceives as its indeterminacy,²¹ whereas others might more positively characterize its non-doctrinal aspects as evidence of its rich diversity. She attacks what might be regarded as the 'stereotypical' face of feminism, and argues that a feminist 'style' - characterized as a total rejection of all conventional standards of feminine beauty and sexual attractiveness - leads to a repression of individual self-determination: 'The fact is that women who dress in a conventionally feminine way, or give the impression of caring about their appearance however little effort it actually takes, are regarded by many feminists as enemies.'²² She trivializes feminists' endeavour to politicize issues of

representation and female sexuality, conflating debates about the imposed sexualization of the female with sexual pleasure itself, and asserting 'it can be no part of a serious feminism to argue that there is anything inherently wrong with the sensual enjoyment of sex'.²³ For her, feminist personal politics denies individual women their personal preference - although of course feminists would want to debate the extent to which such 'choices' are made freely. She defends the sanctity of the private sphere, and therefore refuses any credence to feminist problematizations of the public/private divide, or analyses of a dominant ideology which positions women in an object relationship to men - in fact she appears to condone such a view - 'There can be no reasonable feminist principle which says that women ought not to want men, and if women want men they must be willing to be pleasing to them'.²⁴ The thrust of the book, in its attempt to rescue feminism from its worst excesses, addresses a reader who has always been the focus of liberal feminism - white, middle-class, heterosexual - ignoring women who do not inhabit what is a relatively privileged social position.

The Sceptical Feminist typically appeals to the readers' common sense - assuming them to be women who may wish to assert their right to equality under democracy, but have no wish to radically transform their current status quo. However, Richards' reappraisal of feminism fails to take account of how such 'common sense' opinions come to be entrenched in our consciousness, not necessarily because they are the most effective wisdom available. The underlying assumption is that women largely want what is now available to them, although with a little more freedom to

exercise certain choices. In fact she assumes, in common with Wollstonecraft and Friedan, that right-minded women still wish to be in sole charge of domestic arrangements and childcare. She concludes that feminism is an 'unpopular movement',²⁵ and largely blames feminists themselves for creating exclusionary practices, and advocating alternative social arrangements which antagonize other 'reasonable' women.

Liberal feminists' constant recourse to reason, and commitment to a recognition of the rights women already theoretically possess, is its most problematic feature for other feminist perspectives. Nonetheless its long and respected history as a corrective element to dominant political thought cannot be ignored, since its fight for equality created the conditions whereby dissenting feminist stances could emerge. It still remains popular, and as Andrea Nye postulates, is often the first form of feminism that women encounter:

When a woman in the United States or Western Europe first identifies herself as a feminist, it is often as a liberal feminist, asserting her claim to the equal rights and freedoms guaranteed to each individual in democratic society.²⁶

In its investment in a social hierarchy that allows nominal equality on the basis of merit and effort, it reminds many feminists of early Second Wave errors in assuming that women's collective experience of oppression was a bourgeois one, since it addresses women who have the luxury of making choices which they often mistakenly assume are available to everyone. It is also too often a position from which the women's movement is

undermined, its politics trivialized, and made indistinguishable from an anti-feminist wave, which assumes the title of 'post-feminism', and urges a reconsideration of the 'facts' of human nature - as something which 'extreme' feminism has rather too precipitately rejected.

AN UNEASY ALLIANCE: THE MARXIST/FEMINIST ENCOUNTER

The terms Marxist and socialist become relatively interchangeable when describing those feminists who have endeavoured to form alliances with the political Left. However, critics such as Rosemarie Tong argue that they represent two distinct tendencies within feminist thought - socialist feminism having superceded Marxist feminism and being 'largely the result of Marxist feminists' dissatisfaction with the essentially gender-blind character of Marxist thought'.²⁷ Marxist feminists, she asserts, see class as the ultimate determinant of women's current social/economic status, whereas socialist feminists view gender and class as equally powerful oppressive mechanisms and focus, in addition, upon areas of sexuality and reproduction. I do not agree, however, that such a clear distinction can be made, and would concur with Alison Jaggar that 'socialist feminism is unmistakably Marxist, at least insofar as it utilizes the method of historical materialism'.²⁸ Currently, socialist feminism appears to be the preferred epithet, but this seems to be a response to Marxist hostility, and a move towards involvement with mainstream left-wing politics, rather than a symptom of theoretical fragmentation. The very addition of gender to the

Marxist theoretical equation prompts scrutiny of areas of female sexuality and procreation, so that a maintenance of class as the central determining factor of contemporary power relations seems untenable. Since much of the following is concerned with the appropriation of Marxist thought for feminist purposes, I shall use the term Marxist feminism in the initial stages of this discussion, and then proceed to use the term socialist feminist in the successive section - to indicate the growing split between feminist analyses and Marxist orthodoxy.

Marxists do not, of course, share the liberal investment in maintaining the social status quo, since the conditions of social life for the oppressed and exploited under advanced capitalism is the primary subject of their critique. Feminists hoped to develop Marxist critiques of a social and economic system based on class divisions, and fuse this with radical feminists' utopian call for a revolution in consciousness. In their attempt to merge Second Wave radicalism with Marxist analyses of the capitalist social formation, Marxist feminists encounter a major difficulty - the radical feminist concept of patriarchy as a universal and transhistorical system of power relations between the sexes seems incompatible with Marxist class analysis, which is historically and culturally specific, and elides the gender question almost entirely. Where liberal feminists still tend to regard the domestic sphere as the focus of women's lives, Marxist feminists are concerned with the fate of women workers in the labour market itself, as well as with examining how women's perceived natural function as carer and domestic labourer affects notions of her 'value' within the workplace. They share with

radical feminists a commitment to politicize the personal and private, by arguing that women are held in the thrall of a patriarchal system of relations, which may work as functional for capital, but predates it and therefore might be regarded as having a certain degree of autonomy. However, their attempts to forge an alliance with Marxism meant that they expended a great deal of their energies challenging a political agenda which tenaciously obscured the fact of women's oppression, and therefore might perpetuate it outside a capitalist social formation.

Feminist interventions into Marxist thought rapidly exposed the fact that class-based analysis either assumes that women enter the class system on equal terms with men, or that they are of no relevance to either its maintenance or destruction. Just as a liberal concept of rationality presupposes a male model of reason, so Marxism presupposes that a male experience of inequities under capitalism will be the motivating force behind a revolution, and therefore the building block upon which to construct an alternative. Marxists, unlike liberals, ostensibly repudiate purely essentialist notions of human nature: the Marxian notion of praxis posits human activity as social activity - that there is a dialectical relationship between human biology and human society, which is constantly undergoing modifications through the process of history - yet this concept is not interrogated in relation to particular social roles of women. In theory, therefore, Marxist analysis of historical flux appeared to facilitate a consideration of the social construction of gender roles, which could dispense with the biologicistic

assumptions that lay at the heart of liberal philosophy; but in practice women's 'natural' social functions were assumed as givens.

Marxist thought proved attractive to feminists because of its eschewal of universalizing notions of human nature; but more pragmatically, such a mode of analysis was familiar to many women who found their political awakening in left-wing radicalism. Both movements are, after all, seeking a total transformation of social institutions in order to end the exploitation and oppression of specific social groups. The Marxist consideration of the function of ideological processes is particularly conducive to feminist appropriation, as a means by which individuals' 'collusion' in their subordination can be critically reappraised. Nonetheless Marxist feminists faced a substantial hurdle to their project, which is that the basic tenets of feminism and Marxism - patriarchy versus class - appear to be mutually incompatible. For this reason, Marxists have at times been hostile to feminist critiques, characterizing the Women's Movement as constructing an abstract and ahistorical case of special pleading on behalf of women - in that woman as an analytical category is not compatible with social delineations exposed by class analysis. Feminism, it is argued, homogenizes female experience from a wholly bourgeois perspective, creating a political diversion which forestalls revolution rather than facilitates it.

Such attacks primarily resulted from feminism's focus upon women's private lives as the crucial site of unequal patriarchal power relationships, a sphere which plainly has no place within

Marxism's economistic framework. Feminists responded by arguing that the Marxian analysis of labour relations is inadequate so long as it ignores how other forms of unpaid, 'unproductive' labour - such as procreative and domestic labour - contribute to the stability and viability of industrial capitalism. Whereas Utopian Socialists of the nineteenth century such as Saint-Simon and Fourier (viewed by Marx as forming 'mere reactionary sects'²⁹) examined the effects of gender oppression under capitalism, 'women's position is increasingly marginalized in socialist work by a focus on paid labour and class relations. This occurs with the rise in importance of Marxism and a male-dominated organized Left.'³⁰ A central problematic for Marxist feminists was that women seemed to be governed by two semi-autonomous but mutually strengthening power mechanisms - the operation of a patriarchal ideology of immutable sexual difference within the family, and a sexual division of labour in the workplace - and that both had received little attention in the Marxist tradition.

In the development of a Marxist feminist theory, Friedrich Engels' The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State (1884) was a crucial text. However, Engels' position on women's place under capitalism is ambiguous. On one level Engels assumes that women independently acquire class status by virtue of the same economic determinants as men, but on another level he infers that all women are proletarianized within marriage - where male power is regarded as analogous to that of the bourgeoisie. The family, therefore, represents a capitalist system of relations in microcosm, and it is assumed that once class is abolished, so

sexual inequality will disappear. In this way women's particular experience of oppression at a dual level is absorbed and obscured under a description of class antagonism, with a result that 'there is therefore no theoretical space to develop any understanding of patriarchy, as either a separate or a related system, for sex oppression has in effect been rendered invisible.'³¹ Feminists were left to untangle the conjoined threads of patriarchy and capitalism in order to determine how far capitalism can be blamed for women's oppression - a state of affairs which manifestly existed in earlier social formations. Engels concurs with this view, locating the phenomenon of the 'pairing marriage' (following broader incest taboos within previously polygamous tribal cultures) as heralding 'the capture and purchase of women'.³² He presupposes the existence of a primitive matrilineal social organization that is at some point overthrown by a patrilineal one, and the historical landmark he selects for this transformation is the creation of wealth and private property. He argues that the possibility of the transfer of capital from one generation to another requires the male head of the family to be able to identify his legitimate heirs; but in common with many nineteenth-century commentators on the 'mother-right' debate, Engels admits that we cannot trace the approximate moment in history when such an overthrow was achieved, other than to claim that it falls within prehistoric times.

Engels implies that despite the 'prehistoric' origins of the patriarchal family form, it had become an instrument for capitalism. For this reason, later feminist debates around

women's specific status in the spheres of the family and in commodity production, were held to obscure the more 'important' analytical tool of class division, especially debates around the question of whether all women constituted an oppressed class in themselves. The calculated avoidance by classic Marxists of gender issues, creates a theoretical slippage, whereby women's oppression predates and yet becomes organic to capitalism; from feminists' perspective, women's subordination is in danger of becoming implicitly linked to biological destiny. 'Women's realms' as reproducers, carers and nurturers within a monogamous family relationship are left untouched by Marxist analysis in its concentration on the public sphere of labour and the accumulation of capital. The 'private sphere' - the obverse of the labour market - becomes hermetically sealed as outside the framework of materialist analysis, outside the relations of production and ultimately - given Engels' vague interrogations into the field of prehistory - beyond history itself. In common with liberalism woman's social role was by implication seen as rigorously bounded by her biological identity and nature; while males' superior rationality or thirst to transform nature by the action of praxis was the key to civilization. A central feature of contemporary Marxist feminist thought has been to render up a viable theoretical framework that could at once incorporate female experience outside the welter of the labour market, a framework that acknowledged women's unique relationship to familial and ideological forces, and yet could counter what was regarded as ahistorical tendencies within radical feminist politics.

A starting principle for Marxist feminists was that female

domestic labour - reproducing and maintaining the workforce - should be considered an aspect of production (or reproduction), which worked to the benefit of capital, whether it was strictly functional or not. In addition, it was asserted that women's role in the labour market was hugely influenced by this domestic identity, and made their relationship to production distinctly different from men's. Although Marxist analysis concentrated on relations of production within the labour market, 'no Marxist theory provides a satisfactory historical account of the sexual division of labour'.³³ The sexual division of labour was a concept developed by Marxist feminist revisionary work, but one in which other feminist factions had a clear vested interest - not least because it highlighted the necessity of foregrounding the effects of both ideological and material processes upon women. All feminists observed that female labour is concentrated in low paid bands, such as cleaning, nursing and childcare; whereas Marxists assumed that women's exclusion from the public sphere was the primary source of their oppression (even though this oppression was deemed unworthy of further analysis). What is most problematic for contemporary feminists is that women have always been present in the labour force; and now more women enter full-time occupations, a sexual division of labour still prevails.

The supposed propensity of women for domestic and caring roles influences dominant attitudes to women within the labour market, and informs the 'choices' women have in employment, to the point where one can identify an area of 'women's work', deemed qualitatively different from men's. Women who undertake paid

labour still tend to suffer the effects of low pay, or the insecurity of part-time or outwork, which they often endure because of additional commitments of housework and childcare. Recent equal pay legislation has had a negligible effect on women's pay conditions, primarily because the majority of women workers are concentrated in a handful of jobs - such as nursing and primary education - containing very few male workers, and equal pay legislation stipulated that women should receive the same wage as men for comparable work. It was a simple matter for employers to 'regrade' jobs held by women, in cases where they were similar to those done by men, so the act became self-defeating - perhaps only serving to further entrench the ideology of the sexual division of labour within the sphere of employment, where certain jobs appeared to merit lower wages because they were generally performed by women.³⁴

Feminists have observed that the concentration of women within 'service' jobs seems to reflect the division of labour in the household, where women primarily care for and service the dominant male. This suggests that it is only possible to fully examine the feminization of certain forms of waged labour in relation to an analysis of the ideology of family life and domestic responsibility, which feeds upon biologicistic assumptions about natural sexual divisions. In an article on the sexual division of labour within the medical profession, Eva Gamarnikow suggests that the doctor-nurse-patient relationship is analogous to the father-mother-child hierarchy of the home. Historically the nursing profession has been regarded as suitable women's work, requiring care and similar domestic skills, which are the

desired moral attributes of the 'good woman' in the home. Since domestic labour has no exchange value, women's domestic skills in the labour market gain low financial rewards: the masculine ideal of a 'woman's place' perpetuates and covertly justifies the unequal value ascribed to men's and women's work: 'The occupational ideology of nursing thus genderised the division of labour: it associated science and authority with doctors and caring - putting science into practice - with women.'³⁵

Similarly, in lower and middle schools where most women teachers are to be found, the caring and socializing aspects of the work take precedence over the educational role. In addition to the ideological representation of the 'natural' divisions in domestic labour, we might also identify an 'ideology of naturalism' informing the structures of waged labour itself, where the 'patriarchal' relations of the family are recreated to similar effect, and gendered ideological patterns repeat themselves.

The concept of a 'family wage' - where a man's earnings are presumed to be sufficient to support an entire household - provides further material reasons for retaining women's pay at a lower level: their wages are deemed an additional 'luxury':

although few families have in fact depended upon the male wage, the belief that they do underlies our present sexual division of labour in a fundamental way and has, furthermore, been influential in determining the attitude of the labour movement to women's wage work.³⁶

As Barrett suggests above, the chief paradox of the 'family wage' is that a relatively low proportion of families fit the ideological 'model': single female parents are left close to the

poverty line, or dependent upon an ex-husband's alimony payments. Women who choose to raise a family alone have to face the economic reality that they would most probably be better off married. Yet such logic still carries enough weight to be used as a powerful weapon by both political parties and the labour movement alike.

The fact that for working-class families the sexual division of labour is potentially divisive - if lower-paid women are regarded as taking away men's 'rightful' jobs in a time of recession - is an important area of analysis for feminists. It profoundly affects the utility of a Marxist model of labour relations when it is working-class men themselves who are brought into direct conflict with their fellow women workers, although this situation is only advantageous to the bourgeoisie, and is ultimately sustained by the notion that women are secondary status workers, able to undercut the higher wage demands of men. The labour movement has always defended the male labourer's unquestioned right to earn his family wage; for this reason women's wage labour tends to be viewed as a disruptive, competitive element in the labour market, instead of as a reason for legislating for wage parity in real terms across gender (or indeed racial) divides.

The history of gendered labour conflict stretches back at least as far as the nineteenth century, when trade unions attempted to close their ranks to a growing female labour force, and effectively quashed the efforts of women to campaign for emancipation in the workplace.³⁷ Given the predominance of male labour issues in the trade union movement, equal pay was never a

high political priority, which means that issues of gender are still treated as relatively unimportant. Therefore Marxism and the labour movement tend to fuel the common misconception that women remain in the home, sustained by a single male breadwinner, thereby consigning women to a secondary labour status, which conceivably remains unchanged even after a Marxist socialization of relations of production. In this context it is obvious that the Marxist gender-blind analysis of wage relations is grossly inadequate for feminist purposes, not only because it disregards the hidden economic functions of domestic labour, but also because the theoretical framework denies any importance to questions of sexual/racial division at work.

Marxist feminists have concluded, therefore, that in a very real sense the patriarchal/familial ideology permeates the wage labour structure as effectively as it polices women's private lives:

In assessing the factors which might account for the position of women as wage labourers it is impossible to escape the conclusion that family structure and the ideology of domestic responsibility play an important part.³⁸

The power of social representations of the family cannot be underestimated, especially if they are reaffirmed by Marxists, by the absence of such considerations in their theoretical frameworks. Legislation will remain particularly ineffective so long as trade unions decide it is in their members' interests to militate for the inalienable rights of the man to earn a family wage. In this atmosphere of gendered conflict, capital will

continue to reap the benefits of exploiting cheap female labour, when a dominant familial ideology confirms that in the 'natural' order of things, women belong in the home.³⁹ Women workers are predominantly viewed as the 'reserve army' of labour, to be drawn upon in times of economic buoyancy or national crisis, and expected to return to their homes in times of mass unemployment - despite the fact that since the eighties:

Women could no longer be described as a 'reserve army of labour'; they had become the regular troops. They were not swept in and out of the workforce by fluctuations of the market. They stayed in, but paid a high price for the privilege, as their wages, hours and conditions ebbed and flowed, beyond their own control.⁴⁰

The sexual division of labour is perpetuated most effectively at an ideological level, since ostensibly women can make the choice to engage in a fulltime career, but unlike the male experience of work, women's choices often have to, at the least, be informed by a recognition of their 'natural' obligations within their families. Marxist feminists urged an awareness of the effects one's personal life can have upon one's social existence, and such a stance demanded further investigation of the family and of the radical feminist concept of overarching patriarchal power.

Marxists tend to implicitly assume a 'universal history of the family':⁴¹ the family is subsumed within the economic framework of capitalism as a pre-given structure, hinting at acceptance of the notion of fundamental, eternal differences between the social functions of men and women. Marxist theory asserts a distinction between waged labour ('exchange value') and domestic labour ('use

value'), where waged labour is almost exclusively defined as 'work', thereby pushing the question of the economic value of domestic labour outside its purview. Any theoretical link between domestic and waged labour is effectively blurred by locating domestic labour within the realms of 'personal relations', where patriarchal ideology condones the view of marriage as allowing a husband access to his wife's labour free of charge. Engels distinguished between the bourgeois family structure as a means by which the head of the household secures paternity and inheritance, and the proletarian family - the 'sex-love' match - as representing largely egalitarian values. Although it is true that working-class women are usually wage labourers, this distinction ignores the fact that working women are still more than likely to be dependent upon their husband's 'family' wage, and considered duty-bound to perform all domestic/caring functions. Marxist feminists set out to show how the family - a form which predates capitalism - does in actuality fulfil an economic role within capitalism in the relations of production and human reproduction. Having pinpointed the 'invisible' economic aspect of women's domestic labour, it is therefore essential to analyse relations of 'reproduction' and the means by which Marxism's separation of use value from exchange value concretizes women's subordinate social status.

From a feminist perspective, there is clear evidence that economic relations of production overspill into domestic labour:

Since the production and reproduction of labour power take place substantially within the family through the labour of the housewife, then it is clear that her labour

is in one way or another crucial to the generation of surplus value.⁴²

Domestic labour, in other words, underpins capitalist profit margins, by recreating the availability of labourers, and providing a haven from the alienating effects of waged labour which cushions them and reinforces the separation of the two 'worlds' of private and public - although it would be impossible in our present social arrangement to calculate the value of such a service in monetary terms. The public/private divide also strengthens capitalist relations, if one sees the private sphere as containing the vestiges of patriarchal power relations - where male dominance is endorsed by society - presumably because it blunts the edge of the alienation felt by the male worker in the public domain. Even if radical feminism's description of patriarchal power relations requires an explicit historical edge to contribute to Marxist feminist work, it still facilitates a revisionary critique of Marxism's contradictory assumption that the family is at once functional for capital in some indirect way, while having a degree of autonomy by virtue of preceding it. Accordingly Marxist feminists would argue that a reduced form of patriarchal relations still functions within the family, which determines and controls women's procreative functions as well as strengthening justification for the sexual division of labour in the workplace.

While Marxist feminists would wish to highlight the economic importance of the household, they must simultaneously explode the popular biologicistic myth that 'home-making' is something to which women naturally aspire. In order to do this it is important to

historicize the family form, to show how flexible it is to the needs of dominant social forces, and how it reproduces itself most effectively through ideological representations which may or may not correspond to people's lived realities:

'The family', however, does not exist other than as an ideological construct, since the structure of the household, definition and meaning of kinship, and the ideology of 'the family' itself, have all varied enormously in different types of society.⁴³

In order to avoid the mystificatory, emotive connotations of the term 'family', feminists such as Michele Barrett and Mary McIntosh refer to the 'family-household system' or a 'familial ideology'.⁴⁴ The ideological and material relations influencing the family-household system are apparently mutually strengthening and not easily separable. For the working classes, the household might be the site of major divisions, where all men benefit from the privileges bestowed upon them by the fact of their masculinity, and women are subordinated both at work and in the home.

In their analysis of relations of production, Marxists have therefore avoided the issue of women's labour almost altogether. The problem is that as such an analysis depends on their ascription of class divisions, can feminists be sure that the Marxist description of class antagonism has a direct relationship to women's social experiences? As a consequence, much debate has been generated around the problems of relating gender divisions directly to class structure, and upon adjudicating between the relative importance of either structure. For feminists, the

conception of the family unit, headed by the (male) breadwinner, tends to obscure and a priori deny women an independent social status in public life. The institution of the family itself provides an obstacle for theories of women's entry into class relations, since class is primarily designated by the family breadwinner's earning potential, and since it is assumed that the breadwinner is male, it is a correspondingly gendered analytical division. Before feminists interrogated the relationship between women and their class status, its complex nature had largely been ignored. Sociological theory generally assumed that women should be situated within the family unit, meaning that the family, apart from the (male) breadwinner, remained outside the scope of class analysis.

One problem with this simplistic sexual role division is that the notion that most women's place is still largely in the home is a function of a particular ideological representation, and ignores the material conditions of working class women in particular, who constitute a significant proportion of the labour market. As Jackie West points out, the first step is for feminists to expose the chasm between the ideological representation of women in the workplace versus their perceivable material conditions, and to do this requires a shifting theoretical position:

Without an adequate theoretical appreciation of women's direct relationship to and experience of productive and market forces, we continue the mistaken tradition of allocating women to a wholly special place in our society which so easily becomes a 'problem' area requiring entirely different tools of enquiry.⁴⁵

While traditional class analysis only succeeds in evading the question of women's class position by ascribing the man's class to his entire family, applying a feminist perspective to their 'secondary' or 'derived' status is equally problematic. Within a Marxist discursive formation, women need a 'special' place, in the sense that at present they have none. Therefore, no progress can be made without rupturing the entire debate on class status, and perhaps concluding that in its existing form it is inadequate to account for the unequal position of women, or racial outgroups, compared to that of their presumed 'equals' in the workplace.

Feminists might feel that one could more accurately accept that it is families, not individuals, who have a particular standard of living, insofar, as Barrett observes, 'An aspect of women's relationship to the class structure is that it is mediated, to some extent at least, by the configuration of the family, dependence on men, and domestic labour.'⁴⁶ What, in terms of traditional class analysis, is the status of an unattached woman, for example? Does she retain her father's class position? If this is the case, does gender (and race) constitute an internal hierarchy within given class positions? It is clear that all people deemed to be members of the same social class do not have equal access to comparable jobs at equal rates of pay, but that women and people of colour tend to find their bargaining power weakened. If, in fact, few women spend all their adult life in the home dependent upon a male breadwinner, it must be the case that, in a family with both a

male and female earner, a woman's supplementary wage improves the whole family's standard of living. By virtue of her involvement in waged labour, a working woman ought to be regarded, at least on an abstract level, as independent of her relationship to the family. An advance on the feminist concept of a 'derived' class for women (derived, in other words, from her husband or father) might be to perceive them as occupying a distinctive place within class. Class, after all, does not imply a homogeneous status for all its occupants: it must be seen as divided into age, skill, ethnic group and sex.

It is certain at least that women's class position is affected by their dual role as domestic/wage labourer - especially by the fact that the importance of the latter is ideologically suppressed. Within the labour force women are likely to have less upward mobility because of the ties of mothering/caring (even if these 'ties' can be resolved by fulltime childcare, they are still perceived as 'natural' by employers, who may be prejudiced against women who do not regard them as such) - in a sense they are proletarianized by virtue of the fact that they proliferate in low status jobs (as do racial outgroups). In common with men, a woman's projected position in the labour market is influenced by her education and (father's) class background; but unlike men, a woman's actual labour status is also determined by the way her relationship is mediated through her dependence upon a husband and her assumed domestic responsibilities (not to mention how gender socialization affects her own view of her career potential):

For working-class women this may result in simultaneous direct exploitation by capital via their own wage-labour, and indirect exploitation via vicarious dependence on the wage of a male breadwinner. For bourgeois women this may result in simultaneous ownership of, yet lack of control over, capital.⁴⁷

In view of the numerous complex factors which may restrict women's entry into full employment, it seems inevitable that any feminist discussion of class must insert sub-categories of both gender and race or ethnicity: a purely 'class-based' analysis in traditional terms effaces the mechanism behind women's continued subordination/negation in their dual positions of domestic/wage labourer.

Sexism, like racism in the workplace is an ideology which a change in the economic base will not necessarily transform. Capitalism has successfully maintained the right to exploit the cheap labour of women and ethnic minorities by retaining their function as a 'reserve army' of labour which can be moulded to suit the fluctuating requirements of capital. Major contemporary left-wing arguments have held that women are structurally part of the working class, and that their future is likewise determined by the fate of capitalism (although this contention is undermined by the continued existence of a sexual division of labour in socialist states). Yet the left has consistently failed to champion the basic rights of women and minorities in the same way that it has protected the rights of the (white) working man. Even though many union organizations have structures within which racial and sexual inequality may be addressed, until the 'breadwinning' wage for men alone is analysed, such improvements

can do little to change the real position of working women and people of colour. This is not to say that feminists should ignore the demonstrable fact that some women are more privileged than others.

The difficulties confronting feminist analyses of class, the family and the sexual division of waged labour expose how crucial an examination of ideology is to all these theoretical strategies. Marxist feminists were not alone in a growing conviction that the perpetuation of a society divided along gender lines is primarily assisted by the action of ideological apparatuses, which naturalize such social divisions as essential for the personal happiness of its members. Marxist feminist debates consequently came to focus on representation in addition to the economic base, and upon the effects of gender socialization and the construction of female sexuality. These issues reconnect Marxist feminists to other feminist political strategies, and the issues of ideology and sexuality are explored in detail in Chapters Four and Five, in order to emphasize these connections.

MOVING AWAY FROM ORTHODOXY - PROBLEMS IN MARXIST FEMINIST ANALYSIS

Marxist or socialist feminism has always been a stronger tendency in Britain than in the US, where radical and liberal politics proved more popular.⁴⁸ According to Ginette Castro, Socialist Worker's Party women in the USA tried to hijack radical and liberal women's groups for their own purposes, capitalizing upon

the unstructured formation of many of such groups.⁴⁹ Whether or not she exaggerates the case, commentators on feminist activity on both sides of the Atlantic chart serious tensions between radical and socialist feminists, leading in Britain to a destructive split in feminist politics around 1978 - the year of the last National Women's Liberation conference, held in Birmingham. An important and recurring point of dispute was the question of inclusion of or collaboration with male political sympathizers, prompted by radical feminists' doubts that men had anything to contribute to women's liberation in its developmental stages.⁵⁰ The very fact that left-wing feminists endeavoured to accommodate gender issues within a pre-existing male-oriented framework seemed to suggest to radicals a symbolic collusion with the enemy, and a consequent dilution of feminist politics by the addition of class considerations.

The issue of men's involvement in feminism has of course been a contentious one, and radical feminists are most often characterized as operating separatist strategies - at least at a political level - in order to create a movement sustained and expanded by women alone. Socialist feminists' theoretical alliances with Marxism ^{were} ~~was~~ viewed from other feminist quarters as not just a political engagement with men, but as an affirmation of male discourse, which others had discredited as exclusionary at its core, and therefore irredeemable for feminist purposes. Many feminists have additionally recorded the practical difficulties of forming liaisons with male activists who tend to dominate and structure debates to their own purposes. But the problem for socialist feminists seemed to be primarily in getting

Marxist men to take their revisionary materialist model seriously, as well as countering entrenched male prejudices about female political participation - a prejudice that seems to have existed within socialist organizations since the nineteenth century:

Women were seen as a reactionary force in society. There was disagreement as to whether they were naturally or socially conditioned to be conservative, but there was a general fear that women constituted a threat to socialism. This was based more on their 'undue' influence over their husbands or over their children than on their own negative influence on socialist politics.⁵¹

It appears to be the case that socialist men were interested in matters of gender, but that they seemed to be drawn to forms of feminist analysis removed from a Marxist framework. Lynne Segal supports this view, and argues that in Britain in recent years, 'a socialist feminist project which attempts to connect up a feminist analysis and strategy with a more traditional socialist analysis... has often proved less popular than radical feminism with men on the left and in the Labour Party.'⁵² This ironically suggests that contemporary left-wing men prefer to characterize feminism as an autonomous bourgeois movement, which devotes its energies to specifically 'female' issues surrounding sexuality and domesticity, rather than a position which intervenes in and offers critiques of current male-dominated political positions. Socialist feminists nonetheless encouraged male/female discussions on the grounds that patriarchal structures will never be abolished while men retain their investment in their perpetuation, and therefore feminism should be an educative

process for both sexes to indicate that class privilege is just one stronghold among others that needs to be relinquished.

By the end of the seventies, feminists with firm Marxist roots were still attempting to enhance radical (and liberal) feminist positions by giving them a materialist theoretical structure which would ally them with left-wing politics. However, among those who preferred to call themselves socialist rather than Marxist feminists, there was a growing unease that Marxism's class-based analysis of oppression could not be simply appropriated to analyse women's oppression, even though such analyses allowed closer scrutiny of the effects of unequal social divisions among women themselves, and 'by the end of the decade many if not most socialist feminists were convinced that patriarchy was at least as basic a structure as capitalism.'⁵³ By the early eighties many socialist feminists, especially in Europe, had structured their arguments coherently enough to assert that capitalism, male dominance, racism and imperialism were mutually interdependent mechanisms of oppression, so that one could not isolate theoretical solutions to one without considering all the others (sexual orientation would be a later category in the socialist feminist scheme of things).

In the past decade socialist feminism has striven to produce more adequate methods of defining the nature of oppression, and counteract the abstract ahistorical connotations acquired by the term 'patriarchy'. An historical edge was required in order to demonstrate that patriarchy is inscribed in both the economic and ideological structures of contemporary Western society, illustrating a degree of shared experience between women, that

cut across class and race boundaries:

Women share common experience of oppression which, though, they may be mediated by class, race and ethnicity, nevertheless cut across class lines. All women are liable to rape, to physical abuse from men in the home, and to sexual objectification and sexual harassment; all women are primarily responsible for housework, while all women who have children are held primarily responsible for the care of those children; and virtually all women who work in the market work in sex-segregated jobs. In all classes, women have less money, power and leisure time than men.⁵⁴

Socialist feminists do take class divisions seriously, rather than claiming, like their radical sisters, that all women form part of an oppressed underclass. In this their work proved attractive to working-class women, who had generally felt alienated by the middle-class dimensions of radical and liberal feminism. Their appropriation of Marxism's commitment to historical specificity meant that they were able to begin to unpack the unwieldy concept of patriarchy, and make connections between this seemingly timeless system of domination and a capitalist social reality. Although the rhetoric of shared sisterhood is beguiling as a slogan, it can be offensive to those women who do not have access to the privileges of their more prosperous and enlightened 'sisters' - who tended to gloss over the day-to-day material hardships of women's lives in favour of concentration on representations of femininity which generate false consciousness. After all, once it is established that all women confront a society that divides and privileges on the basis of gender, one has to further examine how other social identities

such as class and race can handicap different women in different ways.

There necessarily remains a prevailing problem - one shared by many feminist strands - and that is how to adequately articulate the means by which women internalize their own oppression. In its political guise, socialist feminism must resist Marxism's implicit agenda where sexual difference remains unscrutinized, in order to argue that there can be no reason to maintain the public/private distinction in political theories of oppression. This suggests an expansion of the revolutionary agenda to incorporate a 'revolution in consciousness' as a vital ingredient to achieve social transformation; in that without destabilizing the social/ideological construct of femininity, women's material conditions of existence will remain the same:

A particular household organization and an ideology of familialism are central dimensions of women's oppression in capitalism and it is only through an analysis of ideology that we can grasp the oppressive myth of an idealized natural 'family' to which all women must conform.⁵⁵

A revolution in consciousness, however cannot be attained by the powerless overthrowing the material conditions of their oppression. And in this sense socialist feminists share the radical feminist awareness of the need for 'consciousness raising' activities, though they might want to extend these far beyond the confines of a discrete female subculture.

This seemingly free appropriation of Marxist discourse for specifically feminist purposes predictably provoked harsh

criticisms from hard-core (male) Marxists. From a classic Marxist perspective feminist questions are at odds with the class-based nature of Marxist critiques. To set women apart as a class (or classes) of their own was to introduce divisive and diversionary debates to a political framework which depended on unity within class regardless of gender; a revolution in the material conditions of existence would supposedly achieve liberation for working-class men and women alike. Furthermore, because of feminism's tradition as middle-class defenders and thinkers, any attempt to pursue a feminist perspective within socialism was seen as bourgeois treachery. It was largely a question of a clash of priorities between socialist feminists and classic Marxists, where feminists' foothold in Marxism was compromised by their aim to forge links between gender and class oppression:

Women have systematically argued that gender relations cannot be subsumed under the categories of class and the economy and that an autonomous or semi-autonomous body of theory needs to be developed to explain the domination of women by men.⁵⁶

Feminists highlighted the conceptual problems of classic Marxist class analysis and showed that women's relations to class were at best equivocal; they probed the so-called 'private sphere' of the home in order to assess the extent to which domestic labour (including reproduction of the workforce) might be viewed as functional for capitalism, and exposed the prevailing sexual/racial inequalities within the labour market itself. It was in a real sense impossible for classic Marxism to assimilate

such critiques of its own analytical structure unless it was prepared to transform its own definitions of the real source of oppression.

The editorial of a 1986 issue of Feminist Review⁵⁷ reflects a sense of identity crisis among socialist feminists, in face of Left-wing allegations that feminism has lost its political commitment and steadily drifted nearer the Right. The editorial collective of Feminist Review attribute this partly to the existence of a 'generation gap' in contemporary feminism:

The women involved in the formative period of socialist feminism in Britain were nearly all highly educated, white and middle class, their politics indebted to the 1960s student revolt and its legacies. Young feminists' formative experiences are of chronic unemployment, a massive dismantling of public services and provision, and a more right-wing, embattled and confrontational political culture. In this history gross social divisions have been given new and painful meaning.⁵⁸

Feminists were aware that they may have rested on their radical laurels, and have not kept abreast of changing political realities - leaving them both incapable of challenging New Right assaults on women's rights, and rendering them unattractive to many politically-aware women since the eighties. There has been an increased recognition that socialist feminism can no longer give precedence to matters of class and production at the expense of important issues such as racial difference, homophobia, sexuality, ideology and culture. More than ever feminists have to fill the analytical gaps in political theory, which still resolutely ignores the specific needs and demands of women.

Socialist feminism has political resonance, asserts the Feminist Review collective, precisely because it perceives Western society as containing more than one system of domination:

In contemporary Britain we can identify capitalism as an economic system based on the exploitation of the labour of the working class. We can identify imperialism, based on the exploitation and subordination of whole peoples, races and ethnic groups. And we can identify the system, call it sexism, patriarchy or a sex-gender system, based on the power of men over women.⁵⁹

Socialist feminist discourse has, arguably, a greater potential to examine the workings of all three oppressive structures and be able to highlight their complex inter-relationship, whereas Marxism continues to be largely race/gender blind. In practice the clashes between questions of class, race, gender and sexual orientation are still prevalent in the Women's Movement, where different priorities create differing analyses of patriarchal/imperialist power. However, socialist feminists did facilitate an exploration of race issues, which enabled them to make connections with black feminists who previously felt themselves marginalized or ignored. Nonetheless, some white feminist's acknowledgement of their own past theoretical ethnocentricity has provoked the criticism that white feminists still persist in disregarding the different meaning that institutions such as the family can have for black women, and might therefore be construed as persistently racist.⁶⁰

Perhaps it is socialist feminists' growing interest in matters of female sexuality and identity that announces the most significant rift between their work and that of Marxism, despite

their attempts to demonstrate how such factors are fundamental to the economic base of society. At this end of the socialist feminist spectrum, we can witness a strong link with radical feminism. Personal politics seemed to warrant closer materialist analysis, in order to show that the public/private distinction maintained in all phallogocentric political discourses is founded on the ideology of male dominance, and contributes to a maintenance of the equilibrium of such dominance.

CONCLUSION

It seems, then, that classic Marxism, in common with classic liberalism, is of strictly limited use to contemporary feminist thought, in that fundamental to both dogmas is the assumption that woman is socially subordinate to a politically, materially and ideologically dominant man. If deeper scrutiny of such theories as Marxism bears witness to the fact that woman is persistently associated with a transhistorical, all-consuming notion of nature, it is at times difficult to see the benefit of attempting to 'tack on' feminism to such monoliths, when it seems that the question of women's social position can at best remain a supplement. The socialist feminist project has been to some extent a negative project, which has resulted in many cogent criticisms of the Left, but few major developments in thought which affirm the useful purpose of Marxist analysis, or acknowledge the contribution of other feminist strands to their own debates. Many feminists would still defend the necessity to appropriate and reappraise 'masculine' discourses, if only to

subvert them so as to be better able to question and criticize existing patriarchal political structures. However, as Annette Kuhn points out, this often results in the 'woman question' being clumsily inserted into the bedrock of academic disciplines as a side-issue, but never fully assimilated as an integral feature.⁶¹

Meanwhile, the women's movement was being rocked by intra-feminist disputes:

Arguments between socialist and radical feminists shook the women's liberation movement at times. Yet feminists on both sides saw eye-to-eye and campaigned together on a number of specific issues, and for most of the time, the movement managed to remain a singularly heterogeneous body, in which radical and socialist feminism co-existed.⁶²

Although I have signalled clear links between socialist and radical feminist politics, socialist feminism acquired a reputation for having 'ghettoized itself from interaction with non-socialist-feminist debates'.⁶³ A major criticism was of their apparent collusion with men and male-oriented discourse; but in their recognition that issues of sexuality, ideology and reproduction are fundamental areas for the investigation of women's oppression, they were fairly close to radicals, although the terms of their analysis differed.

Both liberal and socialist feminists suffer to some extent from their links with male discourse, where they are often viewed as the supplement, and by extension as of lesser importance than their ordinary doctrine. In order to recognize that both socialist and liberal feminism have been instrumental in the development of feminist thought, it is necessary to critically

reappraise the status of supplement, and to regard this position potentially as one of strength. Here we might usefully employ the insights of two male poststructuralist thinkers - Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida - and argue that a notion of supplementarity can be interpreted as something which further decentres the logic of a pre-existing originary 'truth' by denouncing its limits, and therefore destabilizing its claims to empirical hegemony.

Within both Marxist and liberal bodies of knowledge one opposition is deemed to lie at the origin of social formations and that is a divide between nature and culture - an opposition which Derrida claims, 'is congenital to philosophy.'⁶⁴ Of course feminist attempts to explode such a logic - in common with all forms of oppositional discourse - can only have recourse to the philosophy of such a logic itself, a double-bind which is both positive and negative. Positive in that feminism as supplement destabilizes the truth claims of such discourses, by analysing uninterrogated concepts such as 'nature'; negative in that 'we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest.'⁶⁵ Reason polices its own boundaries, so that a critique of the phallogentricity of reason can only occur from within: we therefore have 'only the recourse to strategems and strategies.'⁶⁶

Perhaps radical, black and lesbian feminists have been more aware of the power of the strategy, resulting in their refusal to accept repudiations of their perspectives by mainstream

philosophical/political discourse, by in turn refusing to take them 'seriously'. The main business of these feminisms has always been to give voice to the silences in our Western epistemological tradition, focusing on the 'private' spaces of female experience, especially the dark continent of female sexuality. Chapters Four and Five further investigate feminist perspectives on ideology and sexuality respectively, in order to show crucial points of connection between feminist strands that can be exploited for meta-theoretical purposes - thence to inform a more cogent feminist politics. But firstly the liberal and Marxist feminist traditions need to be set against the iconoclastic tendencies of radical, lesbian and black feminism.

CHAPTER THREE
RADICAL, LESBIAN AND BLACK FEMINISMS

Where liberal angels and Marxist cadres have hesitated to tread, radical feminists have marched. While inadequate thought on the reasons for action, and the location of targets, have undoubtedly posed problems for the remainder of the movement, radical feminism has alerted us to many wrongs. Moreover, it is a virtue that, by its very existence, it keeps the issue of the politics of sexuality and sexual preference alive.¹

I have decided to consider radical, lesbian and black feminism within one chapter, primarily because they are strictly contemporary phenomena, whereas both Marxist and liberal feminist tendencies have roots that extend beyond the Second Wave. Black and lesbian women clearly were active in earlier suffrage and reformist campaigns, but it is arguably only in the sixties that they fully articulated the need to identify ethnicity or sexual orientation as a significant factor of their oppression as women.² Such divisions questioned the validity of an all-embracing concept of sisterhood, and point to a significant reaction against the dominant formation of feminist thought. As the Women's Movement grew, a 'mainstream' of white, heterosexual, bourgeois thought came to embody its possible definitions, marked by a seeming reluctance to address the degrees of social acceptance and privilege that white bourgeois, heterosexual women enjoy at the expense of other groups of women.

Radical, black and lesbian feminism all signal attempts to create a discursive arena freed from the tyrannies of male-oriented political discourse. This can be set in opposition to much of the work produced by socialist and liberal feminists

which in part endeavours to wreak something from the bare bones of existing phallogentric forms of knowledge. The radical stance is often inaccurately taken to be synonymous with lesbian feminist politics; in truth the dominant issues foregrounded by radical feminism were often subjected to heterosexist or ethnocentric analysis, and both lesbian and black feminists were critical of what they perceived to be significant gaps in radical theory. Nonetheless radical feminism's ground-breaking work in investigating the spheres of female sexuality and female socialization, provided the impetus for the creation of a new kind of feminist theoretical space, facilitated by radicals' negation of phallogentric political hegemony.

New calls to sisterhood emphasized the conviction that the oppression of women as women ran deepest in contemporary society, and consequently demonstrated a failure to recognize that race or class divisions were themselves intrinsically gendered, or that women as a group were divided into constellations of oppressor and oppressed. In this sense, developing feminist forms of knowledge themselves created a need for the epithets 'black' or 'lesbian' to be supplemented to the term feminism, in that these two broad-based groups added a vital and neglected component to existing feminist positions which denied the overarching supremacy of a methodology based upon the notion of a homogenized 'underclass' of women. The facts of race, sexual orientation or class meant that many women perceived that the nature of their subordination was at least two-pronged; the feminist implication that sisterhood meant pooling one's experience and recognizing our shared oppression by men, was quite simply offensive, not

least in its inference that enlightened feminists could never be guilty of perpetuating such power imbalances themselves. Black feminists had close connections with civil rights movements, and lesbian feminists had drawn strength from the radicalism of the gay liberation movements: involvement in such groups might well have proved equally liberating and affirmative of their identity.

In a sense radical, black and lesbian feminisms might all be dubbed 'radical' if we take the word to signify going to the root or foundation of established thought. All three loose groupings, to a greater extent than any feminist movements which predated them, were prepared to rock the foundations of contemporary philosophical and political thought; in this they share certain features with other developing oppositional political movements of the sixties and seventies:

In addition to the CND, the emergence in the 1960s of other social reform and environmental groups - including those campaigning for the legalization of abortion and homosexuality, and against capital punishment - helped to create a climate of reform in which feminism could flourish.³

Nonetheless, radical feminism found little hope for coalition with such groups, which were deemed to be founded on sexist (and racist) principles; in addition radical feminists favoured the small group formation, rejecting firm links within or outside feminist politics. On the whole, radical feminist politics announced the transition from earlier twentieth century women's rights movements with a liberal or socialist legacy, to the new women's liberation movement, which was characterized by its

decentralized, localized and anti-elitist organizational principles - something which liberal and Marxist feminists have also integrated into their political practice.

Before embarking on a closer investigation of the politics of these three strands of feminism, it is perhaps necessary to reiterate that all such distinctions are to a large extent contingent. This problem is further compounded by 'a common misconception that the radical-socialist divide reflected a split between lesbians and heterosexuals',⁴ and therefore such associations have made radical feminism 'a scarecrow with which to frighten women away from feminism.'⁵ It would be equally preposterous to assert that black and lesbian tendencies operate on the grounds of exclusive consideration of either race or sexual orientation. For instance, black feminists also address the problems of being lesbian within the black community and confronting instances of homophobia, just as they confront the dominant racist and (hetero)sexist ideologies perpetuated within society at large.⁶

RADICAL FEMINISM

Radical feminism emerged as a powerful oppositional discourse during the late sixties. It flourished during a period of marked upsurge in radical political agitation - for example the student and civil rights movements - and challenged the epistemological basis of both Marxism and liberalism. Radical feminists, possessing no single core doctrine which informed their theories, were fragmented from the start, a process exacerbated by their

preference for small group formation, where each individual woman could find a voice, and where all tasks could be shared out equally. The groups devised their own consciousness raising strategies, and produced manifestos independently of one another, operating as distinct political 'cells' who might or might not forge coalitions in cases of direct action. One result of such discrete, and free-floating political activity was that it provoked a degree of criticism from more centrally organized feminists - such as the liberal tendency that comprised the membership of NOW in the States - and also a large amount of parody from the mass media.

Radical feminism's 'invisibility' as a structured organization was, however, perceived to be a strength by its adherents: they do not subscribe to any one tradition in political thought and are therefore at liberty to constantly reinvent themselves. Although it would be fair to assert that radical feminist politics has been most influential in its work upon issues which closely affected women's personal life and physical and mental well-being, it is much more difficult to isolate a central governing principle informing radical feminist work. Perhaps anthologies such as Robin Morgan's Sisterhood is Powerful (1970) and Koedt, Levine and Rapone's Radical Feminism (1973) most effectively do justice to the sheer range and heterogeneity of radical feminist perspectives, although it is difficult to identify a representative range of radical feminist writings still in print. Especially in its embryonic period, radical feminist writing showed a commitment to the experiential, and it is rare to find proponents debating or contesting the meaning of

their radicalism among themselves, or announcing a radical feminist tradition - since they rarely credit the sources of their ideas.⁷

Radical feminists appear to pride themselves on being notoriously difficult to define, and this is in part an effect of their commitment to denying that one voice can speak for the many. However, Bonnie Kreps provides a useful characterization of radical feminism as a tendency:

which chooses to concentrate exclusively on the oppression of women as women (and not as workers, students, etc.). This segment therefore concentrates its analysis on institutions like love, marriage, sex, masculinity and femininity. It would be opposed specifically and centrally to sexism, rather than capitalism.⁸

Much of their energies were focused on discussions around gender as a social construct from which permeates all other forms of material and ideological female oppression. In order to explore the nature of such oppression more thoroughly, radicals concentrated on the experiences of the individual woman in society, often using writing as a vehicle to communicate their own narratives of pain, and to convey their passionate belief that sexism lies at the heart of women's oppression. For radicals the problem for women is quite categorically men; and even male sympathizers to the women's movement are treated with suspicion, on the grounds that they still wield the power to be potential oppressors. Since every aspect of women's social and private lives is deemed to have been latently infected by the curse of male domination, all forms of male oriented knowledge,

including the use of language, is liable to scrutiny. This necessarily includes all male analyses of oppression including Marx's characterization of capitalism which, in common with Marxist feminists, they recognized could not account for the tenacity of female exploitation across history and cultures. Accordingly, they tried to confront the seeming universality of female oppression by positing a universalizing notion of patriarchy.

Such feminists were convinced that a female revolution in consciousness was the most crucial primary step towards a social revolution, and their wholesale commitment to consciousness raising is testimony to this. Consciousness raising was conceived as the most effective means of encouraging all women to acknowledge their entrenched secondary status, by accepting that no aspect of their lives - particularly their personal lives - was innocent of patriarchal influences:

Everything, from the verbal assault on the street, to a 'well-meant' sexist joke your husband tells, to the lower pay you get at work (for doing the same job a man would be paid more for), to television commercials, to rock-song lyrics, to the pink or blue blanket they put on your infant in the hospital nursery, to speeches by male 'revolutionaries' that reek of male supremacy - everything seems to barrage your aching brain, which has fewer and fewer protective defenses to screen such things out. You begin to see how all-pervasive a thing is sexism - the definition of and discrimination against half the human species by the other half. Once started, the realization is impossible to stop, and it packs a daily wallop. To deny that you are oppressed is to collaborate in your oppression. To collaborate in your oppression is a way of denying that you're oppressed - particularly when the price of refusing to collaborate is

execution.⁹

This is part of Robin Morgan's impassioned introduction to Sisterhood is Powerful, and demonstrates the emphasis of radical feminism on enlightenment and from thence revolution; but it also seems to carry an explicit threat to women who perhaps do not conceive of their oppression in quite the same terms.

Nonetheless, consciousness raising added a new dimension to the growth of feminist politics, which gave momentum to the conviction that all women should become involved in political activity, and the development of strategies to counter oppression. Consciousness raising offered women the opportunity to share and analyse experiences which were previously discredited as having no currency in wider political debates. The smallness of such groups encouraged this sense of a personal touch, which was and remains the trademark of the radical endeavour.

It is difficult to generalize about the range of activities or debates that took place by means of CR methods, but the anonymous essay 'Consciousness Raising' in Radical Feminism¹⁰ offers some insights into typical aims of the process. These guidelines suggest that a period of three to six months should be devoted to the articulation of members' personal experiences, before these are analysed in 'feminist' terms. This is then followed up by establishing activities and self-help groups, such as reading groups, child care centres, and organized protests. There are of course problems with a structure which relies upon individual self-knowledge, not least that it is compatible with the dominant ideology of abstract individualism, which deflects from

collective activity - a clearly stated end result of CR. Carol Williams Payne is just one writer who expressed her dissatisfaction with the CR project, pointing out that although discussions centred on personal problems, 'we never tried to relate these problems to the structural problems of women in society nor did we think about how they could be dealt with beyond the personal level of these particular women in their particular situations.'¹¹ A democratic 'structureless' group does not of course guarantee equitable discussion, and can just as easily allow the most vocal members to take over and create an unacknowledged internal hierarchy, where power relationships hold sway more tenaciously for being denied: as Joreen remarks, 'there is no such thing as a structureless group.'¹² One 'invisible' structure was that of membership criteria, where certain groups could hold sway over the range of issues discussed in their cell, by means of blocking the entrance of, for example, heterosexual married or partnered women. Such a quota is established in the 1969 manifesto of 'The Feminists', a New York cell.¹³

While socialist and liberal feminists embarked primarily on a discussion of social structures and women's unequal position within them, radicals tended to focus on the personal lives of women, an area to which consciousness raising inevitably directed their attention. Important aspects of women's lives such as marriage, childcare, sexuality, health and work could not be readily considered within a mainstream, sociological framework, and the radical slogan, 'the personal is political' sought to elevate these issues to a matter of urgent political concern. This resulted in a concentration on grassroots mobilization,

rather than on refining a coherent political theory; many radical activities focused on the development of a 'woman's culture' through explorations into literature, art, music, and health, although it could be argued that such endeavours risk leaving the dominant culture uninterrogated. But such quests for a pre-existing authentic woman's culture affected radical 'theoretical' positions, which were expressed in diverse forms, ranging from what might approximate to a mainstream theoretical stance, to fiction, art and music, in the quest for a body of knowledge and tradition freed from the shackles of male interference.

Perhaps more than any other branch of modern feminist thought, radical feminism's activities transformed the foundations of what could be defined as 'political', not least because 'our theory is that practising our practice is our theory.'¹⁴ In other words, radical feminist writings are consciously deemed inseparable from group tactics, rather than as a discrete contribution to an abstract philosophical position. Theory and practice, personal and political combined were to be the means by which women might transform their lifestyles, at the same time as militating for social transformation. The belief that radical feminism needs 'to question every single aspect of our lives that we have previously accepted as normal/given/standard/acceptable and to find new ways of doing things',¹⁵ resulted in a search for alternative lifestyles removed from the stifling effects of patriarchy. Communes, businesses, women's festivals and other women-only concerns were established to allow women to pursue and construct their own identities unfettered by pre-given social

institutions such as the family, marriage and domestic labour. All radical feminists seemed to agree upon the need for separatism, but the scale of separatism varied considerably, ranging from political separatism (women-only discussion groups, dealing purely with issues that affect women), to complete separatism (communes, etc.) - or as complete as was economically or practically viable.

Separatism is one of the most lambasted features of radical feminist policy. Other feminists, although they too believe in political separatism to some degree, tend to view certain radical 'extremes' as denying that any successful feminist social transformation should be directed at changing men's lives too. This form of separatism is regarded as reaffirming the dominant conflation of biological and gender difference, which identifies essential and distinct features of male/female psychology. Despite evidence that radical feminists concur with other strands that gender difference is a social construct and therefore subject to change, debates - particularly around issues of male violence and sexuality - have a tendency to lapse into a biologism which suggest that men are innately aggressive.¹⁶ In addition, the commitment to promoting a women's culture can also have a similar effect, since often this amounted to a celebration of aspects of femininity which had previously been cast in negative terms - for example, being irrational, emotional, intuitive, nurturant and passive - rather than a rejection of the rigidity of such qualities. Communal living was the ideal to render male assistance redundant, and to varying degrees, lesbianism or celibacy was seen as the preferred form of sexual

orientation; many factions held penetration during sexual intercourse to be intrinsically an act of dominance and aggression by the male.

Of course radicals' all embracing concept of patriarchy can lead to a sense of the inevitability of the male will to power. Furthermore, if the female body and its function as vessel for human reproduction is seen as one of the chief reasons for female subordination, the only progress towards a feminist utopia might be seen as a technological revolution, where women are no longer handicapped by their biological processes. This is Shulamith Firestone's position in The Dialectic of Sex (1970), where she asserts that 'the division yin and yang pervades all culture, history, economics, nature itself; modern Western versions of sex discrimination are only the most recent layer.'¹⁷ Patriarchy, for Firestone, is therefore a system of power which exploits women's biological incapacity, and it is this fundamental handicap that must be removed to transform our current social order. In some respects, Firestone is in agreement with other radical and socialist feminists - that is, that the construction of the family and the institutionalization of monogamous heterosexuality as the desired norm are crucial factors in women's oppression. Firestone therefore advocates the necessity of removing the biological bond between mother and child, through socializing childcare and domestic arrangements, and thereby rendering the male/female parenting role redundant: 'to free women thus from their biology would be to threaten the social unit that is organized around biological reproduction'.¹⁸ Although she demands the use of technology, most of Firestone's

accompanying demands - the end of monogamy, incest taboos, childhood sexual restraint, the nuclear family. the reproductive/productive labour binary - are aimed at redefining the meaning and therefore ideological impact of such social 'givens'. The chief objections to her particular feminist utopia are that to deprive women of their 'right to choose' in favour of reproductive technologies is to submit our current attenuated liberty into scientific processes which are at present in the hands of men.¹⁹

Firestone's work, though it has survived in print to the present, has not been as influential upon radical feminist politics as other texts - perhaps because the crux of her analysis of subordination is that female biology is at fault, rather than the system of male dominance, which interprets reproduction as a reason for social disadvantage. Certainly the most famous early radical feminist work is Kate Millett's Sexual Politics (1969), a book that has been comprehensively attacked by literary critics and modern feminists alike, but which is still compelling in its attempt to create a revolutionary feminist perspective from a very raw state of bricolage - a heady mixture of literary criticism, historical survey and political polemic. The fusing together of the words 'sexual' and 'politics' opened up new theoretical possibilities for feminist debate, enabling the assertion that all things 'private' and 'personal' in women's lives were affected by the politics of the state and patriarchy, and that the chief weapon of resistance for feminism was to politicize those sacred spheres of liberal individualism:

The word 'politics' is enlisted here when speaking of the sexes, primarily because such a word is eminently useful in outlining the real nature of their relative status, historically and at the present. It is opportune, perhaps today even mandatory, that we develop a more relevant psychology and philosophy of power relationships beyond the simple conceptual framework provided by our traditional formal politics. Indeed, it may be imperative that we give some attention to defining a theory of politics which treats of power relationships on grounds less conventional than those to which we are accustomed.²⁰

Millett's assertion has the ring of a prophetic statement in the light of contemporary feminist thought, and the way it has moved towards a more complex examination of the power structures which place women as subjects in particular oppressive relationships.

In common with Millett, Germaine Greer in The Female Eunuch (1970), concentrates mainly on the business of raising universal feminist consciousness, rather than providing a clear agenda for change. on the basis that woman 'could begin not by changing the world, but by reassessing herself'.²¹ While Millett embarks on a scathing critique of the violent and offensively sexualized imagery of women in novels by male literary lions of the twentieth century. Greer initiates her enquiry by looking at the construction and fetishized naturalization of the feminine body. However, both have a similar end in view: to analyse the way the female body has been situated in a discourse of normative feminine structures in order to posit a radical fracturation of such discourse. Greer's view of a positive revolutionary stance is one analogous with the situation of the proletariat outlined in classic Marxist thought, and her solution is for women to

withdraw their labour. This heralds another important aspect of feminist methodology: that women's work, classically viewed as something they are naturally equipped to do, is reconstrued as cheap, or often free labour, whose reward is long overdue.

In varying degrees, Greer and Millett see the solution as a revolution in consciousness which can also serve to awaken men to their own internalized position as oppressors, whereas Mary Daly's view of patriarchy is that it is tenacious enough to resist such 'pseudo-feminist' rhetoric:

However possessed males may be within patriarchy, it is their order; it is they who feed on women's stolen energy. It is a trap to imagine that women should 'save' men from the dynamics of demonic possession; and to attempt this is to fall deeper into the pit of patriarchal possession. It is women ourselves who will have to expel the Father from ourselves, becoming our own exorcists.²²

Daly's work is more far-reaching than that of Millett, Greer or even Firestone, in the sense that she attempts to combat sexism at its very roots in the language one uses to articulate one's oppression, by punning on and expropriating negative gendered words: 'In order to re-member our dis-spelling powers, Hags must move deeper into the Background of language/grammar',²³ to create a feminine language which consolidates a separatist vision of a female future. More recently feminist linguists have argued that processes of linguistic signification are more complex than Daly's inference that words and concepts have a fixed one-to-one relationship, and that what is needed is a more wide ranging study of language which links modes of speech as well as writing

to women's multifarious and possibly conflicting social identities, in a much broader based interrogation of the means by which meaning is socially and culturally, as well as linguistically embedded.²⁴

Radical feminism is potentially more wide ranging than either socialist or liberal feminism - not least because it often explores means by which women can reconceive their relationship to the current social reality, in order to resist it. Rather than putting all its energies into either reform or future resistance, it implicitly argues for constant acts of rebellion within both personal and public lives, to revivify the movement. But perhaps the emergence of radical feminist politics as a position which recognizes no preordained parameters, determined its current fall from grace, in face of more sophisticated analyses of women's oppression. Nonetheless, although there is less evidence of organized radical feminist activity in the nineties - in terms of publications and journals and academic profiles (the British journal Trouble and Strife, and the USA's Off Our Backs are two exceptions) - the continued debates around women's health, pornography and sexual violence are largely due to radical feminist studies in these fields.

One of the best known radical feminists still actively militating for changes in censorship legislation, campaigns against male sexual violence and prostitution is Andrea Dworkin - a woman whose books are widely read and publicized, and who is generally accessible and compelling in her arguments. For some feminists she represents an 'extremist' position, which naively attributes a direct relationship between images of women and

sexual violence - for instance between pornography and rape:

Pornography is the propaganda of sexual fascism.
Pornography is the propaganda of sexual terrorism.
Images of women bound, bruised, and maimed on virtually every street corner, on every magazine rack, in every drug store, in movie house after movie house, on billboards, on posters pasted on walls, are death threats to a female population in rebellion.²⁵

Although Dworkin's stance on pornography remains uncompromising, many recent feminists are reluctant to cast the debate in such black and white terms. Some lesbian and socialist feminists, for instance, feel that a tightening of censorship laws would hit hardest at groups who already feel the sting of restrictive legislation. In addition, some gays and lesbians argue that pornography can be empowering; that 'gay porn offers images of desire which a hostile society would deny and are therefore real encouragements for a positive sense of self.'²⁶ It has been often noted that a stance against pornography such as Dworkin's creates unholy alliances with moral majority pressure groups, whose intentions in stopping the flow of pornographic material are far from sympathetic to feminism. Dworkin's role on the Meese Commission, which was set up under President Reagan to determine the impact of pornography on society and to recommend means by which the spread of pornography could be contained, is one example of such a contradictory alliance.²⁷

Radical feminists have often been criticised for re-casting women in the role of passive victims of their biological impulses - more so because anti-porn and sexual violence debates often appear to slip into essentialist assumptions about the fixity of

aggressive male sexual impulses. Nonetheless, as I shall go on to discuss in Chapter Five, radicals in particular helped to explode some fairly tenacious myths about femininity, and were at the forefront of theoretical examinations of the construction of female sexuality. Anne Koedt's essay, 'The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm' (1970), was a crucial step towards rethinking the means by which heterosexual desire is constructed exclusively around male needs, particularly discussions around the issue of whether all penetrative sex is currently symbolic of patriarchal colonization. Doubtless such debates on the one hand prompted common assumptions that radical feminism is a solely lesbian political stance, even though radical analyses of female sexuality did not always include lesbian perspectives. Nonetheless, they were instrumental in introducing to the feminist agenda a candid and often combustible approach to the subject.

CRITIQUES OF RADICAL FEMINISM

The most common criticisms of radical feminism are that its view of patriarchy remains uninterrogated; that many of its arguments lapse into biologism of a reductive kind, and that its focus on women's personal experiences renders it politically ineffectual, or at worst prescriptive - if, for example, it is seen to argue that 'lesbian sexuality does serve as a paradigm for female sexuality.'²⁸ Although writers such as Millett and Firestone have appropriated a Marxist model of historical materialism for their own radical use, the notion of patriarchy as the central

system of female subordination is most problematic for socialist feminist thinkers. Its polemical strength has been recognized by writers such as Rosalind Coward, who agree that the use and appropriation of such a term 'has given a theoretical basis for the specificity of women's oppression'.²⁹ However, she argues that it is an inadequate formulation from which to discuss the dynamics of sexual relations in their specific, various and changing historic forms:

For the term 'patriarchal' implies a model of power as interpersonal domination, a model where all men have forms of literal, legal and political power over all women. Yet many of the aspects of women's oppression are constructed diffusely, in representational practices, in forms of speech, in sexual practices. This oppression is not necessarily a result of the literal overpowering of a woman by a man.³⁰

A universalist concept of patriarchy, then, is regarded as a trap for feminism: it can lead us down avenues of biological essentialism (an avenue pursued by Mary Daly, and other radical feminists who are often dubbed cultural feminists, in their primary celebration of women's power as a sub-culture), or it leaves us with a naive and unwieldy notion of power relationships which cannot theorize itself out of the subtle and stubbornly 'naturalized' effects of a patriarchal ideology.

It now seems to present-day feminist commentators that early radical feminism (which rapidly split into several factions itself) over-simplified the causes of female oppression in its assertion that gender difference had arisen as a universal, and ahistorical, system of male domination. Goals to end patriarchy

might be either a utopian vision of androgyny or more typically perhaps, a movement towards total separatism. Radical feminists seemed to be the first group to utilize the term 'patriarchy' as shorthand to designate the means by which women are oppressed. It was used relatively unproblematically to signify the subordination of all women by all men; because of its ahistorical, cross-cultural and universalizing tendencies it was held to imply that all men were irredeemably the enemy and that women's subordination was inevitable. In other words, women are perceived as an oppressed class in their own right, regardless of social, cultural or racial distinctions. This argument has been latterly exposed as both contradictory and circular within the terms of radical feminist aims itself, since it returns feminists to the realm of biologicistic assertions - precisely those used to strengthen so-called patriarchy in the first place, when the stated goal of most radicals is to expose the social construction of gender roles and definitions.

The term can however be used for more positive purposes, one of which is a willful resistance of all phallogentric categories of knowledge, including notions of historicism and cultural specificity. For radicals, patriarchy is the means for articulating the way in which every aspect of a woman's life appears to be tainted by male domination. It is for this reason that they are accused of failing to recognize that different men have differing degrees of access to power, and of denying the possibility that some men are sympathetic to feminist issues and do not consciously wield their potential power. Radicals largely argue that all men profit from patriarchal systems of oppression

and therefore all men are answerable for its continuance - for this reason, the policy of individual acts of resistance by women in their personal lives was seen as an important precursor to collective activism. Although such a position can be deemed weak and a recipe for epistemological fracturation, it might also be characterized as one of the most potentially far-reaching oppositional strategies devised by feminists - especially when it is accompanied by a call to separatism. As I have already asserted, separatism is to some degree a factor of all feminist positions: in the case of radical feminism it is woven into the fabric of their work, even though most writers seem to envisage a time when social sexual divisions are eradicated.³¹ Patriarchy is used by radicals as the most forceful evocation of oppression because they maintain that:

the pathology of oppression can only be fully comprehended in its primary development: the male-female division. Because the male-female system is primary, the freedom of every oppressed individual depends upon the freeing of every individual from every aspect of the male-female system.³²

Although the use of the terms male-female as opposed to masculine/feminine is potentially misleading, read in context, this particular manifesto addresses the problem of cultural definitions ascribed to sex roles. The notion that sexual difference underpins all other systems of oppression in society is a seductive one for feminists, in that its institutions seems to be among those most resistant to change in contemporary society, and those most neglected by male-oriented oppositional

politics.

Radical feminism, although not a strongly visible force in the academic institution, has survived as an aspect of current feminist activism, especially in grassroots work maintaining rape crisis centres, women's aid and other support networks for women - as well, of course, in work around issues of pornography and prostitution. Although the methods and principles of radical feminism render it to some extent incompatible with other feminist theories, this is not because it is resolutely anti-theory, as is often suggested, but rather that theory and practice are viewed as each a product of the other, and therefore mutually strengthening. In recent years, the publication of works which include questions of the legacy of radical feminism, suggest that radical politics is experiencing a modest renaissance.³³ Radical feminism arguably had a more profound and sustained effect on the development of American second wave feminism than it had in Great Britain where 'socialist and Marxist feminists were the virtual "midwives" of the British women's liberation movement':³⁴ however, radical feminist tendencies forced those feminists allied to mainstream political factions to recognize that mere reformism had not proved successful in conquering female oppression.

Much of what was regarded as most extreme about radical feminism has been variously ridiculed and dismissed by the other voices comprising the Women's Movement. Perhaps because radical feminists concentrated on cultural awakening rather than theorizing and scholarly debate, its features (often exaggerated beyond all recognition) were regularly pilloried by the mass

media as a means of defusing what could have been regarded as quite a significant and concerted onslaught by feminists upon the establishment. Most people if asked to define feminism today would produce a definition which vaguely resembles the radical feminist agenda, and many women writers have described radical feminism as a phase in the Women's Movement which alienated many of its more 'decorous' members. Lisa Alther's Kinflicks (1976) itself contains an episode which, in the context of the book as a whole, appears to be intensely parodic.³⁵

It is an attractive notion to assert, as radical feminists often do, that every society has two cultures: the dominant male one and the barely visible female one, and thus pinpoint the need to celebrate the features of a female sub-culture as the source of women's strength, and a point of departure from which to organize a sustained threat to male supremacy. Radical feminism, perhaps more than any other strand has tried to define feminist politics as a complete way of life, from sharing experiences in consciousness raising sessions, to living under degrees of separatism in communes and collectives. This seeming refusal to compromise on the part of many of its advocates is seen to be its most intimidating aspect, in that, 'radical feminism reminds women of their own moments of exploitation or abuse, and these memories are not welcome'.³⁶ Separatism can suggest that women's interests will always be in direct opposition to men's, and this is a most unpalatable stance for feminists allied to mainstream politics who do not readily see women as a discrete 'class' of their own. It might also be regarded as racist, in its assumption that black women share the experiences of white women,

whereas many may quite naturally see their alliances as split between all women and men of colour. For black, lesbian and socialist feminists alike, the radical notion of sisterhood - a bond which cuts across all other boundaries - is untenable and blurs the evident fact that women too can function as oppressors of other women. Black feminists particularly resent radicals' wholesale attack on the familial institution, since on another level, the family acts as a haven for women of colour from a racist 'public' domain. Radical feminists have taken such criticisms seriously, and despite clear evidence that some writers do ignore issues of race and sexual orientation in a glib assumption that white bourgeois heterosexual reality is women's reality, their record of attempting to encourage all women to have a voice is better than that of socialists, as the most well-known anthologies of radical feminist writing testify.

LESBIAN FEMINISM

I have argued that radical feminism, more than any other tendency, focused upon issues surrounding female sexuality and the female body - and for this reason may seem peculiarly compatible with lesbian concerns. Matters of women's health, work, and issues of contraception and abortion were overlaid, at a more abstract level, by sustained analyses of the ways women internalize and act upon sexualized representations of femininity. The Stonewall Rebellion in New York in 1969 announced the emergence of the Gay Liberation movement as a political grouping who adopted the militant tactics successfully

used by other radical factions in the sixties. The spread of slogans such as 'Gay Is Good', and the beginnings of gay pride parades, was itself a form of consciousness raising which allowed people to derive strength from the knowledge of a shared identity. Collective gay action was a call for full visibility and equal human rights, and no longer a meek plea for tolerance. The gay movement aimed to combat all forms of social invisibility, which had previously condemned homosexuals to the margins, deemed as either sick or perverted; they also identified the means by which homosexual identity was perceived to determine one's wider social identity. In common with feminists the crucial factors at stake were effects of both ideological representation, and the social and material practices which affirm and perpetuate its influence. Lesbian feminism aimed to fuse the positive aspects of gay and feminist politics, whilst offering critiques of both - particularly sexism endemic in the Gay Liberation Movement, and covert homophobia rife in Women's Liberation.

For lesbian feminists the problems of female sexuality and sexualized images of women were crucial to their analysis of women's oppression; what they objected to about straight feminist political writings was the emphasis upon male-female relationships, at the expense of any focus upon woman-identified concerns. This is sometimes interpreted as a deliberate attempt to alienate heterosexual women, by positing a model of women's liberation which questions the political viability of heterosexual relationships; occasionally they are even accused of splitting the women's movement in the seventies, allegedly by

their 'proselytizing...in the name of feminism itself'.³⁷

Although some lesbian feminists undoubtedly felt that to further revolution, all women should become at least 'political lesbians' (which might entail the choice to remain celibate), few seem primarily interested in policing women's sexual preference. Lesbian and gay men's initial concern was with transforming the social processes which meant that their sexual choices were liable to surveillance and control, and to end the association of homosexuality with mental or physical illness. Although gay men and women might well be deeply critical of the way heterosexuality is situated as the central normative 'natural' social structure, they do not necessarily conclude that all heterosexual men and women are acting in bad faith.

In the early seventies, some of the statements issued by American lesbian groups such as The Furies or Radicalesbians provoked a profound unease among straight feminists. Both groups, notionally a part of radical feminist politics, criticized aspects of feminist analysis which focus almost exclusively upon heterosexual relations, and whose critique of female sexuality blindly pursues an uninterrogated heterosexual model. For lesbian feminists, the term lesbian itself is seen as in need of positive reappropriation: as the epithet so often indiscriminately hurled abusively at women who fail to 'conform', it comes to signify for lesbians the pariah who rejects conventional notions of feminine propriety. Nonetheless, many straight feminists persisted in seeing only its 'negative' connotations, and became defensive in the light of exhortations for all women to become 'lesbians'. Radicalesbians' argument in

'The Woman Identified Woman' (1970) may well on one hand be interpreted as an example of such a demand; but it is chiefly concerned with the way heterosexual feminists assume a pseudo-patriarchal perspective on lesbianism, conceiving them in purely sexual terms. However the central thrust of the Radicalesbians' argument appears to be that all sexual categories are a symptom of a patriarchal ideology that might well be transformed after a social revolution; but, that in the interim women should make other women the focus of all their political and emotional energies, not least in order to fully appreciate the effects of the dehumanization of male sexual categorization: 'Women resist relating on all levels to other women who will reflect their own oppression, their own secondary status, their own self-hate.'³⁸ Although Radicalesbians are relatively uncompromising on the question of where one's sexual allegiances should lie, it is clear that their primary concern is with homosocial rather than sexual bonding in a society which endeavours to reinforce the view that lesbians and 'normal' women have little in common.

Heterosexual feminists tended to ignore lesbians' implied critiques of heterosexuality as an institution, and channelled their energies into refuting any notion that lesbian sexual relationships are the only true model for liberated womanhood. A common defensive position was an insistence that feminism's wider agenda must accommodate a redefinition of all personal relationships and sex role play, therefore creating the possibility that man can be other than 'enemy' in the personal sphere. Anne Koedt in her essay 'Lesbianism and Feminism' (1971)

establishes what she claims are points of disagreement between radical and lesbian feminists - one being lesbian feminists' reputed conviction that they form the vanguard of the Women's Movement, and that their sexual choices in themselves constitute a revolutionary act. Koedt is clearly antagonistic towards what she regards as a lesbian policing of sexual boundaries, although she seems to have some fairly sedimented ideas of what authentic 'feminist' lesbian sexual practice should entail, and disallows anything she defines as sex role playing:

The organized gay movement seeks to protect the freedom of any homosexual, no matter what her or his individual style of homosexuality may be. This means the protection of the transvestite, the queen, the 'butch' lesbian, the couple that wants a marriage license, or the homosexual who may prefer no particular role.³⁹

This is reminiscent of a sexologist's check list, complete with inaccuracies (her equation of transvestitism with homosexuality). Her attack on role-playing within homosexual encounters suggests that there is an 'authentic' form of homosexual expression that can transcend the 'patriarchal' stigma attached to such roles. Of course this begs the question as to whether role-play - for example, butch/femme configurations - necessarily carries the same meanings as it does in heterosexual relationships, and whether the roles correspond to masculine/feminine ones in terms of the degrees of access to material and social privilege they connote. Within lesbian feminist circles, arguments about the desirability of role-playing within gay relationships still rage, also informing recent critiques of lesbian sadomasochistic

practices.

Koedt seems to have a fairly clear idea of what constitutes a politically correct form of homosexual relationship, by virtue of her list of unacceptable sexual identities; but nowhere does she hint at means to liberate heterosexuality from its present inequities. Neither does she consider whether any relationship can currently be free from the dynamics of power inequality - such as race, class or age - or the possibility that all homosexual 'roles' are ultimately defined and contained by a 'hetero-reality'. Radical feminists have been adept at analysing the problems of heterosexuality, but reluctant to translate their findings into a coherent agenda for change, wary of appearing prescriptive or moralistic. Yet Koedt and others failed to perceive how homophobic their arguments became when they felt at liberty to determine and categorize the dynamics of lesbian behaviour, just as sexologists had done before them. Koedt particularly objects to women behaving like 'men' or vice versa; although since as a radical she supports the eventual elimination of patriarchally defined gendered sex roles, her argument becomes distressingly circular - caught up in a mesh of patriarchal logic. Disregarding for a moment questions of the advisability of establishing 'codes' of sexual practice, the inability of such writers to define a positive form of sexual expression, implies that the field of sexuality still required much further and more complex analysis. Koedt's essay is symptomatic of how straight feminists, on the defensive against the 'lavender peril', became contradictory in their arguments around sexuality, contenting themselves with often counterproductive attacks upon lesbians -

many of whom as feminists, shared their central aims.

The Radicalesbians' evocation of the 'woman identified woman', is intended to be more than a depiction of sexual preference; they sought to end the competitiveness that divided women in patriarchy, thence to strengthen political and personal bonds. Their essay certainly implies that heterosexuality is a destructive force in women's lives, but suggests this is the case at present because of the tenacity of the patriarchal sex role system. The urge to categorize identity through sexual orientation, would disappear, they argue, in a androgynous utopia where the social meanings attached to such 'roles' had vanished. In her essay 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' (1980), Adrienne Rich extends the notion of the woman identified woman, talking instead of a 'lesbian continuum';⁴⁰ thus further displacing the focus on sexual love and prioritizing the strength and love to be gained from female friendship and support networks. This aspect of lesbian feminism, which has become especially prominent in the analysis of literary texts, allows an important focus on something which has been noticeably absent in much heterosexual feminist thought - that is the social and political importance of female bonding.

In a foreword to this essay, Adrienne Rich states that the piece:

was written in part to challenge the erasure of lesbian existence from so much of scholarly feminist literature, an erasure which I felt (and feel) to be not just anti-lesbian, but anti-feminist in its consequences, and to distort the experience of heterosexual women as well. It was not written to widen divisions but to encourage

heterosexual feminists to examine heterosexuality as a political institution which disempowers women - and to change it.⁴¹

Rich reiterates the point that lesbianism, for many straight feminists, is chiefly a sexual category, and analyses this in relation to what she regards as a serious omission in mainstream feminism. That is, that most feminists have failed to critically evaluate the status of heterosexuality as a sexual preference which cannot be innocent of political or ideological ramifications - not least its privilege to determine the deviant status of all unproductive 'marginal' sexual orientations, and the way the denaturalization of other forms of sexual expression consolidates and strengthens patriarchal ideology. She asserts that the assumption of the normality of a heterosexual existence (lived within the parameters of monogamy and the institutional family form), enables the perpetuation of social and political control over women and sexual 'outgroups'. Rich's (and other's) extensions of the term lesbianism to embrace a lesbian continuum enables analyses of both positive and negative aspects of female bonding - such as mother-daughter relationships - which act as buffers in a patriarchal society, while often reaffirming the patriarchal status quo from generation to generation.

The institution of 'compulsory heterosexuality', Rich argues, facilitates the worldwide sexual exploitation of women from the pimp's 'protection' of the prostitute, to the battered wife's feeling of dependency and guilt towards her husband; and most of all services the supposed uncontrollability of the male sexual drive - a mythification which endorses male sexual aggression:

Women learn to accept as natural the inevitability of this 'drive' because they receive it as dogma. Hence, marital rape; hence, the Japanese wife resignedly packing her husband's suitcase for a weekend in the kisaeng brothels of Taiwan; hence, the psychological as well as economic imbalance of power between husband and wife, male employer and female worker, father and daughter, male professor and female student.⁴²

Accordingly, Rich asserts that there is a 'nascent feminist political content in choosing a woman lover or life partner, in the face of institutionalized heterosexuality'.⁴³ This statement, equating the fact of lesbianism with feminist politics, is of the variety which has heterosexual feminists rushing to their own defence. Yet in her afterword she concludes that:

I never have maintained that heterosexual feminists are walking about in a state of 'brainwashed false consciousness'... In this paper I was trying to ask heterosexual feminists to examine their experience of heterosexuality critically and antagonistically to critique the institution of which they are a part, to struggle with the norm and its implications for women's freedom.⁴⁴

But this remains a statement of intent within a piece intended as a work in progress; the problems of resolving the theoretical differences between lesbian and heterosexual feminists are still developing. Whether one sees heterosexual women as colluding with the heterosexual institution and lesbian women as 'outside' of its confines is a moot point. It seems doubtful, given our present social framework, that any woman has the luxury of

freedom from 'heterosexual'/patriarchal constraints, or that all heterosexual women actively collude whereas all lesbians are in the process of sexual revolution.

As the Rich article shows, the lesbian feminist movement has grown and shown increased theoretical sophistication over the last decade - and it is lesbian feminism that has most categorically asserted that 'Heterosexism is the set of values and structures that assumes heterosexuality to be the only natural form of sexual and emotional expression'.⁴⁵ Certainly writers such as Koedt seem to exemplify the reasons why lesbians found a need to identify themselves increasingly as lesbian rather than radical feminists. Although the radical movement has always been regarded as predominantly lesbian in its politics, there are many instances of homophobia, which at best ignore lesbian issues, and at worst displace lesbians as the unrepresentative deviant few in the movement, perhaps exposing fears that many women would find them an unattractive aspect of feminism. Radical feminists seem to have been on the whole reluctant to address instances of their own heterosexism - Anne Koedt's famous article 'The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm' being a case in point, since presumably lesbian women have already had their consciousness raised in that respect, and would not be heartened by her throwaway conclusion that 'lesbian sexuality could make an excellent case...for the extinction of the male organ'.⁴⁶

Lesbians could not but be aware that their private lives and object choices were susceptible to wider public scrutiny and condemnation; and since feminists were committed to politicizing

the personal, lesbians felt that feminist politics should equally address this problem, if it was believed to be the case that the private sphere mirrored broader abstract systems of power and subordination. However, feminism's supposed liberalism towards the matter of sexual orientation made homophobia within the movement much harder to confront, as was the subject of racism, and the problems peculiar to lesbians still tended to be ignored. Lesbians made bad publicity for feminism; they should be tolerated but remain theoretically invisible - although of course 'invisibility' outside of the gay scene was a central problem for lesbians: 'Gay people really are oppressed, although their oppression is a peculiar one since it rests partly on the possibility of always remaining hidden and invisible'.⁴⁷ In perceiving 'out' lesbians as a threat to feminism's coherence, heterosexual feminists colluded with the patriarchal mainstream, and provoked doubts as to whether a feminist revolution would transform the social status of homosexuals.

Heterosexual feminists, while busily dissecting stereotypes of the feminine, omitted to analyse the whole representative arena of stereotypical images of the homosexual. Although motherhood was a central issue, the problems confronting lesbian mothers, who face the constant threat of having their children taken away from them, was rarely discussed. Even if childcare was socialized along the lines of socialist and radical feminist thinking, what lesbian or gay man could feel assured that such socialization would also outlaw the heterosexual norm? Lesbians were left to debate such questions largely amongst themselves, while heterosexual feminists pursued the 'main' objectives of the

movement. Their relationship with feminism's 'mainstream' remained volatile: when not seen as aggressively self-righteous, they were heroized as gatekeepers of the model relationship where jealousy, power struggles, violence and oppression had no place. The more lesbians debated their political stances, the more differences they seemed to expose within their own ranks - 'on the one side was the "lesbian continuum" and woman bonding, on the other the fetishistic specificity of key codes, leather, and coloured handkerchiefs'.⁴⁸

In recent years, debates on the politics of role-playing have again figured prominently in lesbian feminist circles, where the split is between two main camps - those who see role-playing as empowering and transgressive, and those who maintain that it results in the inevitable return to patriarchally defined mechanisms of power. The revolutionary lesbian feminist Sheila Jeffreys is fiercely critical of 'role-playing' lesbians, especially those who engage in sadomasochistic practices:

Once the eroticizing of otherness and power difference is learned, then in a same-sex relationship, where another gender is absent, otherness can be reintroduced through differences of age, race, class, the practice of sadomasochism or role playing. So it is possible to construct heterosexual desire within lesbianism and heterosexual desire is plentifully evident in the practice of gay men. The opposite of heterosexual desire is the eroticising of sameness, a sameness of power, equality and mutuality. It is homosexual desire.⁴⁹

Jeffreys' book, Anticlimax (1990), defines all heterosexual and gay male relationships as sites of the enactment of unequal power relationships - the erotic need for one partner to be subordinate

to another. Sadomasochism, she asserts, is contrary to a feminist agenda for change, since it reinscribes power politics within people's personal lives. She claims that some lesbians have been seduced by libertarian politics, but argues that women, as essentially socially powerless, should have no investment in creating power play in woman-to-woman relationships. Although the 'ideal' form of lesbian sexuality is never expressed, it is implied as the opposite to all other forms she lists in her book (heterosexuality, gay male sex, paedophilia, transsexualism and so forth), as being the only recourse feminists have to revolution and the only ethical stance any woman can take.

Not surprisingly other lesbians take Jeffreys' arguments to be doctrinaire and analogous to women's social purity movements of the last century.⁵⁰ Joan Nestle is representative of the other pole of lesbian politics, who defends butch-femme roles as giving lesbian sexuality a physical presence, rather than pandering to the heterosexual preference for lesbians to remain discreetly invisible. In common with other lesbians who emphasized the playful, parodic qualities of butch/femme existence, she emphasizes its erotic potential:

Butch-femme relationships, as I experienced them, were complex erotic statements, not phony heterosexual replicas. None of the butch women I was with, and this included a passing woman, ever presented themselves to me as men; they did announce themselves as tabooed women who were willing to identify their passion for other women by wearing clothes that symbolized the taking of responsibility.⁵¹

Nestle and others felt that 'vanilla' lesbians spent far too much

time analysing their political function, and failed to address the fact of lesbian's sexual desire for other women, which had little means of expression in a heterosexist society. She argues powerfully that butch/femme identities were negotiable and flexible, and that a woman could freely adopt either role according to the desire of her and that of her partner. Nestle denies that gay role-play bears any direct relationship to heterosexual dynamics; rather it is a playful merging of identities which transforms and radicalizes the ordinary meanings of masculinity and femininity, releasing an erotic potential that redefines the possibilities of lesbian sexuality.

The possible conflicting meanings that could be derived from adopting a role or style, posed problems for those lesbian feminists who struggled to be 'politically correct'.⁵² By rejecting certain styles of dress, for example, lesbians still found themselves trapped within dominant meanings of the style they adopted - with the consequence that during the seventies 'everyone looked butch'⁵³ in their disavowal of things feminine. For some lesbians, it is clear that the dogmatism of lesbian feminist 'lavnecks' (lavender rednecks) was intrusive and oppressive, another symptom of de-emphasizing sex; whereas they determined to produce more sexually explicit material in a celebration of woman-to-woman desire. The eighties saw a new generation of lesbians who, reflecting the diversity of positions feminist and gay politics had spawned, rejected any notion of uniformity in their portrayal of a lesbian identity. They reintroduced a heterogeneous lesbian 'chic', creating phenomena such as the 'lipstick lesbian', and inciting a return to

butch-femme debates,⁵⁴ coupled with discussions about the political acceptability of sadomasochistic practices.⁵⁵ In the slow demise of feminist political activity many struck up new allegiances with gay men, particularly with the growing problem of AIDS and the new militancy it prompted in the form of 'Queer Nation' - committed to direct action around broader lesbian and gay issues (the term 'queer' being chosen, because 'gay' is often taken to just signify male homosexuals).

Moving into the nineties, the most important theoretical developments in lesbian thought have been the emergence of gay and/or lesbian texts, which appropriate aspects of postmodernist thought, in order to rethink the politics of identity. This is understandable, given the lack of space that feminists have given lesbian perspectives in the past, and the emphasis seems to be on a celebration of heterogeneity, although lesbian thought still carries with it the ravages of its political past: 'Lesbian theory is also rife with its own insecurities: its practitioners are acting under a compulsion to tell the truth, to record, to evangelize, and to be politically correct.'⁵⁶ Feminism at its most homophobic tended to stereotype the lesbian viewpoint (in the singular), which can then be consigned to a token position on the margins of its philosophy, and lesbians have responded to this over the years by creating their own definitions separate from heterosexual feminists. Many lesbians, nonetheless, still maintain broader feminist allegiances, and their contribution to the increasing sophistication of feminist thought has been crucial, particularly in the work they have produced on sexuality, and on re-readings of cultural productions.

BLACK FEMINISM

Kate Millett and Shulamith Firestone are just two examples of white radical feminists who make analogies between the social position of women and the subordinate position of racial and ethnic minorities in Western culture. Firestone states quite categorically that 'racism is sexism extended';⁵⁷ Millett observes that 'It was the Abolitionist Movement which gave American women their first opportunity for political action and organization'.⁵⁸ The anti-slavery and emerging women's movements were seen to be mutually strengthening allies in Millett's historical summary, and this had been previously reinforced by pioneer white feminists. Millett goes on to assert that:

Slavery was probably the only circumstance in American life sufficiently glaring in its injustice and monumental evil to impel women to break that taboo of decorum which stifled and controlled them more efficiently than the coil of their legal, educational and financial disabilities.⁵⁹

While it is certainly the case that American feminists were involved in the Abolitionist Movement, Millett's use of the term 'women' in this quote obscures the fact that she is only talking about white women; and that black women active in reformist movements at the end of the nineteenth century were rarely ever allowed a voice at public meetings, and were certainly not held to possess the equal right of suffrage with white women. As Bell Hooks points out, 'when it seemed black men might get the vote

while they [white women] remained disenfranchised, political solidarity was forgotten and they urged white men to allow racial solidarity to overshadow their plans to support black male suffrage.⁶⁰ The same passionate Abolitionist women revealed themselves to be uncompromisingly racist in their views; appealing for an end to slavery did not amount to advocating human equality in social and political life.

Patriarchy and imperialism caught black women in a tenacious double-bind. Whether they chose to opt for racial or sexual solidarity, either allegiance would only address half of the problem. Indeed, experience had shown black women activists that either ally tended to subsume the black female voice, so that feminism seemed to refer only to the needs of white women, and civil rights only addressed the oppression of black males. Bell Hooks traces the history of American black women's political and historical invisibility to the inception of slavery - and in terms of the effects of patriarchal/imperialistic oppressive structures, they remain at the bottom of the social pile. In a spirited rebuttal of the analogies drawn by white feminists between black experience and female subordination, Bell Hooks argues that such parallels effectively exclude black women as a category in any analysis of gendered or racial oppression:

Like many people in our racist society white feminists could feel perfectly comfortable writing books or articles on the 'woman question' in which they drew analogies between 'women' and 'blacks'. Since analogies derive their power, their appeal, and their very reason for being from the sense of two disparate phenomena having been brought closer together, for white women to acknowledge the overlap between the terms 'black' and

'women' would render this analogy unnecessary. By continuously making this analogy, they unwittingly suggest that to them the term 'woman' is synonymous with 'white women' and the term 'blacks' synonymous with 'black men'. What this indicates is that there exists in the language of the very movement that is supposedly concerned with eliminating sexist oppression, a sexist-racist attitude toward black women.⁶¹

It is this linguistic conflation which Hooks upholds as symbolic of the invisibility of black women in most analyses of social life. What she alerts us to most strongly is that although white feminists tacitly 'assumed that identifying oneself as oppressed freed one from being an oppressor',⁶² such women still retained racist assumptions which weaken their notion of a universal sisterhood, since women of colour were always already erased. In common with lesbians, black women recognized that white heterosexual feminists conceived of the women's movement as their 'own' - and the consideration of women who experienced oppression not only because of the fact of their biological sex, was implicitly seen as detracting from the main business of feminism.

Since the predominantly radical feminist trend in the USA and the socialist feminist tradition in the UK were advocating nothing less than a transformation of the entire social fabric of Western life through a revolution in consciousness, it is clearly a fatal flaw in 1970s feminist politics not to recognize the dynamic interrelation between issues of race and gender for black women. Given that their vision of a transformed society did not explicitly include racial equality, it gave the lie to the assumption that the social status of all women in American society (for instance) was the same. While it homogenized female

experience, it also alienated those women who arguably suffered most due to the racist/sexist framework embedded within Western society. White women involved in radical political groups during the 1960s and 1970s had had to come to terms with the sexist structuring of such organizations and had departed, concluding that the social revolutions envisaged beneath the rhetoric were actually entirely male-oriented. But they offered little solace to their black sisters, in that they all but denied that they could be racist, or that their analysis of female oppression was flawed and narrow in its focus.

During the seventies, white feminist's commitment to discussions of the effects of sexism only was to a large extent a reaction against the patriarchal structuring of political groups which effectively outlawed discussion of issues relevant to women. For this reason it was commonly felt that, for an interim period at least, analyses of 'related' issues, such as class and race, needed to be shelved to make space for this neglected area of study. Of course such a division denies any investigation of the complex and diverse means by which women are positioned in society as subjects bounded and contained by ascriptions of their class, race, gender and sexual orientation. What black feminists have made abundantly clear is that 'women's issues' considered without a conscious acknowledgement of other oppressive mechanisms at work in society, does not even work productively at a theoretical level, and neither does it accord with most women's lived experiences of oppression. Feminists assuredly need to foreground social injustices which only affect women, but without a thorough awareness of the differences that divide women into

sometime oppressors, as well as part of the oppressed, feminism remains the domain of the white, bourgeois, heterosexual woman, and its political scope is necessarily curtailed. To some extent modern feminism considered itself an 'organization' which is simply concerned to question all women's basic right to equality, and that therefore the specific problems confronting black women and women from other ethnic outgroups could be satisfactorily accommodated within a gender-specific framework, neglecting the complexities of racist oppression as it affects - in both material and ideological terms - all people of colour. In short, to retain clear discursive boundaries between anti-racist and feminist movements precludes any analysis of the complex ways power operates, by situating both women and black people collectively as essentially inferior.

Hooks locates modern feminism's central problem as a failure to interrogate the dynamics of power: if feminism at some level wishes to wrest power from men, the meaning of such power relations require transformation:

Women's liberationists, white and black, will always be at odds with one another as long as our idea of liberation is based on having the power white men have. For that power denies unity, denies common connections, and is inherently divisive as a natural order that has caused black and white women to cling religiously to the belief that bonding across racial boundaries is impossible, to passively accept the notion that the distances that separate women are immutable.⁶³

Here she implies that divisions between black and white feminists are sustained because patriarchal notions of racial and class

division are left intact, despite the fact that feminists are largely committed to radical social change, which anticipates a dismantling of imperialist and capitalist social realities. Here she highlights a tension that I have already hinted at in my examination of lesbian feminist critiques: that feminists do not consistently deny such social divisions' validity, and that therefore a future feminist utopia might be one which retains certain aspects of a social hierarchy intact.

Black feminists writing in the 1970s and 1980s have found little analysis that enables them to theorize about the black female experience, or upon the ways that negative images of black women are perpetuated throughout cultural history. In a very real sense black feminists had little option but to work outside the preordained parameters of the 'mainstream' women's movement, and start from scratch; rediscovering a history of black women in the USA and Europe and creating a discourse that incorporates both the problems of race and gender. Because of all these problems, coupled with the fact that there are still a lamentable shortage of black female academics in the institution (a material reality that is rarely protested against by white women), black feminism is still in a period of relative infancy. With reference to the specific problems encountered by black feminist literary critics, Barbara Smith observes that:

There is no political presence that demands a minimal level of consciousness and respect from those who write and talk about our lives...there is not a developed body of black feminist political theory whose assumptions could be used in the study of black women's art. When black women's books are dealt with at all, it is usually

in the context of black literature which largely ignores the implications of sexual politics. When white women look at black women's works they are of course ill-equipped to deal with the subtleties of racial politics. A black feminist approach to literature that embodies the realization that the politics of sex as well as the politics of race and class are crucially interlocking factors in the works of black women writers is an absolute necessity.⁶⁴

In the field of literary theory, black feminists have devoted their efforts to producing a black positive methodology, which also confronts the absence of women writers of colour in literary criticism produced by white women.⁶⁵ Black voices and experience are at best under-represented and at worst excluded from discussions which produced a feminist theoretical stance that affords a partial and ethnocentric discussion of questions of gender. More recent black feminists have subsequently argued that as a consequence, white feminism does not simply ignore the specificity of the black female experience, but also occludes and distorts the nature of those problems peculiar to black female existence.

Even in the late seventies the chief obstacles facing a developing black section of the women's movement was the inherent racism of white feminists. In Britain, Pratibha Parmar reports an incident where she and Kum-Kum Bhavnani submitted an article on 'Racism and the Women's Movement' to Spare Rib which argued that the women's movement had never taken seriously the issue of racism within its ranks, and pointing out the anomalous relationship of black women to feminism. The article was rejected by the collective who stated, 'We didn't really feel

your article could form a basis for discussion inside the feminist community as it betrays so many misconceptions about the movement's history.'⁶⁶ Clearly the rejection is based on the inference that a select group of (white) women are the keepers of feminism's history, and are in the powerful elitist position to suppress critiques of their own hegemony, and maintain intact unequivocal 'truths' about feminism. The use of the word 'community' belies the inequitable, exclusionary formation of many white feminist groups. Unfortunately it seems to be the case that white feminists have been responsible solely for stunting the growth of black feminist theorists in what can only be interpreted as a wish, conscious or internalized, to limit the purview of any feminist perspective to an ethnocentric one, which in attempting to strengthen the rhetoric of community and universal sisterhood, evades debates which threaten to rupture such fictional unity. Black feminists in the USA and Europe point out that such a specious form of cohesion is bought dear, when it highlights traces of an imperialist power struggle within a movement that purports to deconstruct male-oriented power principles.

White radical and socialist feminists were committed to an attack on the male dominated social system - whether they happily termed this patriarchy or not - and consequently focused upon institutions which shored up patriarchy, such as the family. Conversely, black feminists were faced with the reality that the family form was more often than not the only cushion against systematic racism in the public sphere, even if the familial ideology outlined by white feminists also held sway over black

communities. In addition black feminists set out to combat the tenacious myth that black communities were largely matriarchal in their form, and therefore emasculated black manhood, depriving him of his 'rightful' role as head of the household. Analyses of the matriarchal structure of the black family in the USA circulated during the sixties, and Angela Davis cites Daniel Moynihan's The Negro Family: The Case for National Action, published by the US Department of Labor in 1965, as a powerful and influential example of such a thesis. Moynihan had linked contemporary social and economic problems of the black community to their matrilineal structure, and called for the introduction of male authority in the black family system. Such a position ascribes women greater power than they can conceivably have had, and fails to take account of the evidence that black women, like most working-class white women, never had the luxurious position of angel in the house, but always had a clear cut economic role to perform.⁶⁷

It was pointed out by black feminists that the origins of the matriarchy theory lay in the legacy of women's labour during slavery, where many were required to perform tasks identified as masculine in the white consciousness of men and women's work:

To explain the black females' ability to survive without the direct aid of a male and her ability to perform tasks that were culturally defined as 'male' work, white males argued that black slave women were not 'real' women but were masculinized sub-human creatures. It is not unlikely that white men feared that white women, witnessing the black female slave's ability to cope as effectively in the work force as men, might develop ideas about social equality between the sexes and encourage

political solidarity between black and white women.⁶⁸

If black women were seen as a potential threat, the real economic situation belies such a vision of strength since, 'at the very time sociologists proclaimed the existence of a matriarchal order in the black family structure, black women represented one of the largest socially and economically deprived groups in America'.⁶⁹ Such a thesis could potentially divide the black community, prompting black men to blame black women for their 'emasculatation', and not a sexist and imperialist economic system which exploited black women's labour as the cheapest. Black women might well be their family's 'breadwinner' by default; but perspectives such as Moynihan's demonstrate how black men were encouraged to believe that their 'natural' role as household head had been usurped, and black women's 'femininity' compromised.

An imperialist system had designated black women unfeminine and even sub-human. therefore the representations of womanhood black feminists concentrated upon were those that excluded them as women (positing the white woman as the paradigm of feminine beauty), or which situated them as purely sexual creatures, available to black and white men alike. Mainstream feminist images criticism paid scant attention to representations of women of colour, and black feminists were accordingly critical of an analytical model which sought to claim the right to redefine what it is to be female, while ignoring black women's endeavours to gain the right to be identified as 'human'. White women were, in addition, regarded as instrumental in the perpetuation of such imagery, derived from the slave era, which tacitly accepted and reinforced the differences between white and black women as if

they were immutable. Images criticism was bound up with accounting for the seemingly timeless and universal construction of the feminine as passive, frail, but white, ignoring black women's relationships to such images, or for American black women one of their incontrovertible sources: 'the controlling images of black women that originated during the slave era attest to the ideological dimension of black women's oppression'.⁷⁰ Black women were characterized as unfeminine, promiscuous, a woman who cannot be raped because she herself is indiscriminately sexually voracious; this is set against the view of black men as the rapist incarnate. Feminist 'Reclaim the Night' marches which often passed through predominantly black areas in America angered black women as evidence that the stereotype of the sexualized black man prevailed among white women unscrutinized.⁷¹

Similarly, debates around reproductive rights in the seventies were greeted with much scepticism by black feminists, who still retained the memory of the rising popularity of the eugenicist movement in the early years of the twentieth century. In the United States the Eugenics Society 'could boast that at least twenty-six states had passed compulsory sterilization laws and that thousands of "unfit" persons had already been surgically prevented from reproducing.'⁷² Although white feminists vigorously campaigned for legal abortions, they failed to acknowledge that the chief source of the problem was among women of colour who comprised 80% of the mortality rate from illegal abortions in the years preceding its decriminalization in the States.⁷³ Black women in both Britain and the States wanted other measures to be tabled in tandem to abortion legislation -

matters such as that of compulsory sterilization, since sterilization abuse, when figures were obtained, was seen to be a widespread problem, as was the use of Depo-Provera, with its incident risks of breast and cervical cancer.⁷⁴

Black feminists such as Parmar recognize that just as some issues raised around sexual difference lead us back to the old essentialist arguments utilized to maintain women in a subordinate and quantitatively different role, so the notion of 'blackness' can carry essentialist overtones. A black feminist movement established on the grounds of certain irreconcilable differences with white women, has then to come to terms with its own range and diversity: 'racial identity alone cannot be a basis for collective organizing as the black communities are as beset with divisions around culture, sexuality and class as any other community'.⁷⁵ The will to categorize differences between women in order to deflect from the sometimes oppressive and offensive notions of 'sisterhood' has resulted in an 'identity politics' within feminism, which though productive in its positive affirmation of heterogeneity, threatens to divert the essence of feminist debate away from the aim of radicalizing a viable political stance, towards the internal politics which almost always seem to assert a hierarchy of authenticity. Many feminists now recognize the need to critique all essentialist notions of 'self' as something absolute and unchanging, in favour of an 'anti-humanist' concept of subjectivity.⁷⁶

Bell Hooks puts forward the idea of 'solidarity' to replace the overused term 'sisterhood' because, 'the emphasis on Sisterhood was often seen as the emotional appeal masking the

opportunism of manipulative bourgeois white women',⁷⁷ shielding the bald fact that women can and do oppress women. She further argues that the call for sisterhood on the basis of common oppression as women is a call to acknowledge the nature of our victimization and to celebrate as victims rather than push for a rejection of such subject positioning. Ultimately, bonding as 'victims' implies there is no place for strong assertive women (the recurrent stereotypical view of black women in popular Western mythology) in the Women's Movement. She perceives that:

Ironically, the women who were most eager to be seen as 'victims', who overwhelmingly stressed the role of victim, were more privileged and powerful than the vast majority of women in our society.⁷⁸

The concentration on a shared status as victim, she argues, prevents women from analysing the complexity of their own responses to other women, as well as men; in particular the way sexism, racism, classism and homophobia are perpetuated and naturalized within social groupings to the extent that 'Sisterhood became yet another shield against reality, another support system.'⁷⁹ But even today, when there is a recognition on one level that women's social experiences are affected by the processes of racism and imperialism, there is a sense that the movement 'belongs' to the dominant white, heterosexual faction, who are in the privileged hegemonic position of being able to 'invite' other voices, and 'place themselves in the position of "authorities" who must mediate communication between racist white women (naturally they see themselves as having come to terms with their racism) and angry black women whom they believe are

incapable of rational discourse.'⁸⁰

Black and lesbian feminist tendencies have been instrumental in constructing a methodology which is able to take account of the effect of other totalizing social factors upon women. If what can be defined as feminist theory remains the prerogative of the white mainstream, black feminists are doubly disadvantaged by an educational system that has historically allowed them limited access to higher education. Many black feminist writers might not 'qualify' as intellectuals in the patriarchal sense; in addition they are always trying to write themselves out of a tradition which has previously successfully absorbed oppositional black perspectives:

Reclaiming the Black feminist intellectual tradition involves much more than developing Black feminist analyses using standard epistemological criteria. It also involves challenging the very definitions of intellectual discourse.⁸¹

Most feminists intend to transform current epistemological definitions, and both black and lesbian feminism have usefully extended the boundaries of feminist discourse, to demonstrate that a patriarchal ideology also supports a racist and heterosexist one, which white heterosexual feminists need themselves to counter and actively reject.

Many radical and socialist white feminists now accept that they were misguided in situating sexism as the 'oldest' form of oppression, since this implies that gendered oppression deserves attention before problems of racism, classism or homophobia - 'suggesting a hierarchy of oppression exists, with sexism in

first place, evokes a sense of competing concerns that is unnecessary'.⁸² While many 'mainstream' feminists attempt to incorporate black and lesbian perspectives into their analyses, there is still much theoretical work to be done before the point is reached where the patriarchal meanings of such differences are no longer entrenched in feminist thought. Meanwhile lesbian and black feminists are variously 'accused' of being the maverick groups who fragmented the women's movement; here is, for example, Lynne Segal's statement that the eighties 'has been a decade of increased fragmentation within the women's movement, with the emergence of divisions between women and the growth of Black feminist perspectives'.⁸³ Although Segal devotes a few pages of Is The Future Female? (1987) to a consideration of black perspectives, her statement might be interpreted as implying that such a fragmentation is necessarily destructive, and a fault of black women. The degree of 'unity' that ever existed within the Women's Movement is, as I have already suggested, a subject of controversy; but it seems clear that what unity existed, did so at the expense of black, lesbian and working-class women.

CHAPTER FOUR
IDEOLOGY, DISCOURSE AND CULTURAL PRODUCTIONS

The concept of ideology is an intractable one for Marxist feminism, not least because it remains inadequately theorized in both Marxist and feminist theory. Although feminists have frequently posed ideology as central to women's oppression this very centrality is presented as self-evident rather than argued for.¹

As Michele Barrett suggests above, Marxists, feminists, and in particular Marxist-feminists have attempted to add strength to their analyses of oppression - whether perceived as class or class/gender oriented - by developing a more complex theory of the functions of ideology, in an endeavour to account for its problematical interrelation with material 'social reality'. She is correct, however, in her observation that feminists, when confronting the fundamental theoretical problem of how to account for the tenacity of gender differentiation and its subtle and diffuse operation in societal structures, have summoned up the concept to mean anything from 'false consciousness' to an 'unconscious' internalization of dominant social values. This position is gradually changing with the growing sophistication of feminist methodologies; but often this amounts to borrowing rather than redefining a post-Althusserian model of ideology. This model allows ideological processes a 'relative autonomy' from the economic base, but either assumes that ideology acquires a certain 'materiality' of its own (without accounting for the means by which such a materiality is achieved), or ignores the problem of the relationship of superstructure to base altogether. An exploration of the relationship between infrastructure and

superstructure is, however, crucial in the elaboration of a feminist political stance which retains a sense of the role of feminism in grassroots, issue-based struggle as well as its discursive role within an abstract theoretical battleground.

Barrett outlines some of the problems resulting from conflicting definitions of ideology, but herself fails to argue for its centrality in such a way as to get feminists out of a critical impasse. She refers to the 'ideology of gender', but having worked from an Althusserian position, neglects to suggest how an ideology of gender can be positioned in relation to other examples of Ideological State Apparatuses which Althusser outlines in 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' (1969). I would contend that the concept of an 'ideology of gender' is too unwieldy, and effectively embraces all Althusser's working categories (as would an ideology of racism, or heterosexism) - this is a crucial point which I will comment on further during the course of this chapter.

I argued in Chapter One that the primary analytical problem for all feminist theorists is the means by which we articulate the previously unarticulated, given the absence of attention to social identities ascribed to women in existing theoretical frameworks. It has been recognized that there is a paucity of viable concepts available for feminist appropriation without extensive redefinition; and yet Marxist analyses of the functions of ideology have been adopted relatively intact. Marxism is one perspective which has proved attractive to many feminists: its analysis of the capitalist social formation as predicated upon class conflict appeared amenable to the inclusion of

considerations of gender inequality, even though such an incorporation serves to expose the limitations of Marxist thought in the context of gender-based inquiry.

Feminists since the 1970s have encountered mammoth problems in their efforts to locate and identify the mechanisms by which desired and distorted images of femininity are perpetuated in society. More specifically, there is still a pressing need to address the means by which such images become equated with 'fact' or common sense, as they are communicated through schools, the law, the media, literature; and inform an individual's conceptions of, and attitudes to sexual difference. A notion of the effects of 'ideology' - even if that notion remains ill-defined in the form of 'images of women' - has become a vital tool for feminist criticism in areas where feminist forms of knowledge have proliferated within the academic institution, especially in the realms of literary theory, film theory and cultural studies. Before I assess feminist approaches to ideology in more detail, I shall outline the process by which early Second Wave feminists identified representations of 'femininity' - an elusive, fluid but tenacious construct - as a central contributory factor to women's material subordination. In addition, I shall provide a working summary of Althusser's description of Ideological State Apparatuses which, I shall argue at a later stage, might be more fruitfully supervised by Foucauldian and feminist analyses of discourse and power.

PATRIARCHY, STEREOTYPES AND THE RADICAL FEMINIST CRITIQUE

A position analogous to the Marxist account of the effects of ideological insertion is summoned by early radical feminists to account for the widespread, though chimerical nature of 'sexism'. The extensive use made of the abstract terms 'stereotype' and 'patriarchy' serves to illustrate this point. Both concepts were crucial in the struggle to establish a resistant feminist discourse, yet both tended to be mustered as if they were self-explanatory, and not as a tentative point of access to a thorough understanding of the way gender inequality is perpetuated in the current social formation. The early writings of radical feminists - especially in America, where the radical tradition had a stronger hold - display a marked reluctance to adopt the analytical frameworks or 'jargon' of established patriarchal academic discourse. This anti-theory tendency, coupled with many feminists' disenchantment with left-wing male-dominated hierarchies, resulted in an almost wholesale rejection of Marxist perspectives. The writings of American feminists actively involved in grassroots agitation, such as those collected in Robin Morgan's Sisterhood is Powerful (1970) and Koedt, Levine and Rapone's Radical Feminism (1973) evince an unwillingness to express themselves in a mainstream 'theoretical' fashion at all. This is partly a result of the non-hierarchical organization of early consciousness-raising collectives which attempted to give all women, regardless of educational background a voice within the movement; but it also indicates a concentration on material instances of women's subordination.

mediated through individual experiences recounted by movement women. This is not to suggest that non-material aspects of sexism are altogether neglected, but that issue-based discussions (on abortion, contraception, the family and so forth) tend to be conflated with a consideration of the means by which material subordination is sustained at a 'meta' level, designated as 'patriarchy'. The result is that early feminist work often gives the impression that 'sexism' is always conscious, purposeful and can therefore be eradicated by outlawing certain social practices.

There are well-documented problems with this feminist appropriation of the term patriarchy, when it is left crudely analogous to its original definition of 'father-right' - not least that it fails to take account of the social realities of advanced capitalism - and these conceptual problems have been addressed in earlier chapters. For the purposes of this chapter, the radical feminist use of 'patriarchy' clearly implies that all men actively subordinate women, but fails to pay more than token regard to the likelihood that men have different degrees of access to mechanisms of oppression (men of colour, for example, find themselves 'outside' dominant patriarchal representations of masculinity). The following passage exemplifies this stance:

All men are our policemen, and no organized police force is necessary at this time to keep us in our places. All men enjoy male supremacy and take advantage of it to a greater or lesser degree depending on their position in the masculine hierarchy of power.²

Such a position evokes the reality of individual male dominance

in the private sphere of home and family (acknowledged by most feminists as the crucial site of women's oppression), but does not allow for the possibility that changes in personal power relations will only be effected by intervention at the level of 'public' manifestations of power.

Patriarchy, in common with ideology, is viewed as inscribed within the totality of the social formation; unlike ideology however, it is implied that an overthrow of patriarchy (enacted primarily at the localized level of the individual's rejection of her 'appropriate' domestic/sexual role) would necessitate a shift in the representation of women, and consequently a renegotiation of current social positioning. Patriarchy, in this context, signifies more than the rule of men; it connotes a ruling body of individual men who directly influence social relations and who could be quite simply dethroned in favour of more egalitarian (power) structures. Stereotypes and gender socialization are seen, therefore, as contingent effects of patriarchy - and are consequently perceived as the product of conscious intention on the part of the powerful (men) to maintain their position at the expense of the powerless (women).

Admittedly, I am taking common features of certain radical feminism and to some extent parodying them; but the point of taking the sub-text of such a formulation to its logical conclusion is still ultimately valid. The way patriarchy is used in such work gives the term a material effect which is untenable, given that patriarchy works effectively even when, for example, a woman heads a government. Ultimately stereotypes are seen as transformable into more 'realistic' images of women, as if they

can simply take on the 'positive' effects of a 'role-model' given some judicious revision from a feminist perspective.

'Stereotype' and 'patriarchy' become caught somewhere between their implied status as transcendent and elusive or invisible, and as material, visible and transferrable. The anti-theory drive of the 1970s has resulted in a theoretical muddle for feminists of the 1980s and 1990s of quite serious proportions. Michele Barrett and others have tried to navigate a way through such a cul-de-sac by talking of a 'patriarchal ideology',³ which concentrates analysis upon how women and men represent the 'realities' of gender inequality to themselves and act upon it in their material practices, as well being subjected to ideology's gendered central Subject. I do not wish to write off radical feminist analysis of the stereotype, or suggest its significance as a representation of power relations embedded in patriarchy is totally redundant. Images and representations of femininity are still central features of contemporary feminist theory, and a revisionary reading of radical texts demonstrates that they shed important insights upon the effects of ideology.

What Greer, Ellmann, Millett, Brownmiller and others share through their explorations into the construction of femininity and the stereotypes used to enforce desired images of the female form, is an awareness of the power of 'gender ideology', in tandem with a sense of its apparent immutability. It has long been accepted that overturning stereotypes - for example using scantily-clad men in advertisements to target women - simply does not work, in that the image may be analogous but the meaning differs substantially. Men simply do not function as objects of

desire; their gendered subject position in society is deeply entrenched. Germaine Greer perceives the perpetuation of the female stereotype as a function of consumption, mediated through the less tangible process of desire - for men the 'woman' becomes a commodity; and for women she is the unattainable seamless hallmark of perfection:

Because she is the emblem of spending ability and the chief spender, she is also the most effective seller of this world's goods. Every survey ever held has shown that the image of an attractive woman is the most effective advertising gimmick...The gynolatry of our civilization is written large upon its face, upon hoardings, cinema screens, television, newspapers, magazines, tins, packets, cartons, bottles, all consecrated to the reigning deity, the female fetish. Her dominion must not be thought to entail the rule of women, for she is not a woman.⁴

Greer hints here at a disjunction between the power of the female image and the powerlessness of women. In Sexual Politics Kate Millett goes further, and actually situates gendered power relations at the level of ideology - gesturing towards its role in the interpellation of subjects:

Sexual politics obtains consent through the 'socialization' of both sexes to basic patriarchal politics with regard to temperament, role, and status. As to status, a pervasive assent to the prejudice of male superiority guarantees superior status in the male, inferior in the female. The first item, temperament, involves the formation of human personality along stereotyped lines of sex category ('masculine' and 'feminine'), based on the needs and values of the dominant group and dictated by what its members cherish

in themselves and find convenient in subordinates: aggression, intelligence, force, and efficacy in the male; passivity, ignorance, docility, 'virtue' and ineffectuality in the female. This is complemented by a second factor, sex role, which decrees a consonant and highly elaborate code of conduct, gesture and attitude for each sex. In terms of activity, sex role assigns domestic service and attendance upon infants to the female, the rest of human achievement, interest, and ambition to the male. The limited role allotted to the female tends to arrest her at the level of biological experience.⁵

Millett's interpretation of the overarching impact of gender socialization analyses the way in which a dominant ideological perspective on gender polarizes the sexes into having two distinct desired roles within the social formation.

This hypothesis, which she terms 'notes toward a theory of patriarchy', implicitly allows for the consideration of class/racial hierarchies in addition to a sexual one,⁶ and therefore enables her to speculate that males outside the dominant group are also 'subjected' to gender socialization without it guaranteeing them the same access to power. By suggesting that 'masculine' attributes socialized in males are positioned as the desirable hegemonic ones, she points to a paradox confronting all feminists: which is that all males have access to power over females in the domestic sphere. Another paradox outlined by Millett is one which has troubled feminists ever since: that women's socially constructed role has always derived its credibility from the 'fact' of female biology.⁷ Although a Marxist analysis of the base/superstructure bifurcation of society allows us to interrogate networks of power

and subordination as effects of culture and 'civilization', such a position inherits the biologicistic reductionism of its object of study. Marxist perspectives on class struggle situate women as outside 'public' power relations; although it is evident that women have always had a public presence in the labour force under capitalism, their role as domestic labourers and reproducers of the labour force is deemed to be their only functional one. Despite an acknowledgement of the part reproduction plays in relations of production, it is still accorded only peripheral significance by Marxists; it was left to Marxist feminists to emphasize that the role women perform in reproducing 'themselves' (i.e. other women/domestic labourers) is equally vital.⁸

Millett, writing in a veritable vacuum, tends to assume the validity of a quasi-Marxist position rather than attempting a 'marriage' between this and her own perspective. Her endeavour to historicize patriarchy effectively problematizes the Marxist historical approach, but she does not pursue the implications of this. She is also not often credited for her awareness of the complexity of constructing a theory of patriarchy which counters the assumption 'that patriarchy is endemic in human social life':⁹ certainly we find evidence of the prevalence of such assumptions in Friedrich Engels' The Origins of The Family, Private Property and the State (1884). Millett, on the whole, gives a very positive account of this text as a contribution to a theory of sexual revolution,¹⁰ especially its descriptions of the patriarchal and bourgeois manifestation of the institutions of marriage and the family. However, she rightly points out that Engels' view of patriarchy - as enacting power over bourgeois

women by rendering them chattels to be passed from father to husband in the circulation of wealth and property - disregards the effects of patriarchal power relations at other levels:

Engels ignores the fact that woman is viewed, emotionally and psychologically, as chattel property by the poor as well as, and often even more than, the rich. Lacking other claims to status, a working class male is still more prone to seek them in his sexual rank, often brutally asserted.¹¹

Millett, in common with other feminist thinkers, found that Engels might yield possibilities for feminist appropriation, not least because he focuses on the familial institution as integral to women's oppression. Nonetheless, she observes above that the degree of female subordination is regarded as class-specific; yet feminists required a framework which could account for the seemingly universal acceptance of female inferiority.

Althusser's revision of Marx's concept of ideology, and his problematization of its relation to materiality seemed a more fruitful point of departure. It is necessary, therefore, to critically assess Althusser's account of Ideological State Apparatuses as relatively autonomous mechanisms of oppression, before continuing our survey of feminist interventions in this area.

ALTHUSSER AND IDEOLOGY

Prior to feminist approaches to ideology, Louis Althusser had already problematized the Marxist theory of the maintenance of

relations of production under capitalism. In his essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', he attempts to modify the classic Marxian account of the status of superstructure (law and the state/ideology) as subordinate to the infrastructure (economic base), which is viewed as the determining instance for superstructural processes. The initial proposition of Althusser's thesis is that in order to maintain its existing relations of production, capitalism needs to reproduce the conditions of production, and that this reproduction cannot simply happen at the localized level of each individual 'firm', or productive unit. At the very least, capitalist enterprises depend upon one another for raw materials, new machinery and so on; in addition each unit requires other 'raw material' such as labour-power, whose 'reproduction' takes place outside the sphere of production. In order to reproduce itself, labour power not only requires sufficient wages for food, clothing and child-rearing, but also an appropriate form of education.

This model of conditions of reproduction already moves us beyond the scope of the Marxian economic base to the meta-level of the state itself. which not only provides the skills, via schooling, appropriate for labour power to reproduce itself in a way that functions for capital, but also imparts 'rules' of good behaviour to its citizens: 'rules of morality, civic and professional conscience, which actually means rules of respect for the socio-technical division of labour and ultimately the rules of order established by class domination.'¹² In other words, the state intervenes in the reproduction of labour-power at a crucial level 'outside' the realms of production 'proper',

and enforces submission to a code of behaviour which serves the interest of capital and also naturalizes the division of labour in its present form. The state guarantees reproduction of the status quo 'in forms which ensure subjection to the ruling ideology or the mastery of its "practice"',¹³ dependent upon the class status of the individual. Already we can observe that Althusser is depicting a profound interrelationship between the economic base and the superstructure, where the material conditions of production are reinforced actively and coercively by a dominant ideology which simultaneously reproduces its own ideological framework as inevitable and immutable.

Althusser points out that the relationships between infrastructure and superstructure have, in traditional Marxist terms, been construed as either a relationship of 'relative autonomy' on the part of the superstructure, or in terms of a 'reciprocal' action of superstructure upon the base. Departing somewhat from these interpretations, he problematizes the conception of base/superstructure from a dual-level perspective, since such a model implies a necessary hierarchical arrangement of one above the other. Instead, the superstructural elements of power, whose component parts comprise the state, are considered in terms of the way they consolidate a particular (capitalist) status quo, which represents to itself and its subjects a desired social reality concretized in material practices. Primarily, Althusser distinguishes between the effects of state power and the state apparatus - state power being analogous to that 'class' who maintain dominance via an abstract power network (the state apparatus), which could conceivably remain intact after a seizure

of power by another social group.

In addition to the State Apparatus (which he describes as repressive since it ultimately 'functions by violence',¹⁴ whether physical or non-physical in form), he distinguishes Ideological State Apparatuses that emanate from and feed back into the Repressive State Apparatus. These are diverse, plural and operate as 'a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions'.¹⁵ and which function by means other than active or tangible repression:

If the ISAs [Ideological State Apparatuses] 'function' massively and predominantly by ideology, what unifies their diversity is precisely this functioning, insofar as the ideology by which they function is always unified, despite its diversity and its contradictions, beneath the ruling ideology, which is the ideology of 'the ruling class'.¹⁶

It is evident that Althusser is thus establishing close links between the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) as a centralized unit of power containing components such as the government, the administration, the army, the police, the courts and prisons, and the mediatory processes of the ISAs, which consolidate the unity of state power whilst containing and repressing contradictions that are the effects of ongoing class struggle.

Althusser's 'empirical list' of ISAs includes the following: the religious ISA, the educational ISA, the family ISA, the legal ISA, the political ISA, the trade union ISA, the communications ISA and the cultural ISA. Even though it is clear that some of these ISAs are also sites of struggle against a dominant

ideological perspective, he maintains that no class could hold state power for long without transforming both the RSA and the ISAs. Both are instrumental in the replication of specific relations of production, and therefore more fundamental than the acquisition of dominance. Consequently, each ISA contributes to the perpetuation of the RSA in ways proper to its function - which clearly implies that ideology has a direct interventional relationship with people's material conditions of existence. In this respect it is apparent that Althusser's model moves towards a definition of base/superstructure as inseparable in practice; or as effects of each other - in that material reality is itself mediated and subject to transformations by the effects of ideology, and changing economic needs dictate subtle ideological shifts (the effects of a wartime economy upon the 'reserve army' of female labour would be a case in point).

A vital distinction for feminists, perhaps, is Althusser's account of the creation and maintenance of separate private and public spheres. The RSA is seen to function primarily in the public domain, whereas a large part of the ISA's effects are felt in the private sphere of the family-household system. The ideological processes which function most effectively in the private sphere inform those institutions which are seen to pre-date capitalism, such as the family, property relations and the sexual division of labour. Further, he avers that it is the state (the ruling class) which determines the very boundaries between 'public' and 'private' - boundaries which are left intact by analysts such as Marx and Engels. Part of the agenda of the modern Women's Movement has been precisely to redefine these

boundaries in an effort to demonstrate that the existing division serves patriarchal interests. Many feminists' clarion call for a 'revolution in consciousness' demands an interrogation of the concepts 'public' and 'private' as part of a broader programme of redefining gender roles themselves.

Interestingly, Althusser cites the family and education ISAs as the most dominant and effective ideological apparatuses in a mature capitalist formation. This signals an immediate parallel with feminist endeavours to foreground these two institutions as having important material and ideological effects upon the positioning of women as functioning overtly in the private sphere - their role as wage labourers in the public sphere being largely neglected. It is argued that it is in the 'natural' apolitical site of the family that ideology most successfully effaces its own effects. Althusser makes a similar assertion about the function of education:

The mechanisms which produce this vital result for the capitalist regime are naturally covered up and concealed by a universally reigning ideology of the School, universally reigning because it is one of the essential forms of the ruling bourgeois ideology which represents the school as a neutral environment purged of ideology.¹⁷

Of course Althusser is aware that within the broad spectrum of the educational ISA can be contained a range of contradictory impulses - for example, where a school teacher attempts to encourage her/his students to recognize that education mediates a dominant ideological perspective which hides beneath the guise of common sense or self-evident 'truth'. Oppositional ideologies

present conflicting perceptions of an individual's relation to 'reality' and therefore expose the contradictions upon which the dominant ideology is founded. Feminists, in order to construct a viable oppositional ideological strategy, have first to recognize that Marxist theories of ideology themselves operate within what Michele Barrett vaguely terms an 'ideology of gender'. The recognition that all Marxist theories of ideology - even Althusser's - situate ideology as 'determined in the last instance by the class struggle',¹⁸ prompts feminists to find new means to conceptualize the effects of a social formation which they perceive as equally determined by the perpetuation of notions of gender and racial difference.

Perhaps Althusser's concluding thesis is the most engaging for feminists. In his assertion that ideology interpellates individuals as subjects in a way that profoundly affects our material existence, he offers a position parallel to more recent poststructuralist theorists. Therefore ideological processes, in the way they mediate and negotiate the repressive aspects of the State Apparatus are perceived as achieving a 'materiality' of their own. In other words, ideology does not just operate at the level of 'ideas', in that ideas exist within and are given meaning by our actions, which insofar as they are 'social actions' are themselves ritualized in ways that are delineated by a particular ISA. We are already 'hailed' or interpellated as subjects by means that allow us to be 'identified' in the social formation by the 'double-mirror effect' of an ISA which implicitly contains at its centre the Subject par excellence (e.g. a projection of God in the religious ISA, or the idea of

the model family which is summoned in the functions of the welfare state) to which we are subjected. From this 'Subject' we obtain our meaning in relation to all other subjects - accordingly, individuality itself is viewed by Althusser as an effect of the operation of ideology.

In poststructuralist terminology the construction of a discrete individuality is seen as an effect of discourse, as I shall later explore. Meanwhile, it is necessary to bear in mind that Althusser's model of interpellation - which necessitates the mutual recognition of subjects, (central) abstract Subject, and the subject's recognition of her/himself - requires extension to accommodate the view that women operate in the present social formation as subject/object in a paradoxically unstable subject position. For example, feminist critics of film and popular culture have analysed the effects upon a woman interpellated by the 'cultural ISA' who, watching images of women on television or in films, recognizes herself as object in relation to the (masculine) dominant subject's gaze:

In film, on television, in the press and in most popular narratives men are shown to be in control of the gaze, women are controlled by it. Men act; women are acted upon. This is patriarchy.¹⁹

The required subject-position offered by such representations is predominantly as object of desire, countered by 'negative' images of unfemininity which seem to warn the female viewer of the dire consequences of not fully entering into dominant ideological definitions of acceptable female behaviour. Nonetheless recent feminist commentators, in addition to exposing the effects upon

women (materially and ideologically) of the male control of the 'gaze', have also turned their attention to the ways in which women have contested such meanings, disrupting the master narratives of the dominant ideology. Althusser's observation of the dual effects of ideology - upon consciousness and as dictating a range of actions - has proved attractive to Marxist feminists who have recognized that a feminist revolution requires not only equal access to material power processes, but also more importantly a sustained attack upon dominant ideological mechanisms, by demythologizing their perceived 'naturalness'.

MARXIST-FEMINIST APPROACHES

For current feminists, there is a growing consensus of the need to establish a stronger analytical position from which to assess the means by which existing 'patriarchal' power structures seem to be self-perpetuating. From such a perspective the quasi-biological account of patriarchy's 'universality' might be countered, and its success as a dominant ideological force examined and undercut. Following Althusser, feminist theorists have rejected the prevailing Marxist notion that ideology constitutes a distortion of reality by the ruling class, or indeed that ideology acts as a direct reflection, in ideas, of the determining economic base. Instead it is argued that ideology achieves a relative autonomy from the economic level (even if this is a determining factor in the last instance). Emphasis shifts instead to the relationship of ideology to lived experience: as the representation of the imaginary relationship

of individuals to the real conditions of their existence. The subject is constructed and reproduced in ideology and 'reality' is therefore perceived as a series of intersubjective social situations and relations.

At the beginning of the 1980s, Michele Barrett saw this shifting Marxist perspective on ideology as more amenable to feminist appropriation:

The influence of this theoretical revolution on Marxist feminist work has been considerable. It has opened up for 'legitimate' discussion the question of the construction of masculine and feminine subjects and the relation of the sexual division of labour to capitalist production. It has facilitated the feminist challenge to an orthodox Marxism that relegated the oppression of women to the theoretical, and hence political, sidelines.²⁰

The adoption of post-Althusserian notions of ideology is one of the means by which socialist feminists have attempted a theoretical 'marriage' with mainstream Marxists. However, such a merger necessitated a revision of the conceptual framework used to describe relations of production, in order to foreground the important role of women as 'reproducers' of the existing and future workforce. To a certain extent, an economistic model of women's oppression has been rejected in favour of arguing that ideological processes are themselves instrumental in reproducing gender divisions within the capitalist social formation. The acknowledgement of the all-pervasive effects of institutionalized sexism upon the functioning of the Repressive State Apparatus effectively transforms Marxist discourse in a way that has cast

into doubt the harmony of such a marriage. There is, as Barrett points out, a risk that feminists might lapse into a naively functionalist account of gendered power relations - one which sees women's oppression as directly governed and maintained by state intervention.²¹

A concentration upon ideological processes specifically raises doubts about the possible historical specificity of such a project which 'remains subject to the risk of universalism'.²² Feminists have concentrated upon two major areas - familial relations and the development of masculine and feminine subjectivity - neither of which is accommodated by Marxist orthodoxy, which itself 'universalized' such areas by tending to accept at least some aspects of family life and gendered identity as social givens. Even Engels, for all his attempts at historical specificity in his account of the development of the bourgeois family form, implies a 'natural' sexual division of labour; he anticipates sexual freedom based on the expression of 'real love' when capitalism is overturned, but gives no further indication of a changed social/economic function for women.²³ His analysis accords the family a history of its own. The account of the mutation of the family from 'prehistorical' mother-right to property-owning patriarchy, which facilitates, but is not itself a direct effect of, capitalist exploitation, fails to interrogate the nature of the relationship between a capitalist social organization and the family. Engels reaffirms the public/private division - one governed by profit, the other by sexual slavery - and, as Annette Kuhn argues, utilizes two conflicting models of history:

although Engels' analysis of the social relations of family forms does inscribe history as a crucial component, the model is founded in an epistemology different from that articulated in an analysis which treats of the dynamic of transitions between different modes of production within 'civilization'. What this means in effect is that although Engels' notion of the social relations of patriarchy is a historical one, nevertheless it cannot be mapped unproblematically onto the social relations characteristic of a mode of production. The two histories are, so to speak, out of step.²⁴

In evaluating the 'private sphere' - a sphere demarcated and identified by the capitalist state apparatus, but one also marginalized by Marxists - feminists find themselves caught between two ideological positions which both show a tendency to consign the family to the realms of prehistory, and therefore outside the parameters of conventional political theory.

Thus re-emerges a recurring problem for all feminists - the clash between a notion of 'sexual politics' and the necessary redefinition of 'politics' itself. Political analysts assert that politics deals with power relations at a macro level only, leaving such institutions as the family uninvestigated. Barrett, writing her new introduction to Women's Oppression Today in 1988, confesses that her attempt to integrate Marxism and feminism is informed 'with a much greater sense of the desirability of this at a political level than I would now express.'²⁵ Her changed stance reflects the growth and diversity of the feminist enterprise in recent years, where the emergence of increasingly heterogeneous feminisms have provoked related investigations into

the nature of oppression by race and sexual orientation, and which transforms the nature of feminist discourse even further beyond the scope of classic Marxism.

Barrett's recent pessimism about the place of feminism in relation to Marxist analyses of class struggle is an acknowledgement that it cannot simply be slotted into a preconceived theoretical enterprise which denies it any intellectual or epistemological credibility. Feminism potentially destabilizes the tenets of Marxism: once theories of ideology are held up for examination, no tool of political enquiry can be left unscrutinized. Barrett originally attempted to construct a quasi-Marxist model for feminism while leaving its exposure of the gendered priorities contained in such a methodology largely unquestioned. In 1988 she has concluded that feminism and Marxism are epistemologically poles apart because 'I would tend now to locate feminism even more firmly within a liberal, humanist tradition.'²⁶ In making this categorical assertion, however, she is ignoring the work done by many modern feminists from an anti-humanist, or poststructuralist perspective. In addition, she also ignores the possibility that if we take liberal humanism to have arisen with the onset of capitalism, and as still remaining the dominant position today, all oppositional discourses are to some extent contained within it, or collapse within its conceptual criteria. One might well equally conclude that Marxism, which cannot by its own formulation conceive of itself as 'outside' the coercion of dominant ideological processes, has imbibed much of the liberal tradition of abstract thought, notably in its characteristic

blindness to the operations of sexual/racial divisions in society. Feminism, at least by its theoretical 'unorthodoxy' has taken steps to question the epistemological roots of Western phallo(/ethno)centrism.

Nonetheless, Women's Oppression Today still provides the fullest and most thought-provoking account of the effects of a gendered social system, and for that reason Barrett's appropriation of post-Althusserian concepts of ideology provides a useful point of departure. Barrett, importantly, highlights the means by which earlier feminist writers have attempted to explore the ways the material conditions of women's lived experience have historically structured the more 'abstract' or 'mental' aspects of their oppression, but have often fallen at the first hurdle of biology. Procreation, and its differing consequences for men and women, are often summoned as the eternal root cause of female oppression. The essential problem is the way sexual difference appears to be inscribed at every level of the social formation (in its material practices and ideological processes) and gives the impression that the 'reality' of gender difference is virtually as irrevocable as the anatomical distinctions which give credence to it. Notions of the naturalness of sexual difference clearly filter into Marxist discourse, where the status of women in the domestic sphere, and the configuration of the bourgeois family form is virtually dehistoricized. In opposition to this view, Sheila Rowbotham categorically states that 'The nature of female subordination is as subject to social change as any other kind of subordination. Women were oppressed before capitalism. But capitalism has

changed the nature of female oppression.'²⁷

Barrett, in common with Althusser, denies ideology in itself any materiality, while acknowledging the material effects of ideology as it is realized in social practices (hence a degree of reciprocity between what Marx would define as infrastructure and superstructure):

It is impossible to understand the division of labour, for instance, with its differential definitions of 'skill', without taking into account the material effects of gender ideology. The belief that a (white) man has a 'right' to work over and above any rights of married women or immigrants has had significant effects in the organization of the labour force. Such a belief has therefore to be taken into account when analysing the division of labour, but its location in material practices does not render it material in the same way.²⁸

Barrett situates an 'ideology of gender' which plays a significant role in the relations of production, but observes that 'it is far more difficult to argue that it plays a crucial part in the essential reproduction of raw materials, installations and machinery'.²⁹ The phallogentricity of the Marxist analytical model presents such a difficulty, but one could agree with Althusser that 'what happens at the level of the firm is an effect, which only gives an idea of the necessity of reproduction, but absolutely fails to allow its conditions and mechanisms to be thought.'³⁰ In other words, modes of production themselves need to be considered at a macro-level, whence their conditions of existence are perceived to thrive upon a sexual/ethnocentric division of labour, where women and racial outgroups are concentrated in low-paid low-status jobs in

relation to their (white) male counterparts. If we take the example of the clothing industry, involving the production of commodities by (mainly non-white) female outworkers or women working in sweatshop conditions, it is crucial to acknowledge that it depends upon the exploitation of cheap labour. The conditions under which these women work - lack of trade union collectivization, low pay etc. - are a result of their femaleness (they might become outworkers because of childcare and other domestic responsibilities), and their ethnic status which might make access to better-paid jobs difficult. By asserting that these factors have no direct effect on reproduction, Barrett risks marginalizing considerations which she otherwise accepts are central to feminist analysis.

Sheila Rowbotham argues that 'The segregation of male/female roles is thus materially as well as ideologically part of the way in which capitalism is maintained.'³¹ This does not amount to a claim for the materiality of ideology, but declares that if gender difference informs the fabric of society, and ideology serves to strengthen the effectiveness of customary practices, then feminists must concentrate their efforts into defining the parameters of the dominant ideology, and constructing a more effective opposition. If ideology operates by connoting the 'natural' order of things, it is vital that feminists renew their efforts to expose its distortions and contradictions. It is of course crucial that women do not lose sight of the issue-based struggles confronting women, and tackle these problems by action against the perpetuation of such material practices. But they must be wary of attempting to broach such prejudice exclusively

on an issue basis, when an 'ideology of gender' is constantly perpetuating the 'reality' and 'naturalness' of inequitable sexual and racial divisions. The meta-level effects of dominant ideological processes can successfully defuse the 'victories' gained in localized spheres, such as equal pay and anti-discriminatory legislation.

Barrett never really develops the problematic concept of an 'ideology of gender', which gives us little idea of how such an ideological process functions, or what definitions of 'gender' it utilizes. If we return to Althusser's 'empirical list' of ISAs it is clear that it would be most unsatisfactory to simply add 'gender' on, since gender itself is inscribed within each of these ISAs, and gender inequality is instrumental to the status quo represented by the unity of RSA. Similarly, we might want to incorporate ideologies of race and heterosexuality which also position men and women as subjects in ways that reproduce social inequalities as repressively as class does. Althusser's Marxist perspective is of a social totality founded on the notion of class difference; feminists also view sexual/racial difference as militating factors maintaining the whole social organization. It is clear, then, that any feminist appropriation of a Marxist model of inequality necessarily requires certain fundamental adjustments to counter gender/race blindness endemic to it. Sheila Rowbotham, writing before Barrett, gestures towards a more radical break with existing theories:

Rather than straining Marx's categories of exploitation and surplus value, worked out to explain commodity production, into the family mode of production and

quibbling about the use of oppression and exploitation in this context, we have to analyse women's labour in the home on its own terms and develop new concepts.³²

There appears, therefore, to be tensions among socialist feminists concerning the desirability of appropriating a Marxist model of oppression at all; nonetheless there is tacit agreement upon the fact that Marx's categories, as they stand are scarcely adequate.

This overview of radical and socialist feminist³³ approaches to 'ideological' issues suggests that there is more common ground between them than first appears:

Both reformists and revolutionaries have to contend with the fact of a class antagonistic society; and feminists must similarly realize that the oppressive social division between men and women, though not a class division, at the very least represents a fissure in the groundplan of human society which must be charted before it can be bridged.³⁴

Both perspectives identify gaps in male theoretical frameworks, and accept that a revolution in consciousness is central to their critical agenda. The first steps to such a revolution are to expose the contradictions inherent in the dominant ideologies of contemporary life because, 'an analysis of gender ideology in which women are always innocent, always passive victims of patriarchal power, is patently not satisfactory.'³⁵ In the ensuing sections on feminist criticism and discourse, we shall see how more sophisticated approaches to ideology and subjectivity allow pathways through such contradictions. The development of the 'images' approach to cultural productions

enabled women to recognize that ideologies of gender are inscribed in discourse and indirectly serve to perpetuate 'patriarchy'. These 'consciousness-raising' approaches, despite initially focusing on the means by which women act in 'bad faith' and internalize their own subordination, serve to foreground the abstract concept of consciousness itself. They launched an interrogation of how men and women are interpellated as masculine and feminine subjects through material/cultural practices. Later critics explore the seductiveness of an acquired subject position which is reassuringly 'natural' and 'obvious', arguing that attempts to simply expose these positions as false and unnatural risk offering women yet another prescriptive set of 'rules' to live by.

CULTURAL PRODUCTIONS AND FEMINIST CRITICISM

Michele Barrett claims that she 'can find no sustained argument as to why feminists should be so interested in literature, or what theoretical or political ends such a study might serve'.³⁶ One is tempted to respond by observing that the growth in feminist literary criticism is partly an historical accident: the sexual division of subject choices in higher education effectively concentrated female academics in 'Arts', especially English Literature. In addition seventies feminist pathfinders dedicated their attention to the sphere of representation, in their attacks on the grossly distorted images of ideal-type women which bombarded female consumers from billboards, TV advertising and contemporary fiction. As to what theoretical ends such a

study might serve, with hindsight we can chart the extent to which feminist analyses have intervened in traditional critical practice and in male-oriented theoretical speculations, establishing for feminists a partially 'respectable' place within the academic institution. This 'place/placing' has of course negative aspects for feminism, rendering it potentially vulnerable to absorption by male theory, thereby defusing its political edge.

The 'political' ends are perhaps less easy to articulate, unless one reaffirms the use of 'political' in the radical feminist sense. In the case of literary studies, the intervention in the canon itself - the destabilizing and questioning of the qualities of greatness and aesthetic value - can be viewed as a political stance, in its implications for the future of the discipline. One might also posit two other 'political' features of feminist literary criticism. Firstly, the introduction of women's writing courses on degree programmes, while falling foul of accusations of ghettoization, inserts a wider range of writings by women into literary studies and results in the wider circulation of certain women's texts.³⁷ Secondly, feminist critics have fought hard to expose the depths of sexism within the academic institutional framework itself: in the sphere of literary/cultural studies, the majority of students are still women, but phallogentric practices are still inscribed within such discourses. These factors in themselves constitute no small victory, and enable future developments in feminist scholarship.

It is perhaps wise to point out that a section on feminist

criticism in the field of literary and cultural productions will scarcely do the immensity of the work produced over the past twenty years justice. The amount of texts which have appeared in this sphere must surely far outweigh the feminist research output in other subject areas. In the context of this thesis, there is not space to chart precise distinctions between 'schools' of thought, and the distinctions made in Chapters One to Three serve as general points of demarcation. By using the example of feminist criticism, I am more concerned to illustrate that all feminist scholarship should be perceived as contributing to the development of feminist politics, and would emphasize that the interventions of feminist discourse in the academic institution is itself a political measure. Feminist analyses of literary texts and popular culture are especially amenable to such a link, since their raw material comprises processes of communication and representation, and addresses the relations of the female subject to some of the most subtle and pervasive patriarchal ideological processes. Feminist criticism constitutes an oppositional or resistant ideology, which by exposing 'objectivity' as a smoke screen for male-oriented subjective responses, attempts to demythologize representational practices themselves. By announcing its own ideological intentions, feminism questions the status of 'neutrality', although its critics tend to characterize such a stance as an excuse for a lack of rigour and discursive precision - or worse, as a means of foregrounding features of texts which are traditionally regarded as peripheral or non-existent.

Many feminists in the academic institution today have a high

theoretical profile, and have to contend with negative responses from within their own ranks. This backlash is largely a reaction to the age-old double bind for feminist politics - that to situate feminism within such a powerful and well-established ISA as the education system is necessarily to make compromises in order to have a voice at all. To insert oneself into a male-ordered discourse which denies the validity of one's position is itself ironic - since the terms of the host discourse serve to discredit any oppositional stance, just as such opposition is intended to undermine pre-existing tenets. It could therefore be argued that feminism in the institution has to some extent 'been "de-radicalized", supporting the status quo rather than working to undermine it'.³⁸ But to maintain this is to assume the existence of a radical space for feminism elsewhere, untainted by dominant social pressures. There is some justification for the fear that feminism as a social movement has become divorced from the academic face of feminism, and that feminist theory in the 1990s has lost its radical impetus. However, partly as a result of its own refusal to enter mainstream politics, women's liberation cannot be clearly identified as a collective movement; its agenda has become fragmented and its energy dissipated. In contrast, the presence of feminist perspectives in certain scholarly disciplines could be viewed as a position of strength. Feminist research should therefore be exploited for its political potential, and used to develop a methodology which focuses on agendas for change within and without the academic institution. Although the presence of Women's Studies options in higher education might smack of

tokenism, signalling no real change in the priorities of such institutions, it at least provides a platform for a new generation of feminists to interrogate the power structures at work within education, and - by extension - society. Louis Althusser argued that education is the chief reinforcement agency of the dominant ideology, and many feminists would reinforce the view that any interventions in this area are politically essential, even if current contributions seem at times elitist or obscurantist.

The earliest Second Wave attention to cultural productions was directed at the male literary 'greats', and the most influential text to emerge during this period is Kate Millett's Sexual Politics - which she herself admitted was, in its combination of literary and social criticism, something of a 'hybrid'. Her justification for such an approach heralds the work of recent cultural critics: 'I have operated on the premise that there is room for a criticism which takes into account the larger cultural context in which literature is conceived.'³⁹ She constructs a spirited reaction against the hegemony of the American New Critics, but has been criticized by later feminists for her rather naive conflation of author and character,⁴⁰ to the extent that the social realities of female subordination are by implication directly communicated to the reader via the text. Although later feminist critics have been inspired by her work, and have continued to develop a study of literary texts in a broader cultural/historical context, they have tended to move away from the naive reflectionism evident in some of her textual analysis. While Millett gives a polemical account of the

functions of patriarchy and the power of the stereotype in and beyond literature Mary Ellmann, writing Thinking About Women (1969) a year earlier, attacks 'phallic criticism' where:

the discussion of women's books by men will arrive punctually at the point of preoccupation, which is the fact of femininity. Books by women are treated as though they themselves were women, and criticism embarks, at its happiest, upon an intellectual measuring of bust and hips.⁴¹

Ellmann recognizes that a sexist ideology is not simply contained in books by men, but is perpetuated by male critics themselves, especially as it influences their 'objective' responses to female-authored texts. Although Ellmann takes us beyond the scrutiny of the stereotype in male-authored writings and gestures towards the effects a 'phallic' appraisal can have upon the reception of female authors, 'images of women' critics tend to concentrate upon texts which are already a part of the literary canon. A consequent effect of such an approach is necessarily to consign women as writers to the margins of the mainstream.

Later in the seventies Elaine Showalter produced a 'gynocritical' model, whose premise is that 'we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture.'⁴² Her dedication to revaluing 'great' women writers and drawing attention to previously neglected ones goes some way to creating a female literary history. Her appraisals of such 'lost' texts were, however, carried out using similar analytical tools to her

male forebears. This new literary history may well be a female one, but it shares unquestioningly the epistemological roots of the male-oriented original; even if it does afford some women writers the critical attention they richly deserve. To a degree Showalter exercises a phallic criticism of her own,⁴³ and unproblematically establishes an alternative female 'canon' based on premises similar to 'The Great Tradition'.

Neither the 'feminist critique' of male writers nor gynocriticism were extensive enough in their break from the confines of patriarchal attitudes to incorporate the wider political perspectives of the Women's Movement. Although such critics exposed deep-rooted sexism at work within literature, Millett, in her concentration on the sins of the male author, and Showalter on the virtues of the female, left the primacy of the canon unchallenged. In addition they simplistically implied that men always produced distorted images of women, whereas women produced correct ones - prompting the impression that one could 'sex' texts in a quasi-biologicistic fashion. In general, pathfinding feminist critics - perhaps because they could not negotiate a complete break from a liberal humanistic critical tradition - never interrogated the divide between High Literature and popular culture. This resulted in a huge group of women writers being neglected and consigned to the margins of 'trash' fiction, where they had been already positioned by the male-dominated critical mainstream.

Approaches such as 'Images of Women' criticism tend to treat fiction as if it unproblematically 'mirrors' reality in some direct way;⁴⁴ yet it must be borne in mind that 'this view of

texts as transmitting authentic "human" experience is... a traditional emphasis of Western patriarchal humanism.'⁴⁵ This perspective on the reflective power of literature is analogous to a naive notion of ideology as a reflection 'in ideas' of material practices. Just as feminist explorations into the social construction of reality need to address the ways ideological processes are mediated as a view of social reality, it is necessary to account for the features which construct the text and 'place' it in various conflicting ideological positions, and which govern its conditions of production. Such features include its 'literary' status, as well as the identity of the author - if we wish to conduct a study of writers who have been excluded from the literary mainstream on grounds of race, gender or sexual orientation. It would be retroactive to read texts for evidence of a singular ideological stance of a central Subject - be it the author, the 'text' or whatever - but we can review (as feminists have constantly done) the problem of representation and its disjunction with social reality. For if we accept that the text does not yield a single objective 'reality', we should concede that it cannot simply faithfully 'reflect' its own historical conditions of existence - a trap into which images critics can easily fall:

In the area of cultural production... it is easy to see how forms of representation are governed by genres, conventions, the presence of established modes of communication and so on. Yet these are not determining in the absolute sense being argued for here. They do not in themselves account for what is represented.⁴⁶

There is a link between what is being represented and existing social relations, but despite the seductiveness of metaphors of mirror imagery, defining the relationship between image and materiality is a complex business. To subvert a prevailing stereotype does not rupture the status quo: modern advertising, for example, can quote 'feminism' in its portrayal of a new independent woman while still subtextually affirming the naturalness of patriarchal familial relations.

Feminists, in common with other modern theorists, are primarily concerned with the ways meaning is constructed, rather than the truth or falsity of representation. This focus accommodates a possible plurality of (conflicting) meanings, as well as exposing the way ideological processes produce, reproduce, challenge and even transform meaning. The assumption is that all texts are encoded with a preferred reading (via narrative voice, etc.) which 'coerces' the reader unless they elect to 'read against the grain' in order to expose the ideological investment in this representation of reality or 'truth'. Despite ideology's complex relations within culture and to reality, the political elements of feminist criticism demand attention to the relationship between literature, criticism and the social and economic conditions of our lives. Feminism is especially adept at making such broad links due to its interdisciplinarity - in changing the precepts of traditional literary criticism, we are overstepping the boundaries of the subject, with a commitment to creating something quite other.

The major object of study for feminist critics is writing by women, which necessitates a re-evaluation of how authorial

identity influences textual strategies: this need not amount to privileging authorial intention, however. It is no novelty for texts to be assessed with close reference to their author's gender - although this practice had previously remained covert and depoliticized. Admittedly, feminist critiques tend to foreground thematic aspects of narration, paying particular attention to representations of female experiences, but this does not necessarily demonstrate that texts are naively conceived as vehicles for social reality. If we accept the model of ideology offered above, then materiality and fictionality are both governed and constructed by ideological means. Indeed, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in their readings of nineteenth-century novels explore the unsaid or underside of the female narrative subtext, to suggest that writing is constrained by extra-literary normalizing processes.⁴⁷ First-person women's narratives are often analysed to demonstrate means by which women have used patriarchal discourse to their own advantage; to rupture the hegemony of meaning, and insert a narrative of resistance. Novels such as The Bell Jar (1963), Wide Sargasso Sea (1966) and Fear of Flying (1974) utilize the mode of fictional autobiography to extend the utterances of the alienated individual and expose the contradictions of the patriarchal ideology of the feminine.

'Identity' and 'experience' are keywords for Second Wave politics, where women demanded liberation from predetermined feminine identities which themselves limited access to a whole wealth of social experiences. Early critics, in their endeavour to account for the mechanisms which maintain female subordination, tended to overstate the currency of universal

sisterhood, thus denying that women from other social groups might identify the 'enemy' by quite other means. This is agreed to be a major flaw of early analytical approaches: in foregrounding prevailing images of desired femininity, such theorists omitted to recognize that these stereotypes tended to target preferred/outlawed forms of white, bourgeois, heterosexual femininity. Black, working-class or lesbian women arguably respond differently to such images, which appear to affirm their own invisibility within Western culture, and therefore additionally connote racist and heterosexist social givens. Such blindness implicates white, middle-class, heterosexual feminists as culpable in constructing alternative 'realities' for women which ignore the material effects of other oppressive ideologies. Early radical perspectives in particular risked homogenizing female experience, and being as prescriptive in positing alternatives as patriarchal liberal humanism is in inscribing a feminine norm. Feminists have always looked to women's texts to express alternative 'realities' from those allowed by a patriarchal ideology. to move away from the tyranny of the central male Subject: it was left to black and lesbian feminists to expose the fact that the 'real' remained the preserve of white and heterosexual subjects.

Interventions by black and lesbian critics have greatly diversified critical responses and approaches. They argue that the emerging female literary history is blind to racial and non-heterosexual forms of identity, and have inserted work by women previously ignored by both the critical and feminist mainstream. Black and lesbian writers and critics produce texts

with the strong conviction that their 'realities' are considered non-universal and have been outlawed or suppressed in literary history, as they have from history in general. A possible side-effect of this is that they eschew the 'rules' of literary and critical discourse more effectively than many white feminists, and question the assumptions which underpin Western notions of aesthetic worth. Recent feminist critical anthologies have addressed questions of racial, class-specific and homosexual identity, but usually by including token essays by lesbian and black feminists, which arguably serves to reinforce racist and heterosexist notions that the 'important' work of feminist criticism lies elsewhere.⁴⁸

Countering the thematic excesses of some white feminist criticism, black feminist criticism finds a different 'tradition' of representation and form in the work of twentieth-century black women writers, where classic 'literary' forms of narration are themselves rejected as colonizing forces. They are less concerned with reconstructing images of women, asserting that the white feminist view of stereotypes fails to acknowledge that stereotypes of black women allow them no access to prevalent standards of 'femininity' at all. However undesirable a male-designated femininity might be, in the light of racial/cultural difference, it comes to represent a hierarchy of relative power positions among women:

Each black woman image was created to keep a particular image about white women intact. Another way of putting it is that the aspects of woman that had negative connotations in the society were ascribed to black women so white women could be viewed, as Alice Walker would

later phrase it, to be 'perfect in the eyes of the world'.⁴⁹

Lesbian feminism had to confront one particularly thorny problem: of defining what constitutes a 'lesbian text'. The fact of authorial identity is unreliable because, 'one of the most pervasive themes in lesbian criticism is that woman-identified writers, silenced by a homophobic and misogynistic society, have been forced to adopt coded and obscure language and internal censorship.'⁵⁰ An author-centred position would also discredit the validity of lesbian readings of any women's text - where the emphasis has been on foregrounding representations of female friendship and love which may or may not be sexual. Lesbian critiques are invaluable because they expose a tendency among other feminists to continue privileging intimate relationships with men, as well as countering the heterosexist myth that lesbianism is purely a sexual identity.

Lesbian and black feminist approaches serve to illustrate the means by which mainstream feminists have unwittingly retained a firm investment in patriarchal realities, by failing to perceive the extent to which many women's lives are governed by other oppressive mechanisms. Bell Hooks, for one, argues that 'a feminist ideology that mouths radical rhetoric about resistance and revolution while actively seeking to establish itself within the capitalist patriarchal system is essentially corrupt'.⁵¹ At the time of writing, feminist textual criticism has reached a phase of relative stagnation: this is particularly true of the most widely read anthologies. These collections reproduce the same core of 'canonical' critical pieces: analyses have

concentrated on certain 'core' texts at the expense of others; and lesbian and black feminists appear to be allowed space merely to justify their right to a critical presence at all.⁵² To negotiate a way out of this impasse we must accept that cultural and literary criticism are forms of knowledge with a prior inscription in patriarchal discursive networks, which institutionalize preferred cultural meanings, and comfortably contain and defuse opposition. As Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn caution:

If feminist scholars are concerned with challenging and changing the ideology which has subjugated women, then they must beware of borrowing analytical categories from it.⁵³

Feminists can mark out a space for themselves within such bodies of knowledge, but more radical actions are required in order to forge any significant form of ideological or discursive resistance.

WAYS FORWARD: THEORIES OF DISCOURSE, KNOWLEDGE AND POWER

In his reassessment of the extensive power of state ideological processes, Althusser maintains that 'the "obviousness" that you and I are subjects - and that that does not cause any problems - is an ideological effect'.⁵⁴ Ideology, then, is the central factor in the interpellation of the subject - its (sometimes contradictory) effects determine our social realities. The humanist notion that individuals precede their subject positions, and are in a position to 'choose' them is thereby discredited,

and the illusion of choice or freedom is itself seen as mediated along ideological lines. Althusser would assert that we are inserted into subject positions upon entry into the Symbolic Order of language. Feminist accounts of gender socialization would seem to concur in this view, where expectations of preferred forms of childhood behaviour seem to gain credence from the fact of biological difference, to the point where a consciousness of the 'fixity' of gender roles appropriate to boys and girls appears to be communicated from an extremely early age.

In general, feminists have argued that the success of ideological processes lies in their ability to conceal their own unstable cultural/historical specificity under the guise of universal, transhistorical 'natural' forms of behaviour. This is particularly true of the processes which determine the private sphere. The most sacrosanct high Liberal principles of freedom of speech and choice are themselves perceived as an ideological effect of a fixed and stable individual and unique identity. A Liberal Humanist philosophy is therefore positively grounded in the deification of difference - not least the discrete qualities of gender difference - and the idea of the free-floating individual is ideologically reinforced in the multifarious discourses that comprise Western forms of knowledge. Paradoxically the radical feminist rhetoric of raising consciousness through sharing experience, at once celebrates individualism while emphasizing the power of collective change; and a central problematic for all feminists is to what extent they affirm a woman's right to choose, or if there are 'choices' that, for political reasons, would be removed altogether. I

previously observed that Michele Barrett has recently located feminism within liberal humanist philosophy. The above paradox, however, suggests that feminist politics anticipates an anti-humanist future, where poststructuralist critiques of Western epistemological binarism might facilitate a movement beyond the impasse of what so far has been dubbed 'patriarchal ideology'.

In her Introduction to the 1988 edition of Women's Oppression Today, Barrett foresees 'the concept of ideology being replaced by the terms "discourse" and "subjectivity"'.⁵⁵ And certainly for writers such as Michel Foucault the term ideology as used by Marxists is constricting, connoting as it tends to, distortions of reality which are wielded as instruments of power by a dominant social group. Althusser's account of the relationship between RSA and ISA leaves us with the impression that ideology (like 'false consciousness' or 'bad faith') is an effect of repression. Once consciousness (of class struggle) is attained, might one transcend the prison-house of ideology in the pursuit of 'truth'? Althusser's model of ideology on the one hand implicates all aspects of social life - whether actions maintain or challenge the status quo; on the other, Althusser posits a space where representation of the subject's distorted relation to their reality might be 'corrected' unequivocally. For example, Althusser states that 'I do not rank art among the ideologies',⁵⁶ affording art a privileged space beyond the welter of power struggles. We are prompted to question whether he considers Marxism itself as transcending the taint of such forces, which would undermine his whole hypothesis of the very immutability of

ideological insertion. Barrett clearly discounts the possibility of a space outside, arguing that contestation of existing power relations must occur at the point of a dominant ideology's contradictions. Patriarchy certainly appears immune to the invasion of 'alternative' cultures - leading poststructuralist feminists to assert that the operations of power are more complex than a mere flexing of political muscle by the dominant group.

Foucault's analysis of discursive formations conceives of discourse as an effect of power (as distinct from domination) which is inscribed in all social relations. The ways discourse can be militated against a subordinate group are therefore more multifarious than Althusser's account of the effects of ISAs. It is argued that Foucault's model tends, at abstract extremes, towards an ahistoricism which occludes the necessity to explore discourses which elide or subordinate women in culturally/historically specific terms.⁵⁷ We may well generalize about the existence of a long-lived and historically resilient hegemonic force known as 'patriarchy', but this precludes the production of any effective response or resistance. I would argue that Foucault's view of history is simply incompatible with a Marxist one. If Engels and Marx use an evolutionary model of history, Foucault conceives of it in terms of discontinuity - a site of fracturation and transformation, rather than an organism which, bar revolution, continues to derive impetus from the conditions of the past. Furthermore, Foucault sees relations of dominant to dominated as unstable and vulnerable; but networks of power as tenacious and resistant to transformation. Discourse is the containing principle of what can be known and therefore what can

be thought: discursive formations can disseminate and create new hybrid forms which often result from the incorporation of contradictions, and herald epistemic breaks in continuity.

I would argue that Althusser's conceptual framework includes aporia that undermine the entire ideological edifice. Foucault's analysis of discourse and power might at first sight appear a more pessimistic vision of the social formation, but by locating power and claims to 'truth' at the level of discourse - the ordering principle of knowledge - he prevents an underestimation of the effects of power, upon both dominant and subordinate. I therefore disagree with Barrett that ideology is simply 'replaced' by discourse or subjectivity; for feminist purposes the discursive approach, while not projecting an 'outside' or neutral sphere for intervention, at least tentatively addresses the problems of resistance from within:

Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power...These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network.⁵⁸

Resistance, it could be argued, lies in the gaps of discourse - the very contradictions that Althusser appears to identify in his account of ideology.

While ideology allows us to articulate how subject positions are realized and institutionalized in material practices, a theory of discourse has been embraced by those feminists who wish to examine the problems of articulation itself. Foucault, among others, has famously asserted that 'knowledge is power', that all

knowledge is formalized and codified appearing to delimit the thinkable. However, because of Foucault's insistence that he merely describes rather than explains the existence of epistemic shifts, it is a huge leap of faith to assert an oppositional point of rupture where women might 'redefine' themselves in face of powerful gendered social 'truths'. Is not feminist knowledge always at the mercy of prior discursive formations which can either transform it or demand 'coherence' on its own terms?

Michel Foucault situates knowledge and the construction of systems of knowledge at the heart of civilization; where shifts and fractures occur in the epistemological formation, new epistemic 'spaces' are negotiated. His account of the effect of the 'infinity' or pre-existence of discourse which 'inserts' the subject into its own symbolic order, is to further extend Althusser's position on ideology. To acknowledge one's place in an order of things constructed, mediated and perceived through the fabric of knowledge systems is not equivalent to transcendence of such 'knowledge' (defying the liberal humanist position that 'man' creates himself). At first sight this seems a pessimistic analogue of powerlessness. If, for example, we accept that women are at one level excluded by a patriarchal discourse which simultaneously subordinates and contains them, how do feminists construct a position of opposition to navigate a means out of such a double bind? Foucault is oblique about the effectiveness of opposition, but does not imply that he regards it as impossible to break the power nexus; he is more concerned to pinpoint complexities in establishing hierarchies in differing power relations, which in the twentieth century, filter down the

entire social formation - with the effect that we largely 'police' ourselves and each other without the need for an omnipresent coercive force:

Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and build up what we could be to get rid of this kind of political 'double bind', which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures.⁵⁹

Discourse cannot simply be reduced to a quality of (written and spoken) language, despite Foucault's assertion that 'knowledge' supercedes language - in that language inserts the subject firmly into the social formation affording a path to shared meaning and representation. Epistemic fractures are described as arbitrary and relational, determining which can be thought as well as which cannot ('unthought' lies in the constantly deferred and unknowable origin of orders of knowledge). Foucault's definition of discourse is that the 'statement' is the elementary unit which enables a group of signs to coexist and the rules of discourse to become manifest. Statements are part of a network which constitutes a discursive formation, and produces and defines its 'object' of enquiry. Such a view is reminiscent of early feminists' sense of an inability to successfully commandeer language which itself seems constructed along patriarchal lines:

For can I, in fact, say that I am this language I speak, into which my thought insinuates itself to the point of finding in it the system of all its own possibilities,

yet which exists only in the weight of sedimentations my thought will never be capable of actualizing altogether?⁶⁰

Discourse functions through its representations of 'reality' or truth (eg by situating the mad or other on the underside of reason/discourse) which itself determines the limits of that reality. An effect we witness in the operation of ideological processes, such as the institution of the family which in its abstract representation, is nuclear, heterosexually oriented, monogamous, non-incestuous and becomes the supposed 'reality' of the desired social order at a micro level even though the range of family forms is diverse (lesbian couple, working mother, etc). The discursive norm is set against all 'hybrid' forms as the natural ideal, precisely by cataloguing and defining the range of possible 'deviant' 'imitations'. But Foucault would not accept that such representations can ever refer to an ordinary and value-neutral 'real'. Representation in such a formulation can only signify the discourse of representation current in a given episteme.

Foucault's analysis of power and its creation in discourse returns us to the idea of subjectivity. By examining the 'rules' of discourse, the means by which human beings are made into subjects occupying a multitude of potentially conflicting subjectivities, we can theoretically reject certain subject positions. But we cannot block the effect of discourse in situating us by the actions of other subject positions: discourse is adept at assimilating the very anomalies it creates. Discourse (re)creates normal/deviant identities which seem to be

a matter of 'choice' - although the knowledge of 'perverse' choices may be used to facilitate punishment, repression or incarceration. The myth of sacred individualism makes us value what we 'are', as if that being was self-evident, unitary and non-contradictory:

Thus conceived, discourse is not the majestically unfolding manifestation of a thinking, knowing speaking subject, but on the contrary, a totality, in which the dispersion of the subject and his discontinuity with himself may be determined.⁶¹

Chris Weedon suggests that feminists should use poststructuralism to produce knowledge 'which will serve feminist interests';⁶² one way of achieving this aim might be to occupy outlaw positions to secure an identity which announces the point at which discourses of the natural threaten to collapse. In The History of Sexuality: Volume One (1979), Foucault describes the ways in which 'norms' are established and abnormality accommodated by rendering 'deviant' forms of behaviour visible as an object of knowledge. In addition he locates a double bind within such discourses as psychoanalysis and sexology. If gathering knowledge by case-histories of sexual deviance allows homosexuals, for example, to be positioned 'outside' the realms of normal sexual behaviour, a correlative effect is to empower those 'deviants' themselves. By displaying their place as threat within the dominant discourse of heterosexuality, whose determining condition of possibility is in the affirmation of a category of homosexuality:

The language and law that regulates the establishment of heterosexuality as both an identity and an institution, both a practice and a system, is the language and law of defense and protection: heterosexuality secures its self-identity and shores up its ontological boundaries by protecting itself from what it sees as the continual predatory encroachments of its contaminated other, homosexuality.⁶³

Homosexuals, therefore, can embrace the identity and subject position which is a residual effect of the use of documentary evidence, which confirms the widespread practices of homosexuality, by appropriating the meanings of repressive knowledge systems. The homosexual can celebrate an outlawed status by perceiving it as shared, rather than aberrant and unique - 'Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.'⁶⁴ It is precisely this empowering effect that Weedon exhorts feminists to exploit. If patriarchally oriented discourse can confine women within the thrust of biological determinism, it simultaneously allows feminists to explore the limits of biology. Like heterosexuality, the notion of natural 'castrated' femininity is predicated upon the category of the unfeminine, or 'phallic' woman. As I argue earlier, the fact that feminists have negotiated a 'place' within influential academic discourses already situates them in a strong position to chart the limits of meaning sustaining patriarchal power. Feminists might, like Foucault, prescribe an 'archaeological' viewpoint which does not position them outside the existing order of things, but allows them to review its ordering principles from within, and assert

that they might be otherwise.

Foucault does not provide answers which signal the end of a quest for feminist knowledge: feminism as a destabilizing underside of patriarchal discourse must of necessity constantly revise and re-revise its terms of reference, in order to thwart engulfment by power networks which ceaselessly threaten to contain and defuse it. Texts such as The History of Sexuality, though not foregrounding women's sexual role for special treatment, encourage consideration of the perniciousness of the means by which the female body, imprisoned within its sexual/procreative function, becomes the site of struggle for meaning:

Dominant discourses of female sexuality which define it as naturally passive, together with dominant social definitions of women's place as first and foremost in the home, can be found in social policy, medicine, education, the media and the church and elsewhere.'⁶⁵

A poststructuralist stance might inform the beginnings of a new radical resistance from 'within', and prevent contemporary feminists falling into Althusser's trap of gesturing towards a 'truth' that is only an effect of knowledge. In order to pursue this we need to shift our gaze from ideology and discourse to a consideration of the way the twentieth-century obsession with sexuality serves to concretize women's subordination. Similarly it will be necessary to address the means by which the language of liberation and sexual revolution infected the emerging feminist discourse of the late 1960s.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SEXUAL SELF: FEMINIST DEBATES ON SEXUALITY AND DESIRE

What sustains our eagerness to speak of sex in terms of repression is doubtless this opportunity to speak out against the powers that be, to utter truths and promise bliss, to link together enlightenment, liberation, and manifold pleasures; to pronounce a discourse that combines the fervour of knowledge, the determination to change the laws, and the longing for the garden of earthly delights.¹

Foucault's statement, quoted above, cogently sums up the dilemma that the so-called 'Sexual Revolution' posed for feminists in the 1970s. On the one hand, calls for liberation from sexual repression seemed perfectly compatible with women's liberation and the demand that women should have control over their own reproductive capacities. However, women soon discovered that participating in the heretofore forbidden fruits of sexual freedom, revealed many conceptual problems around the sphere of sexuality itself. Female sexual desire had been defined and categorized by men; the terms themselves needed redefinition from a feminist perspective in order to cleanse them of patriarchal connotations. The problem of defining one's terms in feminist discourse is of course a recurrent one, where one is always in the process of 'borrowing' and extending the conceptual apparatuses of our forefathers. It is common for oppressed social groups to appropriate negative terms, defining and positioning them to redefine them positively: but one is still left with the problem that the negative connotations exist in a wider sphere. This is true of sexuality, where definitions of the female sexual response are construed as the obverse of male

sexuality - the passive to complete the active, the lock to fit the key. Sexuality, then, has a history of its own in the Women's Movement, where the question is of a woman's relation to sex and (if sex is destiny) herself. In the early days of the Second Wave, debates about female sexuality tended to focus on 'proper' forms of sexual practice, or more commonly on the means by which female sexuality has been used as a tool of repression, related to issues of sexual violence and pornographic images.

Since Wollstonecraft, feminists have tended to portray women as the guiltless yet guilt-ridden victims of marital sexual relations; and before the 'Sexual Revolution' women might often embark upon married life in a severe state of ignorance about even the basic elements of female/male anatomy. The onset of the 'Permissive Society' of the sixties was supposed to change all that: women were emerging with a new freedom - the right to choose sex before marriage with more than one partner (although this did not extend to being able to refuse sexual contact within marriage) and the 'right' to enjoy sex - a volte face had occurred in medical/social thinking in terms of female sexual response. No longer were women who enjoyed or actively wanted sexual intercourse to be pathologized; sex was to be perceived as an important aspect of physical and mental health. Facing a dearth of writings available on female sexuality, feminists had to accept the insights offered by sexological thinking, and welcome the recommendations of writers such as Kinsey and Masters & Johnson that mutual satisfaction was the desired aim in sexual relations. As Lynne Segal argues, 'by the mid seventies heterosexual sex was taken out of the context of personal

relationships and put in terms of individual needs which were being met, or not met.'² This created an atmosphere where pleasure and satisfaction within relationships was calculated purely on the basis of a single 'end product' - the orgasm.

Many feminists remained sceptical that a vision of female sexual autonomy would actually change the way female sexuality is conceived of as being in the service of male pleasure, since they argued that women's bodies have been sexualized as objects for male desire from time immemorial. They also doubted whether identifying the 'authentic' anatomical site of female pleasure would provide clues to the dynamics of female desire, which had been distorted and suppressed for centuries; sexual women occupied the shady margins of Western culture, and 'decent' women were contained by images of gentility and fragility. The female body in Western medical discourse was a volatile mechanism, whose balance could easily be upset. Contemporary theorists perceive tensions in the way desired forms of sexual behaviour are enforced by means of identifying and cataloguing forms of deviance; and although heterosexuality is situated as correlative with the most natural form of sexual expression, the body of sexological and psychoanalytical casework deals with the sexual 'failures' of this world - people whose responses turn out 'abnormal'. This points to what Jeffrey Weeks terms an 'enduring paradox' - 'heterosexuality is natural yet has to be attained, inevitable but constantly threatened, spontaneous yet in effect to be learnt.'³

DEFINING SEXUALITY

One formidable difficulty lies in attempting to limit and determine what 'sexuality' means. The breadth and scope of the term makes it unwieldy to the point of meaninglessness. It is summoned by sexologists, feminists, and libertarian theorists alike, and has passed into common usage to encompass so many aspects of human sexual life. Strictly speaking, the term sexuality refers to the quality of being 'sexual' and pertains to relations between the sexes; but this definition itself throws up tensions between what might be deemed biological fact and what is overlaid by cultural convention. Analyses of human sexuality tend to assume fundamental distinctions between the sexes on the basis of anatomy, and when we talk about sex it is assumed that we are talking about coitus between a man and a woman. As Jeffrey Weeks avers, the centrality of definitions of sex as a procreative force has hierarchized sexual practices, with heterosexuality at the centre, the diffuse but defining principle against which deviations from the 'norm' have been identified.⁴

The procreative capacity may well be a biological given, but sexual pleasure and desire exist outside such constraints, and are affected by historico-cultural and ideological forces, as well as being subject to social control. The categorization of heterosexuality as a discrete set of sexual practices which announces a complete identity in itself is a relatively new phenomenon, corresponding with the creation of the 'homosexual' as a medical model, which described an individual rather than an act which could be potentially practiced by all humans. The

nineteenth century fervour to categorize certain forms of sexual practice resulted in a conflation of the act and the individual:

The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality...The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.⁵

In face of the multiplication of discourses around sexuality, there grew a quest for the origins of the sexual response in biologicistic explanations, linked to the organs requisite for procreation - and in the cases of 'deviance', their malformation. Although all sexual sensations find their focus in bodily response, whether provoked by physical or mental stimuli, some come to be deemed natural or normal, by virtue of their necessity to facilitate conception. In this way, male orgasm, synonymous with ejaculation, is fundamental to the 'natural' expression of sexuality (coitus); whereas female orgasm is not essential and has, conversely, had a more chequered history.

In Freudian psychoanalytical theory sexual 'health' became one of the indicators of mental health; but as it is a commonplace to observe that the penis achieved a huge symbolic significance - as phallus - in Freudian theory, it is clear that female sexuality is merely considered as an adjunct to male sexuality. The Penguin collection of Freud's essays on sexuality contains a final piece devoted to the problem of female sexuality, implying simultaneously that the construction of female sexuality is different and problematic, whilst being subordinate and marginal

to a broader theory of sexuality based on the male model. For Freud the active sexual urge is itself 'masculine', something which both pre-pubescent girls and boys experience auto-erotically, but something which is repressed in the 'normal' pubescent girl, to facilitate her entry into a passive feminine sexual order.⁶ Children, in Freud's terms, possess masculine terms of sexual reference, which girls acquire by means of a seemingly universally acquired penis envy, leading them to regard themselves as castrated, and necessarily inferior beings. This conceptual framework leads to a very complex view of the development of female sexuality; while the possession of a penis allows boys a relatively trouble-free transition from immature auto-eroticism, to the adult quest for an appropriate sexual object, the female's path from immature (clitoral) to mature (vaginal) sexual identification is a treacherous one:

When erotogenic susceptibility to stimulation has been successfully transferred by a woman from the clitoris to the vaginal orifice, it implies that she has adopted a new leading zone for the purposes of her later sexual activity. A man, on the other hand, retains his leading zone unchanged from childhood.⁷

The implication in Freudian theory that female sexuality constituted the underside of male sexuality conceptualized as a lack, or absence of the penis, sedimented notions of female inferiority into psychoanalytical and sexological thinking. Coupled with this is his suggestion that in order for the transition from clitoral to vaginal identification the girl begins to sense shame and disgust at her previous masturbatory

pleasures, which itself appears to inform sexological approaches to frigidity.⁸

Juliet Mitchell in Psychoanalysis and Feminism (1974) offers an apology for Freud, arguing that he uses the terms masculine and feminine to suggest the cultural differentiations they imply (eg. between passivity and activity), and that the phallogocentric organization of his theories is 'not a recommendation for a patriarchal society, but an analysis of one.'⁹ In this sense Freud's language can be appropriated in the way that Lacan and Mitchell later did; the phallus becomes correlative with the Symbolic Order - the entry into language, and thus socialization which has both historical and cultural determinants. In this way the phallus is symbolic of power, the possession of a penis being the boy's passport to his entry into the patriarchal order, and the promise that one day he too could assume the dominant position (in sexual and social terms) of his father. The absence of the penis informs, at a symbolic level, the woman's lack of power, her social position illustrating the power of that lack. It is certainly the case that Freudian theory is ineluctably entrenched in the discursive formation that enabled its appearance, and the uses that Freudian theory have since been put to seek to provide a model of sexuality which hinges on the biological and natural rather than the social and cultural.

In common with Freud, sexologists such as Havelock Ellis considered a person's sexual history as of vital importance to understanding the development of psycho-sexual problems in adult life. Sexology, the 'scientific' examination of sex, involves a cataloguing and interpretation of all forms of sexual practice

which are then hierarchicized as more or less 'deviant': again, the assumption is that at the origins of the human sexual impulse there is a natural form of response, which can be corrupted by biological or cultural means. In a positive light, the sexological tradition is seen to have offered individuals a space to explore their inhibitions, their fetishes, or their 'perversions' in a more tolerant atmosphere of objective scientific exploration: often a person might find that they belong to a category, and that their 'problem' is not unique. More negatively, it can be argued that sexology inscribes in our culture notions of proper and acceptable forms of sexual behaviour, and comprises 'a more or less coherent body of assumptions, beliefs, prejudices, rules, methods of investigation and forms of moral regulation, which still shape the way we live our sexualities.'¹⁰ Sexology might well be perceived as a body of research which in its claim to a privileged knowledge of the sexual impulses, has 'the power to adjudicate on normality and abnormality'.¹¹ In addition, it arguably possesses a hidden agenda that is rooted in a biologicistic model of sexuality, which necessarily includes a view of female and male sexuality as different and complementary. The passive female responds to the active male, whose sexual urges are only barely held in check by cultural behavioural norms; and women are themselves implicated in containing this explosive male force.

'Sexuality', however, might be more provocatively regarded as a social presence which bears little relation to 'nature' or 'biology', and whose realm incorporates all humans, bringing together the capacity to reproduce, desire and need, fantasy,

gender identity and bodily differences. Unlike sexologists, theorists such as Jeffrey Weeks and Michel Foucault do not accept the veracity of 'scientific' essentialist claims, and assert to the contrary that there is no inner truth or sexual essence at the heart of every human being. They argue instead that in the wake of religion's demise over the past two centuries, sex became destiny - that is to say, we are what we desire.¹² Accordingly homosexuals were not just men and women with a non-heterosexual orientation, they were defined as a different breed, a third sex. Ellis coined the term 'invert', implying the status of a congenital anomaly, and lesbians such as Radclyffe Hall regarded themselves as naturally aberrant, the fact of their biological femaleness being merely a physiological carapace which contained a male 'soul'.

Until recently feminists have seemed reluctant to interrogate the field of sexuality and the theories that inform it, although the problem of the sexualization of women is a central issue in feminist thought. The dominant feminist line has tended to be one of defence - to argue that women's sexual authenticity lies elsewhere - rather than taking the form of an attack upon entrenched beliefs around sexual selfhood. Later feminist theorists have followed the lead of thinkers such as Michel Foucault, arguing that sexuality is an historical construct, and is meaningless without its relevant socio-historical context. This facilitates a further and more concerted attack upon the status of the natural in Western epistemology; a move readily compatible with earlier feminist endeavours to deconstruct the naturalization of the social self. For feminists, it is

important to recognize that the production of sexualities is sustained and endowed with meaning by a complex and contradictory signifying system, in order to analyse the social construction of sexuality. Following Foucault and Weeks, the nature of the relationship between sex and power can then be further investigated.

Instead of taking nature - 'biology' - as the raw material for analysing the social, contemporary theorists on sexuality investigate how social relations of sexual difference/differing sexualities are 'naturalized' and made an intrinsic part of a person's identity. Despite the fact that biology might provide the preconditions for human sexuality, Jeffrey Weeks prefers 'to see in biology a set of potentialities which are transformed and given meaning only in social relationships'.¹³ Feminism, meanwhile, still tends to conflate the biological and cultural when it comes to studies of female sexuality, and this seems to be an inevitable effect of drawing upon theories of sexuality constructed with male sexual response as the motivating force. This is true of Freudian theory which 'uses visible anatomical difference as its guarantee of psychic difference and women's inferiority',¹⁴ and focuses discussion around anatomy, whilst decentring questions of cultural and ideological influences upon a person's sexual motivation. In the case of Freudian theory and its legacy, 'anatomical division is seen as equivalent to sexual identity and has been privileged as the fundamental symbolic category in sexuality',¹⁵ with the effect that at an ideological level anatomy is regarded as the irrevocable defining principle of sexual response. The meanings that have been applied to

female sexuality within feminism are conflicting - particularly where the findings of sexologists such as Kinsey and Masters and Johnson have been variously regarded as the key to liberating female sexual awareness, or as evidence of the imposition of a further series of oppressive and coercive structures upon female sexual life.

FEMALE SEXUALITY - THE LEGACY OF SEXOLOGY

Foucault has asserted that 'it is possible that where sex is concerned, the most long-winded, the most impatient of societies is our own.'¹⁶ Nowhere is this impatience, this eager search for the truth about sex, more evident than in sexological thought. During the early years of the twentieth century, Havelock Ellis was credited with heralding a new era of sexual enlightenment, by establishing sexology as an exact science. He identified the existence of a female sexuality which was not pathological; and in creating 'scientific' explanations for homosexual desire he promoted some degree of tolerance to illicit forms of behaviour. Nonetheless, his relatively radical views on human sexuality did not lead him to interrogate the qualities assumed to govern discrete forms of masculine or feminine behaviour. Female sexuality was still viewed as determined by the reproductive urge, and the power dynamics invested in heterosexual sex was endorsed as an expression of the natural biological order of things. His most influential volumes - Studies in the Psychology of Sex (1913) - whilst libertarian in some respects, continue to view women as the receiver of the male, arguing that some

conventional feminine attributes, such as modesty, are essential to trigger the chemistry of sexual attraction: 'the women who is lacking in this kind of fear is lacking, also, in sexual attractiveness to the normal and average man'.¹⁷ Women, Ellis maintains, desire to be conquered: this, of course, seems to be a small step towards legitimizing rape as something women 'unconsciously' desire.¹⁸

Sexology bases its hypotheses of sexual behaviour primarily upon perceptions of the male, and:

takes as given the particular form of male sexuality that exists under male supremacy and attempts to universalize it, so that it becomes the model of sexuality in general...The model thus reflects and reinforces the male supremacist notion that the (male) sexual urge is either uncontrollable or, if repressed, causes neurosis or finds an outlet in sex crimes.¹⁹

In common with Freudian theories, sexology appeared to accept that the male should provide the paradigm for natural, healthy sexual response defined in terms of a goal-oriented role, beginning with penetration and ending with ejaculation. Healthy masculine sexual behaviour was still cast in acquisitive terms, whereas the female sexual response should be passive and receptive. Nonetheless later sexologists such as Kinsey and Masters and Johnson refuted Freud's distinction between the clitoral and vaginal orgasm - and therefore the notion of a female transition from immature to mature sexual behaviour - by asserting that all orgasmic sensations emanated from the clitoris. Such findings suggested that sexual intercourse was not necessarily the most effective means by which women could

receive sexual pleasure, prompting a degree of moral confusion about the legitimacy and normality of other types of stimulation. It announced the legitimation of sexual pleasure in women as natural for any healthy woman, and constructed a model of fulfilling 'married love' via the simultaneous orgasm, after the woman has been dutifully 'prepared' for intercourse:

It is not so much denial of the clitoris that is striking as its appearance and disappearance in favour of the mythologized vagina, in defence of the penis as the organizing principle of the sexual act. This displacement allows the idealization of the simultaneous orgasm and a plethora of neurotic symptoms, notably premature ejaculation and frigidity.²⁰

For women the legacy of sexology has been that while female sexual pleasure is acknowledged as biologically natural, sexual response during coitus is not: it is a 'learned' response - not least because women have to unlearn repressive childhood taboos in order to experience pleasure during 'legitimate' sex. Masturbation came to be viewed by sexologists such as Masters and Johnson as 'healthy' perhaps, but very much second best - women are assumed to resort to it between sexual partners, or to practice it in order to increase their orgasmic potential during coitus. From this one can observe that sexuality is still associated with coitus, and though other practices of stimulation are acceptable, they remain subordinate to this as the organizing principle: 'In fact the very term "sexual intercourse", which would in theory mean any form of sexual interaction, is in practice synonymous with coitus in everyday speech as well as in the scientific literature.'²¹

Sexuality has been implicitly accepted by psychoanalysts and sexologists to represent a fusion of culture and nature: the instinct is there from birth, but our transition to healthy adult (hetero)sexuality is a tortuous journey affected by our successful or unsuccessful entry into cultural/social/gendered norms. Foucault, Weeks and many feminist theorists have opposed the biologicistic dimensions of sexology, arguing that sexuality is only definable through specific social meanings - that correct practices, choice of partner/object and periods of abstinence and forms of desire have always changed according to the vicissitudes of history and changing social relations. Sexuality, then, is viewed as susceptible to dominant ideological positions, and as focused upon our consciousness of social reality, rather than animal instincts. We are all profoundly influenced by social notions of incorrect and correct forms of sexual expression, and there are various types of 'punishment' meted out to those who deviate from the current norm.

In the previous chapter I have already outlined the view that ideological apparatuses and their effects become embedded in the subject's consciousness through means of 'education' and interpellation. The way we learn appropriate forms of sexual expression seems to be through punitive responses to undesirable forms of childhood sexual behaviour; the 'secret' of sex is one which many moral reformers would like to retain, even though the will to hide sexual realities is embraced by a 'veritable discursive explosion',²² to use Foucault's words. The association of sex with secrecy and privacy still pervades discourse around sexuality today, and perhaps goes some way to

explaining feminists' reticence to explore the subject in detail. In addition, this explosive obsession with sex is primarily exhibited as a concern to catalogue unnatural and 'deviant' forms of sexual expression, whereas the 'natural' that presumably underpinned all this chaos was left largely undocumented: 'the legitimate couple, with its regular sexuality, had a right to more discretion.'²³ Foucault's critique of psychoanalytical and sexological discourses has proved an important source for feminists, because he identifies clear links between social control of licit and illicit sexual practices and the operation of power between individuals and institutions. The notion of sexuality as natural instinct is one utilized within society to reaffirm preferred social/gendered hierarchies, and which has no currency or meaning outside these modalities of power:

Sexuality must not be described as a stubborn drive, by nature alien and of necessity disobedient to a power which exhausts itself trying to subdue it and often fails to control it entirely. It appears rather as an especially dense transfer point for relations of power: between men and women, young people and old people, parents and offspring, teachers and students, priests and laity, an administration and a population.²⁴

Networks of power and their relation to individual drives and practices is complex, and yet in Foucault's analysis 'power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere'.²⁵ One cannot identify a singular oppressive force from whence all definitions of sexuality derive; and the more sex is cast as the root of the self, the harder it is to combat the tenacious association of certain practices with

the natural, yet such practices remain the most ill-defined. For feminists approaching the problem of sexuality in relation to women's material and ideological conditions of existence, it is necessary to reinforce the point that, 'sexuality is as much about words, images, ritual and fantasy as it is about the body: the way we think about sex fashions the way we live it.'²⁶ Many of the images, words, rituals and fantasies utilized in modern representations of sex and sexuality involve the use of women's bodies - often fragmented and idealized - to stimulate male desire. It is these sexualized images of women which early Second Wave feminists took as their primary object of study maintaining, to varying degrees, that 'what is specific to the oppression of women of all races and classes is that it takes a sexual form.'²⁷

EARLY SECOND WAVE FEMINISM AND THE 'SEXUAL REVOLUTION'

Second Wave pioneers variously attempted to insert the problem of female sexuality - its current patriarchal construction, and quests for a more authentic model - into their wider political agenda. Part of their struggle has been to find means to liberate women from the sexualized female images that they encounter daily, and which perpetuate the mythification of woman as passive vessel/victim to the dominant male sexual urge. A crucial aim was to correct the patriarchal perspective which objectifies the female body; but an equally important project involved offering a positive view of the future, where women might be able to negotiate their own desires and needs outside the patriarchal imperative. Such a quest led feminists to seek a

model of female sexuality which could be deemed more authentic than the patriarchally defined one; a description of female sexual response that swept away all the old myths and affirmed female sexual autonomy. In a sense these objectives appeared to converge with those of sexologists, who were also in the business of lifting the veil on human sexual behaviour; even though the degree to which they afforded women any liberation has been latterly extensively questioned.

The so-called 'Sexual Revolution' was believed to have been engendered by the endeavours of feminists and sexual radicals alike. Both used the language of liberation from repression, and attempted to create an arena of honest open discussion around human sexuality, in order to destroy some of the more pernicious myths that encumber it. The problem peculiar to feminist explorations into this field was that sexuality never yielded itself up as an area with clearly demarcated boundaries; the conventional view of the preferred manifestations of female sexuality as passive, receptive and even masochistic, seemed to be reaffirmed in diverse ideological perspectives on women's 'proper' social and domestic duties. Despite the problems of establishing a viable political stance on a subject which many would see as beyond the purview of politics, feminists, having broken down the conceptual boundary between private and public spheres of social life, demonstrated that medical, legal and philosophical perspectives on female sexuality directly affected issues related to reproductive rights, rape, domestic violence, pornography and the sexual division of labour. Wherever feminists fought for equality, they confronted the problems of

sex. How, for example, could one make marriage a more egalitarian institution, when until very recently the male still had a legal right to sexual intercourse on demand?

Radical feminists in the United States looked for inspiration to the research of contemporary sexologists, such as Alfred Kinsey and Masters and Johnson. They had finally quashed the Freudian notion of female transference from one type of orgasm to another. They made it official: women achieve orgasm solely by direct or indirect stimulation of the clitoris, and in this 'discovery' feminists hoped to decentralize coitus, armed with sexological proof that it was the least effective way for women to gain sexual satisfaction. Anne Koedt's essay, 'The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm' (1970), pursues this point, asserting that now the 'myth' has been exposed, women should use this information to transform and redefine heterosexuality:

What we must do is redefine our sexuality. We must discard the 'normal' concepts of sex and create new guidelines which take into account mutual sexual enjoyment... We must begin to demand that if certain sexual positions now defined as 'standard' are not mutually conducive to orgasm, they no longer be defined as standard.²⁸

She concludes by implying that once women are made conscious of the fact of clitoral orgasm, the stability of the heterosexual institution is threatened; one consequence of which will be to 'open up the whole question of human sexual relationships beyond the confines of the present male-female role system'.²⁹ Koedt, however, does not subscribe to the logic of other radical feminists' conclusions - which was to suggest that lesbianism is

the only viable political and sexual choice for women to make in order to forge a revolution. The main thrust of her argument is to expose the means by which current definitions of appropriate sexuality are correlative with patriarchal power and effective social control of women. In her acknowledgement of the impact of social processes external to sex she appears to concur with Kate Millett:

Coitus can scarcely be said to take place in a vacuum; although of itself it appears a biological and physical activity, it is set so deeply within the larger context of human affairs that it serves as a charged microcosm of the variety of attitudes and values to which culture subscribes.³⁰

Germaine Greer rejects Koedt's position, on the grounds that it prioritizes the clitoris as the sole focus of female sexuality and facilitates 'the substitution of genitality for sexuality'.³¹ It is true that to some extent Koedt's analysis retained an anatomical and potentially biologicistic focus; but Greer herself is unhelpfully oblique with regard to what sexuality can mean. A tendency among feminists writing in the seventies was to celebrate women's new-found 'right' to enjoy sex, without fully addressing the current obstacles to the exercise of such a right. The prevailing assumption appeared to be that some simple sexual energy lay buried under patriarchal definitions, waiting to be released.

Sheila Jeffreys, a British Revolutionary Feminist writing some twenty years after Koedt, argues that earlier feminists reacted too enthusiastically to sexological perspectives on sexual

liberation, carried away by the novelty of being able to talk honestly about sex as a potentially active experience for women. She is critical of Koedt for taking the 'scientific' findings of Masters and Johnson at face value, resulting in a dismissal of the erotic potential of vaginal stimulation in lesbian sexuality.³² Jeffreys accuses earlier feminists in general of colluding with male sexual liberationists with the result that 'the enthusiasm for the fulfilment of women's sexual potential went so far that some feminists confused sexual liberation with the political liberation of women.'³³ Margaret Jackson agrees with Jeffreys, and argues that radical feminists misunderstood the purpose of the 'findings' of Masters and Johnson - 'which is to cement heterosexuality and marriage through the "pleasure bond" of coitus.'³⁴ It is clear that, despite her tentative closing gesture towards a departure from the dominant male-female model of sexuality, Koedt's critical perspective remains exclusively heterosexual. Generally speaking, other feminists' uncritical adoption of sexological premises meant that their pathfinding analysis remained woefully heterosexist.

Contemporaries of Koedt were concerned that placing sexual discovery at the heart of the movement's agenda would encourage introspection, and thus divert attention from collective feminist revolution. In common with later writers such as Jeffreys, Dana Densmore views the emphasis upon sexual revolution as another means to deny women's freedom in other areas:

Sex becomes a religion, existing independently of the individuals who share its particular physical consummation. The media totally bombard us with it. Sex

is everywhere. It's forced down our throats. It's the great sop that keeps us in our place. The big lift that makes our dreary worlds interesting. Everywhere we are sexual objects, and our own enjoyment just enhances our attractiveness. We are wanton. We wear miniskirts and see-through tops. We're sexy. We're free. We run around and hop into bed whenever we please. This is the self-image we have built up in us by advertising and the media. It's self-fulfilling. And very profitable. It keeps us in our place and feeling lucky about it...It makes us look as if we're free and active (actively, freely, we solicit sex from men).³⁵

Whereas Densmore eyes the Sexual Revolution sceptically, there is a tendency among her contemporaries to suggest that there is an incontrovertible, transhistorical, cross-cultural 'true' sexuality lying innate, corrupted and distorted within the female body. Densmore questions the advisability of situating the female quest for ultimate sexual pleasure at the heart of the feminist agenda at all, since this can and should not be the only revolutionary goal of the Women's Movement, when sexual relationships as they are currently defined all too often alienate us from other social bonds, such as female friendship which have always been conceived as of secondary importance to the institution of heterosexuality. The area of sexuality was a dangerous one for feminists, a realm of experience which seemed to invite recourse to biological givens, which often served to undermine the central precepts of feminism - in that difference was the determining feature. Radicals involved in consciousness raising groups in the USA and later in Britain, risked reinforcing the assumption that a liberated woman was first and foremost a sexually liberated one. Moreover, she had a 'duty' to

explore her own sexual potential, using most recent sexological findings as a yardstick - although the fact of women's multi-orgasmic potential was a daunting target for many.

There seemed to be a confusion about what these 'new' discoveries on female sexuality were for. On the one hand scientific endorsement of the clitoris as site of female sexual pleasure might notionally free women from the guilt of being regarded frigid if they failed to become orgasmic during coitus, and this could be used as a means to redefine prevalent meanings of heterosexuality itself. On the other, this information was implicitly used as a means to 'prove' that after all, women were avowedly dominant in one sphere - that of sexual performance. Books and groups encouraged women to view their own dark continents via specula, slides of assorted women's genitalia and through learning masturbatory techniques, supposedly freeing them from their unconscious dependence upon penetrative sex. Betty Dodson is an example of such a sex practitioner, who developed body sex workshops, involving group masturbation sessions.³⁶ At one and the same time women were encouraged to discover their 'natural' potential; but if such potential could only be discovered by the learning of techniques, who were women 'improving' themselves for? The implication behind such approaches to female sexuality is that to foreground 'foreplay' and marginalize penetration solves the problem of unequal power relations between men and women, without having to confront the wider ramifications of heterosexuality as an institution. Yet feminists were also acutely aware that the politics of the bedroom reflected broader social, economic and juridico-political

forces which had already institutionalized inequities of gender, race and class. The problem still was men; and whilst women might rally to the demand to 'get off our backs', changing patterns of (hetero)sexual behaviour was only an ephemeral 'solution' to female oppression, where changing female consciousness of self would not necessarily change males.

Recent feminists who have reviewed radical feminist approaches to sexuality tend to see its agenda for change as prescriptive, moralistic or hopelessly dependent upon the patriarchal heterosexist model of what sexologists deem to be normal or acceptable behaviour. The critique and wholesale redefinition of notions of female sexuality from a feminist perspective did, however, gradually gain purchase within the movement. For feminists engaged in anti-pornography campaigns, or work against sexual violence, approaches to the construction of female sexuality should always involve an attack on the continued male control of women's bodies. The fact that the Women's Liberation Movement was at its peak during a so-called 'Sexual Revolution' in Western society, has resulted in the two terms being conflated at times, so that the Sexual Revolution is seen to primarily serve the interests of women, and sexologists are therefore perceived as the champions of women and feminism. However, many feminists remained sceptical of the pro-feminist guise of sixties sexologists, or of the revolutionary potential of such bestsellers as Alex Comfort's The Joy of Sex (1972). Margaret Jackson argues that despite the gender-neutral rhetoric of some sexual reformers, they are concerned at heart with maintaining a patriarchal status quo:

While they do attack certain patriarchal sexual values, such as the double standard and goal-oriented sex, their primary concern with male sexual inadequacy (defined as failure to achieve or maintain erection), and with the maintenance of heterosexuality and marriage by means of continuous coital connection, could hardly be called feminist.³⁷

Taken at face value, access for women to more information about sexuality might seem positive, but the discourse of sexology still defined sex around the male model, so that penetration remained at the centre, and sexual problems were performative ones, rather than an indication of the inadequacies of the sexological model. If females were to be more active in their desires, this was still supposed to be focused towards male pleasure; setting aside for a moment the question of whether coitus is the most satisfactory practice from a female perspective, this indicates that the dynamics of heterosexual norms were left largely uninterrogated.

However widespread permissiveness is believed to have been throughout the sixties and seventies, there can be no doubt the sexual reformers changed prevailing social attitudes to sexual freedom - at least in a heterosexual environment. This new wave of sexual 'revolution' spawned an increase in the production and sales of mainstream 'soft' pornography, and also heralded the inception of journals such as Forum, whose emergence coincided with the boom in the pornography industry and the production of magazines such as Playboy and Penthouse. Forum's subtitle - 'The International Journal of Human Relations' - effectively announces its major intention of being a serious publication for

the dissemination of information around sexual matters, devoting much space to articles, readers' letters and a problem page. In particular Forum became associated with the Sexual Revolution and the era of 'swinging' (group sex, and partner swapping) - ostensibly addressing the needs of both men and women, via features designed to increase enlightenment and combat sexual 'hang-ups'. In actuality, most of its regular features, including the problem page, arguably reinforced gender differences in the field of sexuality, where problems were what women suffered from and needed advice about in order to better satisfy their husbands.³⁸ Although visual pornographic images were secondary to erotic fiction and articles, and despite the fact that - in theory, at least - it demonstrated a liberal attitude to homosexual relations, Forum served to reinforce a hetero-reality, where 'lesbianism' was acceptable purely as a prelude to heterosexual 'consummation'. In The Sexuality Papers (1984), Coveney et al. have surveyed numerous editions of Forum issued during the seventies, and argue that they ironically demonstrate that women were actively coerced into 'swinging' and 'free' sexual expression for the greater titillation of their male partners - as well as concretizing the male 'right' to promiscuity within marriage. Their overall conclusion is one shared by earlier commentators such as Dana Denmore: that the belief that the Sexual Revolution liberated women is a myth; and that the 'discovery' of women's multi-orgasmic potential was co-opted into the service of male-oriented eroticism. In fact they identify women as moving from a period of guilt about demonstrating active sexual feelings (only 'bad' women did) to a

New Guilt if they were reluctant to participate in an environment of free sexual expression:

This is how the New Guilt works. Instead of women feeling guilty because they don't want sex at all, or because they experienced sexual pleasure in the days when women weren't supposed to have any sexuality, they now have to feel guilty because they have these 'unliberated' antisocial attitudes towards their husbands' 'liberated' practices.³⁹

What is interesting is the coincidence of the 'soft' pornography explosion and media representations of the late sixties and early seventies as the golden age of sex, with the feminist concentration on the need to define personal relationships and redefine female sexuality and desire. The notion of there being any common ground between the two is particularly problematic, since the anti-pornography lobby became a powerful arm of the Women's Movement. Radical feminists, such as Andrea Dworkin, interpreted the images purveyed by pornography as a kind of patriarchal propaganda which reinforced male notions of women as sexual objects who can be 'taken' if necessary by violent force or rape.

Pornography is an essential issue because pornography says that women want to be hurt, forced, and abused; pornography says that women want to be raped battered, kidnapped, maimed; pornography says that women want to be humiliated, shamed, defamed; pornography says that women say No but mean Yes - Yes to violence, Yes to pain.⁴⁰

For radical feminists of the 1970s, pornography quite simply objectified and dehumanized women, and legitimized the

perpetuation of male violence against individual women in their everyday lives. Their definitions of pornography vary, but in the main such representational forms were regarded as fluid enough to encompass all aspects of culture, including advertisements. Radicals such as Adrienne Rich had no doubt that sexualized images of women affected their social experiences and the way men are encouraged to view women: 'The most pernicious message relayed by pornography is that women are natural sexual prey to men and love it'.⁴¹ Early socialist feminists, especially in Britain, were more lukewarm and tended to consider pornography in the light of the boundaries of censorship; that the definitions of 'obscenity' were governed by the moral purity lobby and censorship might equal denial of free speech for women too. Nonetheless the feminist pornography debate became inextricable from the sexuality debate, and tended to further problematize the issue of female desire, since the female body through pornography had seemingly been subjected to wholesale colonization by the male. Dworkin exemplifies this conflation of perspectives:

The sexuality of women has been stolen outright, appropriated by men - conquered, possessed, taken, violated; women have been systematically and absolutely denied the right to sexual self-determination and to sexual integrity; and because the sexuality of women has been stolen, this sexuality itself, it - as distinguished from an individual woman as a sentient being - it can be sold.⁴²

In the early days of Women's Liberation, therefore, most discussions of what could constitute an authentic female

sexuality, were necessarily tainted by the notion that sexuality had been commodified, and that female sexuality could only be critically cast in negative terms - as something women historically lacked. In this context Shere Hite began her research into how individual women regarded their sexuality, and their own personal relationships.

The Hite Report (1976) surely emerged as a result of the collision between an atmosphere of increased explicitness prompted by the Sexual Revolution and the Women's Movement itself. The Report collated the responses of 3,000 American women to a questionnaire addressing issues surrounding sexuality and sexual practices. It consists largely of quotes by these anonymous contributors, categorized under headings such as 'Masturbation', 'Orgasm', 'Intercourse', 'Lesbianism', etc. The findings and ramifications of these replies have been seen as of importance for the early Women's Movement as a means for sharing experiences and providing statistics about women's attitude to sex across the ranges of age and sexual orientation (although the sample is still relatively small and ethnic origins of respondents were not recorded). For the purpose of this discussion, the most interesting part of the book is the section dealing with the Sexual Revolution, where most of the women's responses are profoundly negative, and appear largely pessimistic about the possibility of there being a sexual revolution that would benefit women equally. One woman directly relates sexual revolution to the images of pornography:

It's got a long way to go. If the crap in Playboy or Penthouse is anybody's idea of a sexual revolution then

it's revolting all right. As long as women are exploited sexually, viewed as sex objects and raised from the cradle to accommodate men, the sexual revolution is meaningless. It seems to me that the sexual revolution has just given the con men the chance to sell douches and razors, but that you don't see much in the way of real free expression and happiness, or joy in the body and in sex.⁴³

Another woman comments:

What 'sexual revolution'? I am struggling in a feminist revolution! The so-called sexual revolution, from my point of view, did nothing to liberate women or men. Men got a screw for free and it was done out in the open and under the liberal-radical guise of a revolution against antiquated sex attitudes. Women still wanted those men for lifetime companions because they gave away their bodies and minds and found identity in the man instead of in themselves. Men still maintain the top position in the job market, in women's magazine stories, in bed and in the mind of the female psyche. So really the sexual revolution advertised something I already knew. Women are treated as objects. Only in this 'revolution' the oppressed didn't gain a thing. The oppressor began the 'sexual revolution' through rock music, the cosmetic market, Hugh Hefner, etc., but we weren't liberated from our roles, only more objectified.⁴⁴

From these two examples it is clear that women were beginning to see more liberal acceptance of expressions of female sexuality as further means for male exploitation. Both respondents make connections between sex and its cultural commodification, and this awareness in itself seems to be a tribute to the power of the radical feminist message. However, replies in other chapters demonstrated a depressing inability among women to translate this consciousness into their daily lives.

Although Hite amongst others calls for a redefinition of what we see as sex - where reproduction is no longer perceived as the sole reason for sexual contact and intercourse need not be central to heterosexual experience⁴⁵ - heterosexuality remains the assumed norm for women. The respondents of the survey saw penetrative sex as a 'goal' in their relationships (even if it is a goal that left them feeling largely unsatisfied), and the questionnaire itself is inevitably weighted towards heterosexual experience. Although Hite is careful to use the non-gendered term 'partner', she specifically addresses a question to lesbians which reveals their effective exclusion from other questions. In addition she persists in using the term 'intercourse', which is popularly considered to connote penile penetration. Later, women are asked whether they prefer clitoral stimulation to penetration - a distinction which only makes clear sense in heterosexual terms, where foreplay is seen as part of a progression to 'real' sexual congress.

Nevertheless books such as The Hite Report clearly aided the consciousness raising aspects of the movement, including as it does frank descriptions of individual women's experiences of various sexual activities. Perhaps its major success lay in its exposure of the fact that many women felt pressurized to perform in this 'new era' of sexual freedom, just as they had accepted the 'fact' of female sexual repulsion in the 'dark ages' of sexual ignorance:

Yes, I feel the need to perform orgasmically, competitively with other women at large in the community. I wish I didn't. It really got started when I used to

feel pressure from my former partner, because if I didn't come, it proved he wasn't a 'real man'. But I'm not a star of a two-ring circus.⁴⁶

The Hite Report reads like a catalogue of restraint, disgust and capitulation. 'Freedom' of sexual expression did not guarantee any increased freedom or change in status for women in other areas of their lives. And many feminists, in common with the above women, associated this failure with the way female sexuality is used and objectified by the media, where 'permissiveness' appears to sanction permission for men to use women as sex objects.

The Permissive Society meant many things retrospectively - not least the opportunity for people to bemoan the increasing promiscuity of youth and the subsequent threat to 'family values' of monogamy and female chastity. If something 'offended' against public decency, then it all too often became linked with counter-cultures from hippies to feminists, despite feminists' obvious unease with their supposed leading role in the Sexual Revolution. The Permissive Society is also famously the era when the Pill became widely available, coinciding with feminists' struggle for women's right to greater control over their bodies, especially in the sphere of reproduction. The commonplace that the Pill liberated women more than anything else cements the assumed link between reproduction and female sexuality. It is a link which many feminists left unquestioned, with the result that coitus still determined sex, and the association between contraception and 'family planning' implied that the only freedom women should have in this field is the freedom to space their

pregnancies once a long-term (marital) partnership is achieved. Female sexual expression was still associated with risks, because it remained centred upon penetrative intercourse: you either risked an unwanted pregnancy or accepted the long term risks of the Pill. Contraception and abortion, not a revolution in sexual practices, remained central to feminist debate and in this sense heterosexual feminists contributed to the commonsense view that penetrative intercourse was the pinnacle of sexual experience - although The Hite Report stands as testimony to the inaccuracy of this view - and the purest expression of love is in 'giving oneself completely' to a man.

Feminism was and still is dominated by heterosexual women, and the area of sexual identity itself was often neglected as a potentially divisive subject, which meant that lesbians felt alienated and unrepresented by mainstream feminist discourse. Heterosexual women themselves appeared to be threatened by lesbian dissenting voices in the movement, especially in face of calls for the interrogation of heterosexuality as an institution as well as a sexual choice. Lesbians with a history in gay activism were accustomed to being outspoken about their own right to sexual self-determination, but even today heterosexual feminists remain reluctant to scrutinize the social construction of heterosexuality, and the means by which - as institution - it exerts a powerful influence over women's social/sexual lives. Discourses which inform knowledges of human sexual behaviour contain and categorize homosexuals as subjects bounded and determined by the perceived nature of their desires; heterosexuality evades such simplistic definition - not least

because it is synonymous with a 'normal' way of life, and therefore its practices and characteristics are deemed to be self-evident. This abstract slippage between definitions is perhaps a contributory factor to heterosexual feminists' reluctance to analyse their own sexual choice. It has been left largely to lesbian and gay male critics to examine the differing social/sexual meanings of heterosexuality, and to investigate its ideological power as an institution which affects everyone's lives regardless of one's orientation, and is, accordingly, much more than a mere 'preference'. As a result, the most cogent and contentious analyses of heterosexuality have been produced by gay men (Jeffrey Weeks, Michel Foucault) and lesbian feminists (Adrienne Rich and Sheila Jeffreys), who hold up supposedly natural expressions of desire and pleasure for scrutiny, arguing that all constellations of pleasure and desire are socially and ideologically constructed, rather than part of a natural universal life force.

RADICAL/LESBIAN FEMINISM - REVOLUTIONARY OR PRESCRIPTIVE?

Utopias involving total sexual freedom (or degrees of concubinage) have endured since the nineteenth century. Radical feminist sexual utopias of the seventies increasingly took on a specifically lesbian identity. Such separatist havens were to be for women whose chosen sexual orientation was lesbianism, and also for women who ended sexual relations with men for 'political' reasons, and who may or may not have sex with other women. This reflected a conviction that heterosexual sex

reflected in microcosm gendered power politics played out in the wider social sphere, and for the interim one could only truly liberate women by liberating oneself from sexual relations with men altogether. Such a view is problematical for feminists who felt that heterosexuality - ill-defined as it is - could be reformed from within. As it is, a call for the rejection of male lovers on political grounds, in favour of female lovers or celibacy, implies that the women's right to choose her sexual orientation might metamorphose into no real choice at all within a radical feminist world view. Feminists who retained their sexual ties to men were afraid of being accused of acting in bad faith and shielding the enemy, rather than exposing him to the consequences of men's past atrocities against women. Although very few feminists explicitly called for all women to reject men, the elision of discussions around politically appropriate forms of sexual desire fostered the common conception that there was a correct form of sexual response - even though feminists had only really got as far as identifying the negative effects of the prevailing patriarchal ideology of heterosexuality. It seems that in the sphere of sexual relations at least, women found it difficult to collapse the public and private spheres, and were enraged by what they regarded as the coerciveness of manifestos such as 'The Woman Identified Woman'.⁴⁷ Such a conflict is expressed by a respondent in an interview conducted by Anne Koedt in 1971:

Many feminists are now beginning to at least theoretically consider the fact that there's no reason why one shouldn't love a woman. But I think that a

certain kind of experimentation going on now with lesbianism can be really bad. Because even if you do ideologically think that it is perfectly fine - well, that's a political position; but being able to love somebody is a very personal and private thing as well...⁴⁸

Despite a commitment towards politicizing the personal, many women wanted to draw the line at a policing of sexual practices, which was often perceived as an invasion of a sphere of privacy that should be demarcated as beyond even sexual politics. Heterosexual women were often antagonistic to lesbian feminist writings on sexuality, although happier with Adrienne Rich's potentially more moderate conception of the woman-identified-woman, which could suggest a lesbian bonding, but was mainly interpreted as an exhortation for women to give support to each other rather than drain all their energies in total emotional investments in men. In other words, few took up Rich and others' call to interrogate heterosexuality in the light of constructions of sexual desire and pleasure, preferring rather to analyse its effects outside of this domain - via the institution of marriage, the availability of contraception and so forth.

One slogan - 'Feminism is the theory; lesbianism is the practice' - reputedly first coined by Ti-Grace Atkinson⁴⁹ - exemplifies a deepening rift between some radicals and the main body of heterosexual feminists, in its uncompromising link between a feminist political identity and a lesbian sexual one. And such a position - undoubtedly a minority one - was used to suggest that feminism was necessarily prescriptive in its

delineation of appropriate forms of sexual response. The notion of a correct political identity which encompasses women's most private lives caused heated controversy in the movement, and still does. Many feminists might accept that as an institution, heterosexuality warrants deeper scrutiny, but that this should not affect women's 'right' to retain the sexual 'preference' of heterosexuality. The breadth of disagreement surrounding the issue of sexuality highlighted it as a real theoretical and political problem for feminism. If you could identify 'bad sex' in the form of power plays of dominance and submission and reliance on penetration in heterosexual behaviour, then it is implied that one must set the terms for 'good' non-exploitative sex. Some straight feminists reacted to criticism of their own bad faith by arguing that many lesbians mimicked traditional sex role definitions, particularly in butch/femme roleplay, and were therefore equally inauthentic in their open parody of male/female power axes, and lesbian sexuality itself was gradually rendered vulnerable to extensive criticism.⁵⁰

Sheila Jeffreys, a revolutionary feminist who has had a significant impact upon feminist thinking during the 1980s and 1990s, perhaps exemplifies the most uncompromising position on what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate forms of sexual behaviour, including lesbianism. Jeffreys paints a harshly essentialist view of male sexual impulses, where the male is predator, whose penetration of the female necessarily and always connotes colonization and aggression.⁵¹ The more common position adopted by lesbian feminists from the seventies to the present, is characterized by their struggle to make heterosexual feminists

confront their own homophobia; particularly in some feminists' paranoic fear of a lesbian takeover within the ranks. Straight feminists often rather wilfully ignored the fact of their tendency to 'masculinize' sex; to conduct discussions solely around the arena of sexual violence, pornography and contraception, and to block debates around female desire and sexual pleasure. Meanwhile lesbian feminists pursued a commitment to explore lesbian sexuality and its expression - the resulting debates often causing rifts and conflict, revealing a painful tension between concepts of sex as an expression of one's own personal desires, and sexuality as a political battleground for both feminists and the gay movement.

In retrospect, it seems that heterosexual feminists exaggerated the takeover threat of the 'separatist' tendency, perhaps because debates about sex created real, but futile, fears that each feminist in her private life did not act ethically; futile in that such demands contributed to the popular consciousness that feminism was an ultimately tyrannical form of orthodoxy. Anne Koedt, in her essay 'Lesbianism and Feminism' (1971) attacks what she sees as prescriptive tendencies among radical lesbian feminists as a perversion of 'the personal is political': 'While it is true that there are political implications in everything a woman qua woman experiences, it is not therefore true that a woman's life is the political property of the woman's movement.'⁵²

Adrienne Rich's famous essay 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' (1980) was one of the earliest attempts to analyse the effects of heterosexuality as an institution, which

taints women's lives, whatever their sexual orientation, and which constitutes a major aspect of women's experience of social and sexual reality. Moreover, she accurately pinpoints an area of neglect by feminists: that of heterosexual sex itself, and the normalizing processes that strengthen its centrality and allow it to seem too 'natural' and obvious to demand definition and categorization in the way that 'deviant' sexual practices do. Since much of the rhetoric of the modern feminist movement is arranged around notions of 'choice' or 'freedom', Rich's analysis of heterosexuality as a compulsory practice is challenging:

Feminist theory can no longer afford merely to voice a toleration of 'lesbianism' as an 'alternative life style' or make token allusion to lesbians. A feminist critique of compulsory heterosexual orientation for women is long overdue.⁵³

Seeming to concur with the findings of Michel Foucault and Jeffrey Weeks, Rich identifies the problem of male sexuality as not limited to their predilection for penetration, but something that as an expression of male power amounts to 'a pervasive cluster of forces, ranging from physical brutality to control of consciousness'.⁵⁴ Rich gestures towards a consideration of the ideological impact of dominant definitions of sexuality and their entrenchment within the master discourses of Western patriarchal social reality; but it is a theme which has only latterly been developed.

Feminists of the 1970s, because of their forthright views on sex, tended to be perceived by outsiders as either sexually available women ('liberated' from chastity) or prudes (liberated

from sex altogether); but the problem of female sexuality and the means by which to redefine it positively became an increasingly thorny one in the eighties and nineties, and the prudish image of feminism has held sway. Few feminists dared to suggest a possibility of a future where everyone was 'bisexual', in face of internal debates about sexual identity, even though most believed in theory that current sexual identities were socially constructed and therefore up for redefinition. Shulamith Firestone's The Dialectic of Sex (1970) does display her deep conviction that humankind is innately bisexual, and her bio-technologized utopia predicts a period of total sexual freedom (including the abolition of incest taboos and childhood sexual repression), particularly in her proposed removal of the link between procreation and sexual intercourse in the era of the test tube baby. In common with many early feminists, she believes that sex roles can be transformed by a transformation of sexual behaviour, although her assurance that 'a revolution in every bedroom cannot fail to shake up the status quo',⁵⁴ had not caused any tremors in the world order by the time the New Right moral reaction began to be felt in the 1980s.

DEBATES AROUND SEXUAL IDENTITY - THE 1980s-90s

Recently, feminists have viewed the early years of Women's Liberation and the Sexual Revolution with a colder eye, and sexuality, a subject which always underpinned the central precepts of feminism, has become subject to more intense theoretical scrutiny. Questions of pleasure, desire and

difference were foregrounded, and many theorists became dissatisfied with what they regarded as the simplistic analytical premises of the early Second Wave where it was often assumed that there was a one-to-one relationship between images of women and female oppression. Most notably this has led to intense rifts around the area of pornography, where some women would argue that sexualized images of women can be renegotiated in a way that is empowering and self-determining. In the past, talking about sex in feminist terms meant talking about anything but the dread act itself; to simply address the 'problem' of sex might risk reaffirming the status of women in Western society as primarily 'sex objects', defined by lack (of a penis/power). Feminists, after all, had campaigned for a women's right to complete access to human relations in personal and social terms; and this had to involve, to some degree, a decentring of the image of woman as sex object.

In fact, by the 1980s, feminists were becoming rapidly more conscious that earlier arguments about 'true' female identity might equate all too closely with the old patriarchal analysis of feminine 'weakness'. It was on the whole easier to emphasize the non-violent, emotional aspects of femininity as positive than it was to address the image of a liberated woman with an even sprinkling of 'masculinity' - including sexual acquisitiveness. To address the problems at the core of definitions of female sexuality, begged an openness about how women really perceived and conducted their sexual relationships, as opposed to the mythologies that surrounded this area, and which feminists seem to have internalized along the way. Changing definitions of

female sexuality were sorely required, and were directly related to projections of what a feminist future might hold.

Often to talk about sexuality was to talk not about sex at all, but about relationships, about life styles, about emotions. The word 'sexuality' went wider, in any case, than sex: 'sex' referred to acts and the engagement in practices; 'sexuality' was about identity and gender, about masculine and feminine, about desire, fantasy, and the whole construction of the self.⁵⁶

Certainly there have recently been more articles about desire and pleasure, especially through the channels of French feminisms and psychoanalytic theory. Nonetheless Anglo-American feminists found supreme difficulties in reconciling a political position which aimed to reinvent a social reality, with a stance that engaged with sexuality at more than a high theoretical level, and which often simply alienated women who might be seeking guidance about the politics of their own desires.

The central theoretical position of Jeffrey Weeks and Michel Foucault - that sexuality was bounded and defined by social and cultural meanings - was embraced by many feminist theorists. Such a view appeared to provide a shifting perspective where change might be negotiated, and the fusion of female sexuality within the parameters of reproduction and domestic servicing could be fruitfully exposed as a construction deeply entrenched in Western medico-juridico-political discourse. Only once the interdependencies between these forms of discourse and their utilization can be made, can the seeming fixity and naturalness of the view of female sexuality as simply complementary - the passive obverse to a male sexuality which becomes the central

determinant of definitions of human sexual response - be exposed. Such theorists challenge essentialist views of sex, seeing the notion of sexuality as a fluid concept, an historical construct, which to be analysed effectively needs to be broken down into social categories of class/race/gender differentiation, the role of the state, and analysis of discourses (e.g. medical, legal, religious) which have sought to control and therefore determine sexuality. They assert that sexuality, therefore, is not simply descriptive, referring to the quality of being 'sexual' in human beings, it is more ominously prescriptive. At one level sexuality is seen as a force which demands gratification as an individual's desires and needs, yet these longings become incorporated into the social fabric and transformed in 'appropriate' forms of sexual behaviour (usually genital intercourse between men and women). The myth of sexuality in its current usage is that it affords the individual liberation through free expression of her/his desires; it is a myth because these desires are mediated through a powerful ideological image of 'good' and 'bad' (usually non-productive) forms of sexual relations, sanctioned or prohibited in social relations. Viewed as a site of symbolic enactment of unequal power relations, female sexuality can be defined as having nothing to 'add' to that of the male; and the masculinized hegemony of definitions of sexuality is maintained.

Sheila Jeffreys, in Anticlimax, is resistant to the position held by Weeks et al., and suggests that current feminist adoptions of analogous positions is part of a 'libertarian backlash' against the critiques of pornography and sexual

violence initiated by the Women's Movement. She goes so far as to suggest that 'in the 1980s women's liberation has been hijacked by the sexual libertarians who are devoted to persuading women that the enthusiastic celebration of our oppression in sadomasochism is the same thing as liberation.'⁵⁷ For Jeffreys, heterosexuality embodies and gives meaning to the sadomasochistic role-play of dominance and submission, in whatever context it is conducted - hence it necessarily interfaces with broader social relations of power at more than a symbolic level. She denies that there may currently be any distinction between heterosexuality as an institution which shapes sexological, medical and political discourse, and heterosexuality as a definition of desire between members of the opposite sex - no matter whether in the future this might be determined along more egalitarian lines. Many feminists would agree with her assertion that 'sex as we know it under male supremacy is the eroticized power difference of heterosexuality',⁵⁸ but few would be currently willing to accept that only an outright rejection of heterosexuality as a form of object choice would pave the way for a feminist revolution. Her analysis of the effects of sexological research and sex therapy can, however, be acute and enlightening; as she points out, if it is accepted that sexuality is socially constructed, then the chief function of sex therapy as a curative process is that of social control. It would not be fair to suggest that sex therapy only performs the function of social control; but it clearly has the capacity to project a model of appropriate sexual appetite and performance against which individual performances and choices can be gauged.

Jeffreys, in short, views all forms of discourse around sexual liberation - whether it be sexology, sexual therapy, pornography, or a new wave of sexually explicit literature engendered in the 1960s, as perpetuating a male model of sexual normality and an apologetic for male dominance in all areas of private and public life. In this context she makes the reasonable point that sexual libertarianism can seem to reaffirm the public/private distinction - that anything goes for consenting adults - whereas feminism needs to interrogate such a divide because it fosters other forms of inequality.⁵⁹ The gay liberation movement is itself viewed as being hijacked by gay men who, Jeffreys maintains, subsumed and negated lesbian sexuality (and with it feminist egalitarian values) in an eroticization of difference within same-sex relationships - 'As men gays receive the same socialization as do heterosexual men. Dominance and submission are eroticized for them too.'⁶⁰ This leads me to identify one singular flaw in Jeffreys' argument. Having implied that heterosexual socialization taints all male sexual response, and therefore indicating that all individuals, regardless of sexual orientation collude or resist, but necessarily act within a 'hetero-reality', she appears to deny that lesbians might also be susceptible to the erotic symbolization of power play in their sexual lives.

This is where Jeffreys' work is at its most unsatisfactory; having concurred with other sexual theorists that sexuality is a social construct which enforces a set of norms that have a dubious bearing on biological imperatives, she isolates lesbianism as in its 'pure' form untainted by such networks of

dominance and power. She highlights what are assumed to be predominant forms of gay male sexual behaviour such as 'cruising', 'cottaging' and habitual promiscuity, setting this against statistics provided by the Kinsey Institute to show that lesbians do not tend to cruise, and prefer instead long-term commitments.⁶¹ The central problem here is that she uses such information to appear to claim that there are essential differences between the behaviour of gay men and women, although one of course could equally argue that each group is responding to the socializing tendencies of a heterosexual institution which endorses different attitudes to sex and emotional commitment along gendered lines, and which must also inform the way homosexuals develop their own specific social environments - where, for example, bar culture is more commonly an entrenched and acceptable outlet for male recreation.

Not only does Jeffreys attack gay men and heterosexuals, but also particular forms of lesbian sexual expression, such as butch/femme role-play, and especially sadomasochism. For her, sadomasochism is a practice embedded in gay male sexuality, something which some lesbians have adopted, despite Jeffreys' personal conviction that 's/m ideology is in contradiction to the most cherished precepts of feminism'.⁶² Unfortunately she is at all times loath to outline what her view of central feminist precepts are - all we know is that she abhors any reproduction of socially defined inequalities of power within sexual relationships. What Jeffreys' own precepts are and how she envisages a future feminist political stance on appropriate forms of sexuality is difficult to determine, except to say that she

perceives all forms of sexual relationships - apart from so-called 'vanilla' lesbian sex - as tainted by powerplay politics. She implies that male heterosexual urges are informed by violent and aggressive feelings towards women, ineluctably informed by their perception of their own ruling class status (here all men regardless of race and class are seen as possessing equal measures of this).

Of course most feminists would agree that women's social experiences of violence and harassment colour their perceptions of sex, but this view can be shaped to quite different ends - other than condemning all heterosexual practices as essentially determined by violence and exploitation. Undoubtedly pornography in its current form is perceived by many as exclusively structured by preconceptions of the nature of the male sex drive, and it informs many men's attitudes to women in a sexual context. Research on the relationship between pornography and acts of sexual violence has never been conclusive, and many have decided that although pornography can 'educate' men in ways to abuse women, to argue that this directly incites acts of violence is probably not the most effective way to redefine pornography. Many contemporary feminists prefer instead to contrast the images of women portrayed in mainstream pornography with other dominant images of women, which also speak volumes about the presumed social/sexual status of women.⁶³

The main problem with Anticlimax is that Jeffreys' arguments are inconsistent and draw upon both biological and cultural considerations. On many issues she is incisive - for example that libertarian approaches to sexuality effectively block the

development of a political interrogation of sexuality: if the premise is that one's private pleasures are sacrosanct, then there is no space to proscribe certain practices, which may well not involve the full consent of both parties - for example paedophilia. Nonetheless her consequent dismissal of writers such as Foucault and Weeks as libertarians themselves is debatable, since neither of them appear to have a clear investment in retaining the public/private divide as it now operates, or to perceive this as individually liberating. In her concluding chapter, Jeffreys' own position becomes clearer; as a revolutionary feminist she believes that lesbianism is an important political strategy for women to end their subordination, and any view of an egalitarian future for heterosexuals and gay men is deferred, on the grounds that we cannot predict what choices people would make in such a situation.

Jeffrey Weeks sees the discourses around sexuality as much more complex and contradictory, and in Sexuality and its Discontents (1985), whilst acknowledging that sexological thinking has contributed to modern meanings of sexuality, argues that their theoretical work is far too heterogeneous to be simply dismissed as a vehicle for greater social control. It remains a vital component of our existing definitions of the boundaries of desire, and although it may need to be rejected, its contribution and its terms of reference need firstly to be re-examined.⁶⁴ In fact, in the radical feminist reaction against the male-oriented rhetoric of the Sexual Revolution, he perceives the risk of a peculiar coalition of interests with its 'ideological enemies in

feeding the new puritanism of our time'.⁶⁵ This is the kind of accusation that Jeffreys objects to, but does little to reject by outlining a future agenda for increased freedom to negotiate one's own sexual choices. Weeks denies Jeffreys' inference that sexual libertarianism has depoliticized the feminist agenda, arguing instead that 'the contemporary political agenda on sexual issues is being written not by the libertarian left but by the moral right.'⁶⁶ Jeffreys cites the former as the enemy and Weeks the latter; and for feminists in general there may well be a pressing need to seek a new discursive ground divorced from both. The Right is associated with moral crusading, the Left with libertarianism, and yet both associations are with conventional mainstream political demarcations, which make little sense for feminist theorists in the wake of their destabilizing of the agendas of the mainstream parliamentary system. Libertarianism and moralism are both features of an old patriarchal order; arguably what most feminists seek is an ethics of sexuality - a consensus of definitions around this area that neither leads to prescriptiveness nor to the myths that sex has got nothing to do with other aspects of our social lives. For women this has never been the case; and as long as sexuality has bearing on the processes of reproduction it never will.

Weeks himself suggests by the logic of his own argument that there has to be some form of social ethics in our consideration of the construction of human sexuality, if we are to avoid a libertarianism that implicitly argues that we should be freed as individuals to pursue our own sexual choices on the grounds of natural self expression - 'We need, therefore, to tear open the

assumptions which lock us into conflicting views about what is natural or unnatural, true or false, right or wrong.'⁶⁷ Later he states that:

It clearly cannot be the case that all manifestations of non-orthodox sexuality are equally valid; that no real distinctions can be made. To argue that 'anything goes' is to fall back into an easy libertarianism which ignores questions of power and the quality of relationships.⁶⁸

Surely this indicates a need for a more general overview of how a theory of sexuality - of appropriate and inappropriate forms of sexual behaviour - dominates Western consciousness of sexual difference in men and women, and extends far beyond the biological, and even beyond observations of what we do in bed. Theories of sexual response embrace much more than an individual's expression of desire, or need for gratification; a person's sexuality, whether they are heterosexual, homosexual, transsexual, auto-erotic, etc., comes to define their very essence.

CONCLUSION

Feminist theorists have begun to recognize the pitfalls of a position which tends to cast female sexual responses in purely negative terms, as shaped and defined by the dominant male imperative. However, the connections that have been made between sexological and psychoanalytical descriptions of human sexuality, and the enactment of such notions of difference at the level of social relations have been crucial to the development of feminist

thought, and the value of this enterprise should not be underestimated. Nonetheless, at present Anglo-American feminist explorations into the realms of female desire are still too dependent on patriarchal representations of sexuality. Even if this dependency only perversely manifests itself as a rejection of such representations, it blocks attempts to signal a way forward for feminism, and sometimes - as in the case of Sheila Jeffreys - marks a retreat into dubious truth claims around an authentic female nature. Jeffrey Weeks pinpoints such a retreat as a significant danger within contemporary theories of sexuality: 'Sex exists today in a moral vacuum. In the resulting confusion and uncertainty there is a temptation to retreat into the old verities of "Nature" or to search for new truths and certainties, a new absolutism.'⁶⁹ Weeks suggests that those who do not accept the challenge of a new (politicized) libertarianism which decentres the family form as the purveyor of social norms, are frightened of the possible moral chaos outside its parameters. I would argue that sexuality is such a minefield for feminists that perhaps they recognize a need to construct quite well-defined models of appropriate forms of sexual expression to prevent a perpetuation of male definitions of sexuality outside the existing familial organization.

Once sex is scrutinized in relation to its social meanings we can identify a proliferation of sexualities contained within the consensual reality of heterosexuality, most of which are negated by prevailing structures of power. Michel Foucault argues that 'sex is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden';⁷⁰ for feminists it seems abundantly

clear that in relation to sex, power is additionally organized around the binarist meanings ascribed to gender difference in psychoanalytical and sexological thought. This crucial binary is largely ignored by writers like Foucault and Weeks, and yet just as we act upon our knowledge of the licit and illicit, any sexual utopia is hampered by the concretizing in discourses of power, of the notion that two sexes act upon completely separate sexual and emotional economies in their responses. Foucault's observation that 'in political thought and analysis, we still have not cut off the head of the king',⁷¹ has a particular resonance for feminists in their analysis of the perpetuation of gendered power relationships. To extend the analogy, to cut off the king's head finally, there is nothing to be gained by simply replacing the head of the queen: we still need to heed his laws and understand the maintenance of his sovereignty in order to subvert them, which engages us in a seemingly incontrovertible double-bind. For example Freudian discourse, as reassessed by feminists, reveals its own points of fragility, its own radical inconsistencies which has facilitated feminist enquiry in thwarting some of the more tenacious truth-claims around sexual response.

For most mainstream feminists, heterosexuality as a sexual 'choice', as an institution, as an instrument of coercion - in whatever guise it appears in the field of human sexual response - is resolutely avoided as a topic of debate. The attempts by early radical feminists to encourage women to understand their own bodies and to explore their own sensual feelings are not pursued today in any refined form; generally such activities are

simply treated to an embarrassed silence, and the issue of sex is elided - not surprisingly, confirming the fears of sexual radicals that feminism has the potential for a strong puritan streak. As I suggested earlier, lesbian feminists have had a much more extensive engagement with these areas; and as much as they have addressed the demonization of lesbianism and homosexuality in general, they have in addition attempted a critique of heterosexuality and its part (as institution) in women's oppression. Sheila Jeffreys has gone as far as to suggest a one-to-one correlation between lesbianism and feminism, stressing that lesbianism is the only political choice for women, thereby conflating the issues of desire and sexual choice with that of an appropriate political/personal stance. Such a position effectively blocks further discussion by heterosexual feminists, who might be forgiven for feeling automatically accused of 'inauthenticity', and declining to enter into such debates. Such a deadlock risks a perpetuation of the popular belief that feminists are prescriptive and tyrannical, and perhaps a little too moralistic about sexuality. Conversely, Beatrix Campbell argues that:

Heterosexuality has to feature in our politics as more than a guilty secret; indeed, in order that women mobilize any political combativity around it, it must be restored as a legitimate part of feminism's concern. It is, after all, the primary sexual practice of most women. It also needs to be present to help clarify lesbianism's place within feminism.⁷²

As Campbell hints above, lesbian explorations into female sexuality remain the most far-reaching available within feminist

discourse - to the point where lesbian feminists are assumed to have forcibly occupied a position of moral superiority in relation to their 'guilty' heterosexual sisters. However, it is evident that essays such as Rich's 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' were sustained attempts to enable heterosexual feminists to take the opportunity to relinquish their status as guilty 'bad girls', and seriously engage with the ramifications of their own sexual choice. In other areas of feminist investigation it is clear that a lesbian or black perspective is still lamentably regarded as the minority one, suggesting that white heterosexual women have tended to leave the 'problem' of sexual orientation to lesbians, just as there is a tendency to place the 'problem' of race firmly in the laps of black feminists. This indicates a marked reluctance on the part of 'mainstream' feminists to focus on issues which demand further scrutiny of many women's most deeply-held prejudices.

To continue to ignore the problem of female sexuality implies that heterosexual women retain an investment in heterosexuality as the norm, as well as indicating a wish to avoid areas of debate where differences between groups of women are at their most obvious. As Jana Sawicki argues, for white radical feminists, 'sexual freedom is construed negatively as freedom from male dominated institutions whose elements are crystallized in pornography, particularly in its sadomasochistic varieties':⁷³ and the problem with this model of female sexuality is that it is resistant but not transgressive. Lesbian sexuality is held, at best, as the 'moral conscience' of feminism and at worst its scourge - either way such ascriptions are only intelligible when

it is assumed that both lesbianism and heterosexuality comprise two distinct but singular forms of sexual expression. The recent theoretical splinterings of lesbian feminism into a multitude of sexual identities - not all of which are held to be conducive to the mythology of a homogeneous 'feminist community' - has further divided feminist accounts of female sexual response. Lesbian advocates of butch/femme and sadomasochistic eroticism have questioned the relevance of the old binary of vaginal versus clitoral pleasure, arguing that the notion of pleasure as lying within anatomical or sexological definitions is a specious one. It is contended that sexual 'identities' can themselves be parodied and freely interchanged in a new assertion of transgressive oppositional sexual behaviour. Although debates about the veracity of the adoption of such subject positions has resulted in much acrimony, the resulting critiques signal a new departure for feminist approaches to sexuality and subjectivity, which perhaps owes much of its dynamism to feminism's relatively recent engagement with discourses of postmodernism.⁷⁴

Feminist theorists are beginning to review dearly-held beliefs about the path of female sexual revolution, and are no longer confident in the binaries they themselves produced - for example that either sex equalled sexism, or lesbian sex per se equalled a radical or revolutionary political stance. Now that heterosexual feminists are also beginning to investigate the areas of desire and pleasure within and outside a psychoanalytical model, it is probable that a whole constellation of warring (hetero)sexual identities will be born. Perhaps it will not be long before the butch or sadomasochistic heterosexual women will emerge from her

guilty closet. This is not to suggest that existing critiques of sexual violence, sexual objectification and patriarchal hetero-reality should be subordinated to the utopian search for a language and representation of desire. Rather that such critiques be interpreted as an effort to locate another missing piece of the jigsaw in feminism's current political agenda.

CHAPTER SIX

IDENTITY CRISIS?: MEN IN FEMINISM, POSTMODERNISM/'POST-FEMINISM'

Our language, intellectual history, and social forms are 'gendered'; there is no escape from this fact and from its consequences on our lives. Some of those consequences may be unintended, may even be fiercely resisted; our deepest desire may be to 'transcend gender dualities'; to not have our behaviour categorized as 'male' or 'female'. But, like it or not, in our present culture, our activities are coded as 'male' or 'female' and will function as such within the prevailing system of gender-power relations. The adoption of the 'professional' standards of academia is no more an activity devoid of gender politics than the current fashion in women's tailored suits and largely shouldered jackets is devoid of gender meaning. One cannot be 'gender neutral' in this culture.¹

Around the mid-eighties in academic circles a 'crisis' in feminism seemed to have been consensually acknowledged: the subject of feminism's differences of opinion was beginning to seem the most crucial in an era of critical retrospectives and summaries. Those dominant 'strands' in feminist thought, which I have referred to extensively in Chapters One to Three, were marking their territory and consolidating their own methodological boundaries, and the impact of French psychoanalytic theory was changing the terms of feminist theoretical debate in the Anglo-American sphere. Radical feminism was increasingly vilified in British socialist feminist circles, and in America feminist radicalism had become associated with a narrower 'cultural feminist' position, which signalled a return to the celebration of the 'feminine', albeit from a woman-centred perspective. Socialist feminists were themselves more regularly defining their own political stance in terms of a

departure from Marxist orthodoxy. Black and lesbian feminists were identifying themselves as organized groupings on the basis of race or sexual orientation, using much of their energies to signal the most grievous sins of white, bourgeois heterosexual feminists. Perhaps their combined critiques - more than any others - exposed the partial and exclusionary nature of the category of 'gender' as it had been used in other elements of feminist thought. Each grouping or 'strand', having been called upon to define its terms and its place within the matrix of feminism as a whole, seemed to settle into degrees of theoretical autonomy that eschewed any comprehensive attachment to male-oriented thought. However, by the latter half of the eighties, the question of male alliances - whether it be the entry of men into feminist thought as contributors and teachers, or the forging of liaisons with an increasingly sophisticated postmodernist lobby - returned as perhaps the single most pressing debate of recent years.

Many theorists were at pains to demonstrate feminism's compatibility with postmodernist theory in signalling the end of modernity and its humanist account of individuality; they also offered a very significant critique of feminism - namely, its tenacious reliance upon gender difference as the single most important analytical category. This, it was suggested, demonstrated a reliance on totalizing and unifying categories - a revivification of the binarism that typified Western thought within modernity, and a consequently naive, or even regressive investment in notions of progress and continuity. While the radical potential of feminist contributions to postmodern thought

were acknowledged because of their recognized contribution to reconceiving Western binarism, it was simultaneously regarded as one of 'the flawed grand narratives of modernity'.² Grand narratives were perceived from a postmodern perspective as potentially tyrannical and unhelpfully universalizing, and feminism's own meta-narrative of gender was regarded as having trapped feminists in ethno/heterocentric truth claims, which no longer had any currency in a postmodern world view. Nonetheless, it is significant that postmodernism continues to be determined as something other than feminism, so that feminism remains contemporary theory's significant Other - a predictable and recurring relationship for feminism to academic thought. From the outset, it must therefore be emphasized that those figures accorded as having made a significant contribution to the development of postmodern perspectives in theory, art and literature are male; and feminists are perhaps justified in their suspicion that a dispersal of the meanings of gender in such a context fairly swiftly amounts to a gender-blindness. In this light, a real danger lies in the possibility that in place of feminism's analysis of gender, ordinary meanings of gender difference are reinforced.

Within feminist ranks two points of conflict are currently receiving a significant degree of attention: (a) the escalation of 'identity politics' within the movement which threatens to turn feminist theory into a highly individualized, introverted and necessarily fragmented political stance; (b) a recognition that 'many feminist ideas become part of the common sense of our culture; yet those ideas may be expressed in forms we barely

recognize as feminist'.³ The two points intersect, of course;- in that whether we recognize a particular stance as feminist depends upon our sense of identity within a particular faction. Nonetheless, most feminists recognize and are antipathetic to a specific appropriation of feminist ideas which is sustained within mainstream New Right ideology, identified as simultaneously pro-female and pro-family, and which offers itself primarily as a stance that recognizes and endorses women's current familial location as a position of strength:

First, it promotes a 'pro-family' stance that views sexual politics, and particularly the politicization of personal relationships, as threatening to 'the family'. Second, it affirms gender differentiation and celebrates traditionally feminine qualities, particularly those associated with mothering. Finally, the new conservatives believe that struggle against male domination detracts from political agendas they consider more important.⁴

This view of feminism as detracting from the more important business of 'real' political enquiry is a familiar one for feminists, when we think of the reasons why many disaffected Left Wing women established feminist cadres in the late sixties and early seventies.⁵ Proponents of such a stance often allude to the dawns of a 'post-feminist' age where the worst excesses of Second Wave feminism can be discarded in favour of a political healing process, where the family can be once again made whole - freed from the indecent assaults of a sexual politics which denies the sanctity of personal privacy.

Perhaps the escalation of 'identity politics' was a contributing factor to feminists' general inability to produce a concerted response to such attacks, or at least to deny them any place in feminist thought. To deny them any currency would after all be to enact a tyrannous response to other 'pro-woman' forms of thought - to exacerbate the problem of vying feminist identities, and the question of who is 'allowed' to construct 'authentic' feminist responses to such challenges. Feminism's political roots are, after all, multifarious, and any such resistance might be seen to mark a precedent, where a feminist 'mainstream' could be construed as holding an unpalatable amount of authority over the utterances of more 'minority' groups. Identity politics, of course, need not be interpreted as a challenge against tyranny and exclusionism; they might be viewed as a positive sign that feminism remains a fluid site of healthy debate into the nineties. Nonetheless identity politics, taken to its logical extreme, facilitates a cacophony of warring feminist voices which can only announce their authority as speakers 'for' feminism by referring to the complex nature of their own subject positioning, of which being female is the lowest of common denominators. The result of such a tendency can be 'not to elucidate debate but to fix a woman somewhere along a predetermined hierarchy of oppressions in order to justify or contest a political opinion by reference to a speaker's identity.'⁶

There are clearly risks in deriving authority as a feminist speaker from one's own constellation of personal identities (as white, lesbian, working class, etc.), and a chief danger is to

concretize the boundaries between major strands of feminism as if they were fixed and immutable, rather than part of a debate which has as its shared goal the maintenance of a viable feminist contribution at both a localized and wider political context. Critiques offered by black and lesbian feminists have, for example, been salutary in changing and expanding the terms of reference of what was by default a white, heterosexual feminism; and the general thrust of this thesis has been to show how the acceptance of heterogeneity within the term 'feminism' can be beneficial to all women. It is possibly the case that identity politics has been construed as fragmentary by white feminists because it is their definitions of oppression that have been under attack.

Whether or not this is the case, identity politics were prefigured by the notion that 'the personal is political'. The primary effects of consciousness raising were arguably to suggest that achieving a feminist consciousness is largely a matter of finding a position which suits one's own public and personal context, which may well give rise 'to a self-righteous assertion that if one inhabits a certain identity this gives one the legitimate and moral right to guilt trip others into particular ways of behaving.'⁷ Of course consciousness raising was intended to be a preamble to collective action; but in the absence of a transformation of the social meanings of gender difference, the task of consciousness raising has to be repeated with every new generation, and in an era of proliferating academic discourses on feminism, consciousness raising of sorts can be a useful part of pedagogical practice. This can itself be rejuvenating for

feminism, and might be practiced in order to forestall the truth claims of anti-feminists who would otherwise consign feminism unchallenged to the annals of recent history.

MEN IN FEMINISM

The mid-eighties signalled a return to an argument that was fiercely debated in the late sixties - the place of men in feminist debate. At that time most feminists agreed that women needed space and time to develop their own arguments and theoretical perspectives, because men - regardless of the benignity of their intentions - represented the means by which female discourse could be/had been absorbed and defused by a patriarchal sleight of hand. But now, perhaps by virtue of feminism's increasing engagement with critical theory, men felt that they had a contribution to offer, as if feminism's involvement in new theoretical departures signified a commitment to male alliances. Just as feminists had previously exposed the male exclusivity of radical discourses such as Marxism, so male theorists felt obliged to question feminism's right to female exclusivity. Some men were content to use feminism as a point of departure to further explore the social construction of masculinity; others wanted to engage more directly in the heated debates that had come to characterize eighties feminism. The latter primarily wanted to demonstrate that they, too, had been profoundly affected by the way feminism undercut the epistemological foundations of contemporary socio-philosophical thought. From a more cynical standpoint, it is important to

observe that - in academic terms - feminism had come of age, and women's studies as a discipline, and as an interventionary project within existing disciplines, was a force to be contended with. One might suspect that male theorists, looking for new theoretical pathways in an increasingly competitive area, alighted upon feminism as another mode of abstract thought which might yield new possibilities.

The anthology Men in Feminism, published in 1987, is an example of such a male intervention: in it an almost equal number of male and female contributors challenge, posture, agree and vilify. The formula was evidently successful, and the dialogue aspects of the volume were extended in Linda Kauffman's two later volumes, Gender and Theory (1989) and Feminism and Institutions (1989). As the 'dialogue' format suggests, the male contributors were to some extent framed and moderated by female respondents; later male feminists felt able to go it alone, as illustrated by the all-male collection, Engendering Men (1990). Joseph A. Boone, one of the editors of the latter, reprints his essay, which first appeared in Gender and Theory, accompanied by a response by Toril Moi. However, he does not refer to her in his preamble to the republished piece, relegating all mention of Moi to a footnote, which itself carries more than a taint of retaliation.⁸

I have not space to interrogate the intentions of all such male critics in detail, but I have noticed certain tendencies within their writings which are worthy of note. There are two main textual strategies commonly utilized by such writers to shore up a rhetorical defence that they clearly feel is needed.

The first is to focus upon feminism's heterogeneity as a site of conflict, to better situate the 'right' of their own work to exist within such diversity; the second is to suggest that any exclusionism on feminists' part exhibits the increasing tyranny of feminist discourse, whose 'leaders' reserve the right to prohibit disagreement - even amongst their own 'kind'. The problem with many of these essays is that, such defences aside, their relationship to feminist debate is often strictly peripheral; one might be forgiven for assuming that one of the main objectives for such work is to lay claim to the identity of 'feminist'. Joseph Boone is one such writer who sees himself as a feminist, a claim which engenders the awkward conjunction 'female feminist' (in addition to 'male feminist') throughout the course of his essay. It is interesting to speculate why such men are not content to be 'pro-feminist', or 'anti-patriarchal'; and why therefore, the question of the 'right' to a feminist identity itself seems to be at stake. During the course of this discussion I shall assume, as I have done throughout this thesis, that feminists are women, and will indicate 'male feminism' in quotation marks to indicate its problematic nature.

Many 'male feminists' thus use the tenets of early feminism against current theorists: they often adopt the 'confessional' mode of expression so favoured by radicals, summoning personal identities which signal the inadequacies of the homogenizing signifier 'man'. For example, Terry Eagleton, in response to an article by Elaine Showalter in Men in Feminism, reminds us of his status as maverick working class Marxist at Cambridge: in describing his working class arrogance in face of 'bungling,

well-intentioned Alisdairs', he all too earnestly reminds us of his own cultural 'otherness'.⁹ It might seem churlish to object to a style so vigorously embraced by earlier Second Wavers, and most feminists would agree that masculinity/maleness as cultural/biological ascriptions are ripe for reinterpretation; but it is worth remembering that this technique proved contentious for feminists themselves, where an identity appeared to guarantee authority, and preclude dissent. It needs to be reiterated that the category 'man' is not the simple obverse of 'woman': 'man' the homogenizing identity for half the human population at least guaranteed cultural/social/economic visibility for white heterosexual men; whereas generic 'man' - the subject of Western epistemological being - denied material and ideological privileges to all women for centuries. The central question must be, if feminism is to remain a politics as well as a polemic, an oppositional strategy as well as a discursive explosion, what are the political consequences of 'male feminism'? This question is an ethical one ranging from the issue of whether the woman's voice will again be suppressed in favour of the male authoritative one, to whether in the academic institution (the last bastion of feminism's growth) women's tenure - even in the 'ghetto' of women's studies - will face renewed threat.

Tania Modleski sees the threat not only in co-option, but in the trivializing of feminist agendas - 'these books are bringing men back to centre stage and diverting feminists from tasks more pressing than deciding about the appropriateness of the label "feminist" for men.'¹⁰ In addition she remarks on the

heterosexism underpinning the notion of a dialogue between men and women,¹¹ accompanied by the tacit assumption that 'dialogue' can herald a sense of formal equality between men and women (including the even balance of contributors in terms of gender), which clearly does not often exist in either the academic scene or the world at large. The problem with the writings of 'male feminists' might, after all, be more pragmatic. What casts them as such an irritant to feminist theorists such as myself is precisely the sheer degree of textual space and effort they devote to questioning the terms upon which they may enter feminism, whilst effectively blocking any response by identifying ways in which feminists denying them free access to feminist theory would be tyrannical, constructing artificial boundaries around feminism which are counter-productive.

Much of the work I have referred to in this thesis has been more in the business of breaking down the boundaries of male discourse, the better to create a mode of speech which is, for political and academic purposes, female-specific. I cannot help suspecting that current 'male feminists' are attempting to do the reverse - although of course a reversal of roles presupposes at least that those positions are of different but equal value. For many men it seems to be a question of who 'owns' feminism - an issue subliminally contested among vying groups of feminists themselves - although the chief outcome has been to move away from the rhetoric of ownership altogether, into a position of celebration and acceptance of heterogeneity. Such heterogeneity seems to be the hardest issue for men in feminism to accept - as it is a position which involves an acknowledgement of the

dispersal of feminisms far beyond poststructuralist theorizing. According to Paul Smith, 'the intellectual task of understanding feminist theory is not a problem since feminist theory is situated within the array of poststructuralist discourses with which many of us are now perhaps over-familiar.'¹² For many feminists this remark poses two immediate points of contention: (a) that feminist theory resides within poststructuralism, a tendency dominated by male 'greats'; (b) that, this being the case, and male theorists being 'over-familiar' with its methodology, the problem of men in feminist theory is assuredly not one of lack of understanding. Indeed, Smith's construction places feminist theory 'in men', and, further, outlaws or disavows other wings of feminism, so that we might be forgiven for wondering whether this fairly recent male theoretical interest in feminism is not spawned primarily by its seeming 'marriage' with poststructuralism.

Nonetheless 'men have a necessary relation to feminism', as Stephen Heath points out,¹³ if men are supposed to be equally changed by its precepts. As Judith Mayne observes, "'men in feminism" is hardly a new formulation';¹⁴ feminists in the main have assumed as part of their task the necessity of raising the consciousness of both men and women. What distinguishes this 'dialogue', then, is its theoretical dimension; and its male proponents might well be repeating one of the early errors of Second Wave pioneers in assuming that they can speak for all men. This implies that feminism's major problem is other feminists - not women, and certainly not 'men' (as they represent themselves in these debates as only too willing to learn and admire).

Joseph Boone takes up the point of the identity of the 'men' that speak in Men in Feminism in his contribution to Gender and Theory - 'Of seven added contributors, Jacques Derrida, Robert Scholes, Denis Donoghue (in small print), and Terry Eagleton (in a reply to Showalter) - critics whose relation to feminism has never been, to risk understatement, unproblematic'¹⁵ - by suggesting that the importation of the 'big' names in theory militates against the serious consideration of 'male feminists' such as himself whose intentions/interventions are entirely honourable. Unusually he pinpoints the heterosexism which has accompanied such projects, asserting that, 'a recognition of the presence and influence of gay men working in and around feminism has the potential of rewriting feminist fears about "men in feminism" as a strictly heterosexual gesture of appropriation.'¹⁶ Laudable as this observation may be, in identifying gay men as holding a possible key to solving the problem of men's possibly unwelcome attentions to feminism, Boone implicitly identifies the problem as lying in feminists'¹⁷ fears of symbolic penetration of their discourse. By another sleight of hand he ignores the reality that lesbians have long been exposing feminist's mainstream heterosexism in woman-to-woman debates quite effectively. In seeming to posit feminism's nascent homophobia as part of the problem, Boone unwittingly inserts his own gyno-homo-phobia into his argument.

For the present it might be advisable to leave this argument floating, the better to underpin the following section on postmodernist feminism; I shall simply attempt to summarize the debate so far. My own antagonism to many aspects of the 'men in

feminism' debate results - as I think do other feminists' antagonisms - from the content of the essays, and the wish to appropriate the term 'feminist', rather than from the very idea of men in feminism - which is not after all particularly shocking. In their introduction to Engendering Men (1990), Boone and Cadden make the obvious but important point that 'there now exists an entire generation of male critics, many of whom, having been educated by "first generation" feminist scholars, have in turn been "engendered" by feminism.'¹⁸ I would not wish to hamper the progress of their work, or deny their right of 'access' to feminist thought; but I remain troubled by their insistence on the 'right' to be dubbed 'feminist', rather than 'pro-feminist', or some other term which might indicate their interests in gender, whilst allowing women to retain the most important impact of the term feminism - that it has come to signify a female presence. Feminism is after all constructed as a work in progress, a debate which empowers women, and indeed is the only non-patriarchal identity that women can lay claim to. In deconstructing Western binarism, such men appear to believe that men can write the 'feminine', as claimed by French feminists: while it is true that writing is not 'gendered' in any direct sense, feminists have found it politically expedient to foreground the identity of the author, as have gay and black theorists. While men perceive the focus of the debate to be around relations of authority/subalternity, women will resist their interventions: these terms themselves are ripe for deconstruction.

FEMINISM/POSTMODERNISM

It is not only the phenomenon of the 'male feminist' that has caused feminists to rethink the dominant framework of their theories; since the mid-eighties feminist postmodern theorists such as Linda Nicholson have identified the continued existence of universalizing tendencies within feminist thought, observing that, 'it was the failure, common to many forms of academic scholarship, to recognize the embeddedness of its own assumptions within a specific historical context.'¹⁹ A particular trait in Western scholarship is the quest for objectivity, the notion that a critique can transcend the perspective of one individual or group, to carry truth claims that could be recognized as such by other individuals or groups; and although feminist groups among others have problematized the notion of neutrality, there do remain traces of dominant Western forms of thought within feminist methodology. Clearly the concept of patriarchy would be one example of a tendency towards ahistorical universalism, particularly when summoned by feminists in examining the 'cause' of women's oppression. Postmodernist theorists locate the mode of objectivity as a symptom of modernity, a range of epistemic conditions which they would argue are waning. Postmodern relations of power therefore render claims of truth or falsehood illegitimate, and displace the unified notion of 'woman' as subject - something perhaps that feminists are reluctant to part with on a political level.

The category of gender itself, and the way gender distinctions are culturally manifested, informs a feminist perspective on

social realities which many would seem loath to relinquish. Fraser and Nicholson, however, suggest that interfaces between feminism and postmodernism would be mutually beneficial since, 'a postmodernist reflection on feminist theory reveals disabling vestiges of essentialism while a feminist reflection on postmodernism reveals androcentrism and political naivete.'²⁰ Here the relations between feminism and postmodernism are still seen to be tense; particularly, as the above quotation implies, because postmodernism emerges from a very male-identified reaction to modernity. Postmodernist critiques might be used by feminists to cleanse their own reflections of the worst kind of essentialism, but feminism's stake in modernity - or any perspective on male systems of power - can only be partial. Postmodernism has as one of its primary goals the aim to free itself from overarching philosophical givens, to ground social criticism within specific contexts and locales.²¹ Gone is the dependency upon notions of historical progression, the transcendence of reason and freedom - the meta-discourse (such as Marxism) is reduced to the status of just another discourse with no prior claim to particular privilege. Feminism, in the Lyotardian terms utilized by Fraser and Nicholson, would be just such another totalizing discourse, dependent as it is on the generalising categories of gender (or even race and class), which are too unitary and too homogenizing to be accommodated within a postmodern notion of subjectivity. However, there are grounds to suppose that even the displacement of the meta-narrative demands a social criticism that can embrace the local and contextual - and this would clearly be the case for a credible feminist

response.

During the past decade many feminists have found previous accounts of female subjectivity to be too reductive - since at the very least they provide grounds for the exclusion of race, class and sexual orientation. But even the inclusion of such categories can be seen to totalize group identity in ways that preclude more cogent and 'localized' analyses of the constellation and mediation of power relationships. In any case, it could be argued that woman remains a totalizing theoretical category, within which other categories of 'otherness' are effaced. Politically, feminists have a strong investment in retaining the masculine/feminine binary in their discourse, whereas utopian tendencies in postmodernist thought might envisage an end to the significance of such a binary. However, it might be advisable to consider Jameson's definition of postmodernism as 'not just another word for the description of a particular style', but:

also, at least in my use, a periodizing concept whose function is to correlate the emergence of new formal features in culture with the emergence of a new type of social life and a new economic order - what is often euphemistically called modernization, postindustrial or consumer society, the society of the media or the spectacle, or multinational capitalism.²²

Such a definition might prove useful to feminism since it offers the moment of postmodernism a historical location, whereby the material and ideological conditions that pertain within such a period can be investigated in relation to women in particular. Moreover, some feminists may be tempted to argue that a

patriarchal ideology retains a rigid stronghold within a post-industrial capitalist society, just as it has been argued that the institutionalization of sexual difference can be perceived to predate capitalism.

Most feminists would accept, however, that the meanings and positioning of gender relations do change when there is a changing cluster of power networks, and the identification of a postmodern moment allows feminists to consider the condition of women as a distinct feature of postmodern social reality. If one of the significant aspects of the postmodern condition is the final dissolution of the myth of autonomous subjectivity, this may have a bearing on dominant feminist articulations of subjectivity, which often do depend upon notions of liberation which suggest a quest for a pre-existing putative autonomy available to masculine subjects. Jameson does not wish to suggest that the postmodern moment indicates a radical break with the period of modernity; rather it involves 'the restructuring of a certain number of elements already given: features that in an earlier period or system were subordinate now become dominant, and features that had been dominant again become secondary.'²³ Jameson's assertion is made within the context of cultural productions; nonetheless in both the sphere of cultural production, and production in a wider sphere, feminism's chief problem is to ascertain whether one feature - the representation/positioning of women as subordinate/other - remains the same. In addition, despite the embeddedness of feminist discourse in identifying a 'reality' of gender difference which finds its intelligibility in essentialism or

biology, the cultural logic of sexual difference has gained momentum from its historical longevity, resulting in the 'fact' of difference being entrenched in experience - not an easy category to theorize, or indeed to generalize about. Cynthia Cockburn looks back on the emergence of Second Wave politics and reflects upon the nebulous sense of difference which pervades feminism still:

There was a material reason for the growth of difference-politics. It was a response to women's lived experience in the 1970s of struggling with men's response to feminism. We felt different. Not some essential or biological difference but an empowering difference born of our centuries-long experience as the subordinated half of the heterosexual couple. Our history had given us different values.²⁴

There may be much that a feminist can invest in the postmodern explosion of the binaries of classic Western thought. But might it not be the case that postmodernism itself derives impetus from a certain binarism in its demarcation of postmodernism and feminist postmodernism?. Is it readily apparent that most postmodern reflections are any more gender conscious than other theoretical offerings by radical male academics have been? If dispensing with the binaries means that gender as category has no theoretical currency, then it would be difficult to interrogate postmodernism for instances of gender-blindness. Yet feminist interventions in postmodernism must do precisely that, and find that although large-scale power relationships can be problematized in the delegitimation of the grand narrative, hierarchies of gendered power may exist in the spaces of

postmodernist theory itself. Perhaps an analogy can be drawn here with Jonathan Rutherford's comments on the organization of political agendas: 'Men's power is not simply a sovereign, repressive force. It can be that, but it is a more complex phenomenon, and also operates through the ways in which politics and problems are defined, and in determining what are the real issues and priorities.'²⁵ Perhaps the priorities of postmodern theorists are by and large still too entrenched in announcing our epistemological and cultural break with modernity to wonder what women's place in modernity could possibly be defined as.

Modernism in art has often been described as a moment of high elitism and male exclusionary practices, and the historical mode of process and objectivity yielded little insights from a feminist point of view. Women are necessarily embedded within these historical moments as material factors, but in terms of their relation to them as grand narratives, they have usually been quietly absent. Christine Di Stefano seems to be suspicious of the postmodern project itself as having an investment - if mainly in its sense of reaction and destabilizing of the models of modernist thought - in the basis of a gendered social organization which is still left intact by its neglect in mainstream postmodernism:

The feminist case against postmodernism would seem to consist of several related claims. First, that postmodernism expresses the claims and needs of a constituency (white, privileged men of the industrialized West) that has already had an Enlightenment for itself and that is now ready and willing to subject that legacy to critical scrutiny. Secondly, that objects of postmodernism's various critical and deconstructive

efforts have been the creations of a similarly specific and partial constituency (beginning with Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle). Third, that mainstream postmodernist theory (Derrida, Lyotard, Rorty, Foucault) has been remarkably blind and insensitive to questions of gender in its own purportedly politicized rereadings of history, politics, and culture. Finally, that the postmodernist project if seriously adopted by feminists, would make any semblance of a feminist politics impossible.²⁶

Stefano's concluding point - that postmodern theory renders feminist politics untenable - offers the bleakest outlook on feminism's engagement with postmodernism. The call to explode gender binaries, might well be perceived as an exhortation to 'gender neutrality', which all too easily slips us back into the bad old days of academic rigour and rationalism. Such a stance denies feminist academics the opportunity to analyse the impact of their own female identity in a social context, that in so many other ideological and material ways reminds us of our own femaleness as otherness. Susan Bordo perceives that this tendency displays further evidence of a backlash against Second Wave feminism - analogous to debates among some First Wave American feminists, who called for an end to discussion focused on gender difference.²⁷ Then as now, perspectives on the heterogeneity of female experience and aspirations led to an extension of the notion of human differences, a pull to accept differences of identity and their social impact as a fact of 'human' life.

It needs to be stated that other cultural 'outgroups' might also feel unprepared to dispense with their own totalizing and unitary categories, such as being black or gay or lesbian. Again

these voices appear on the margins of postmodernism's mainstream, so that Bell Hooks' sense of being on 'the outside of the discourse looking in'²⁸ might sum up how many non-white/non-male/non-heterosexuals feel; that they are a priori excluded, while at the same time being urged to dispense with their old-fashioned 'modern' ways of thinking. Bell Hooks points out that when race is discussed in a postmodern context, black women rarely merit a mention, and she convincingly identifies the aims of postmodern thought as themselves paradoxical:

It is sadly ironic that the contemporary discourse which talks the most about heterogeneity, the decentred subject, declaring breakthroughs that allow recognition of Otherness, still directs its critical voice primarily to a specialized audience that shares a common language rooted in the very master narratives it claims to challenge.²⁹

Nonetheless, she accepts that postmodern critiques of notions of identity and subjectivity are potentially effective tools for black people, who have after all collected politically under an identity foisted upon them by an imperialist ideology, and which is narrow and constrictive. For example, critiques of racism have not heretofore been concerned with the way that class mobility has fractured notions of collective identity; and it may well be in black theorists' interest to focus more upon the diverse and multiple experiences and meanings of racial difference. Yet her exposure of the fact that postmodernist thought remains directed at the most privileged, appears to justify the caution with which feminists have in general received postmodern explorations into the sphere of gender, race and

sexual identity.

THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF FEMINIST CRITICISM

Unlike the heady days of the sixties and seventies, when women academics seemed to be fighting just to get feminism perceived as a serious object of study at all, feminist theory is now a recognized sphere of academic discourse. As I have suggested above, this might have contributed to the current state of affairs, where the meanings and ownership of feminism are now also being contested by male inquirers. The dangers of institutional acceptance have been discussed since the seventies, when Lillian S. Robinson wrote 'Dwelling in Decencies' (1971);³⁰ and there remains a recognition that a degree of absorption by the academy is inevitable, even when clear advances in feminist thought and the dissemination of feminist knowledges are in evidence. Nonetheless, as theorists such as Jane Gallop point out, feminist academics are of the institution, and it is less than helpful to resignedly bemoan our inevitable role as transmitters of elitist bourgeois values within it. Gallop instead wants 'to understand why we are located here, how we got here, what we sacrificed to get here, what we gained: all as preliminaries to the question of how do we do the most good, as feminists, as social and cultural critics, speaking from this location.'³¹

Another side-effect of the institutionalization of feminism is the means by which vying feminist positions are accepted or rejected, coupled with the question of who determines this

inclusion or exclusion. Early radical feminist fears of an emergent 'star system' of honoured spokespeople, sadly realized in the public recantations of Germaine Greer and Betty Friedan, were also occurring in the academy - especially in the increasingly privileged valuation of feminist 'high' theory. The demarcation between 'high' and 'low' feminism created a tendency to characterize earlier Second Wave feminism as naive, responsible for some of the 'errors' or contradictions in feminist politics today.³² While it is perhaps inevitable that 'stars' should emerge in the feminist firmament, the danger is that feminism as a marketable academic enterprise becomes more of a 'career' and less identifiable as oppositional politics. As Marianne Hirsch remarks in conversation with Jane Gallop and Nancy K. Miller, 'there is now a way of building a career on trashing feminist work'.³³ Here she signals a danger inherent in intra-feminist debates - that there is a thin line between healthy discussion and diminishing the successes of currently less popular feminisms.

Jane Gallop concludes this conversation by declaring that 'What we need is an ethics of criticism';³⁴ a sentiment echoed by Bell Hooks in a discussion on the inclusion of race-specific issues into feminism's 'mainstream' when she says, 'when we write about the experiences of a group to which we do not belong, we should think about the ethics of our action.'³⁵ What they both identify are the dangers of feminism as a 'career' in academia, which - in keeping with the demands of scholarly competition - necessitates the debunking or destabilizing of alternative feminist positions. Moreover, this is often viewed as a

gratifying phenomenon outside feminist circles by theorists who may delight in witnessing what they regard as evidence of splits and factions in feminism, suggesting proof of its inherent weakness. However, few feminists would want to counter the risks involved in intra-feminist critiques by issuing any kind of embargo on the types or scope of criticism 'allowed' - for many since the mid-eighties in particular, the extent of debate within feminism has been taken as a sign of its continued vivacity as discourse.

During the seventies Adrienne Rich was attempting to envisage the shape of a 'woman-centred university', and some of her critiques of the steadfastly male hierarchical practices of the traditional academic institution remain problems today. Rich rightly identifies the means by which women's studies courses within the mainstream are rarely able to transform the epistemological givens in pre-existing disciplines. Whatever victories can be gained in women's studies - for example, by means of making available a new resistant range of knowledges - the overall fabric of the institution remains entrenched in patriarchal ideology:

Women in colleges where a women's studies program already exists, or where feminist courses are beginning to be taught, still are often made to feel that the 'real' curriculum is the male-centred one; that women's studies are (like Third World studies) a 'fad'; that feminist teachers are 'unscholarly,' 'unprofessional,' or 'dykes'. But the content of courses and programs is only the more concrete form of undermining experienced by the woman student. More invisible, less amenable to change by committee proposal or fiat, is the hierarchical image, the structure of relationships, even the style of

discourse, including assumptions about theory and practice, ends and means, process and goal.³⁶

Here Rich foregrounds the paradox for women working as teachers/students within such an environment - that the framing of women's studies or feminist courses within institutional parameters, means that the definition of the academy or education continues to be resistant to change. The academic institution remains relentlessly male-identified, creating divisions not merely between the successful feminist scholar - who may achieve academic acclaim at the expense of other feminists who cannot get a foothold in the institution - but between women as teachers, students and women who service the institution in other ways. Women workers, such as secretaries, clerks, cleaners and cooks generally receive little support from their feminist 'sisters', although they collectively suffer from the design of an institution created with male needs in mind - this is most evident in the lack of childcare provisions. All in all, this obviously undermines the scope of feminist intellectual pursuits claiming to be 'political', as well as increasing the threat of absorption by patriarchal ideologies.

Rich and later theorists draw our attention to the fact that there are numerous factors which contribute to the negative features of feminist institutionalization that extend far beyond the subject matter of feminist thought itself, or any questions of its relation to knowledges in the 'centre' of the academy.³⁷ Feminist knowledge, despite its acceptance within the institution remains marginalized and 'other' as an optional extra, even though this marginality has at least allowed feminism to flourish

as critique of the mainstream. There are, inevitably, problems with feminism remaining a subordinate and co-opted fragment of the mainstream, implying as it does that feminism suffers from absorption more often than it wins any victories over the status quo. There is simply no other option for feminists; they cannot work 'outside' the patriarchal order, since the academy is just one example of an institution which perpetuates and reinforces male-oriented perceptions of social reality. Therefore, while the problems associated with institutionalization require further scrutiny along the lines of the critique offered above, such scrutiny has to include an acceptance of feminism's existence 'within' in order to better construct agendas which resist the demands upon feminist knowledge to be just one contested scholarly methodology among many. As Gayle Greene observes, 'We need jobs in the profession in order to have any effect on the profession. As to whether we can fight the oppressor with the oppressor's weapons, we have no choice.'³⁸

ALL THE THEORISTS ARE MEN, ALL THE FEMINISTS ARE WHITE, BUT...

A significant shift in feminist thought of the eighties and nineties was heralded by the increasing availability of black feminist work, which demanded that its own agendas be recognized and acted upon by white feminists. It is now a truism to state that white feminists have up until recently elided the questions that black feminism raises, or simply continued to produce theory which operates along a model of white female experience, and remains blind to questions of racial and/or cultural difference.

Much of white feminism's reluctance to confront the challenge of black feminist writings, or to discuss them in their own work is couched in terms of not wanting to 'appropriate' the black voice and consequently perpetuate the silencing effect of dominant theoretical discourses. The result is that black feminists tend to take sole responsibility for adding the dimension of 'race' to women's studies; yet unfortunately this implies that racism is black women's problem - or that feminists are by definition anti-racist through the same political process of being anti-sexist.

Adrienne Rich was one of the few white feminists to address the thorny issue of racial difference and its impact on feminist thought during the seventies in 'Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism, Gynophobia' (1978). In this essay she discusses the difficulties white women obviously felt when attempting to outline issues specific to black female experience. She observes that:

a great deal of white feminist thinking and writing, where it has attempted to address black women's experience, has done so labouring under a massive burden of guilt feelings and false consciousness, the products of deeply inculcated female self-blame, and of a history we have insufficiently explored.³⁹

As Rich acknowledges, much of this guilt is a side-effect of white women's ignorance about black women's lives, an ignorance perpetuated by an educational system which fosters white experience as the norm. Nonetheless it is clearly inadequate to use as one's defence the claim that we white women, duped by the

patriarchal ideologies of the dominant white male hegemonic force, share no responsibility for the construction, institutionalization and perpetuation of inequality. It is manifestly obvious that white women can and do contribute to the continuance of such systems of social oppression, and are directly responsible for its reinscription in oppositional discourses such as feminism. Many white feminists feel vulnerable to accusations of being dubbed 'privileged' - in that they have the choice and opportunity to learn about feminism and to identify themselves as feminists, compared to black women's general cultural exclusion from such liberties. Yet hierarchies of privilege among women are a social and historical fact, and it appears futile, not to say dangerous, to merely sidestep such features of women's difference. To do so is to imply acceptance of the power and durability of racism, as well as its influence within feminism.

Rich warns against the feeling of passivity that comes with guilt and becomes an excuse for inadequacy; rather, she recommends a deeper search for common ground, coupled with an investigation of racist fears still residual within white feminism's subtext. Meanwhile she herself is culpable of one cardinal error during the course of her discussion, which is to talk about 'women' and 'black people' as if they were two mutually exclusive interest groups, creating a rhetorical chasm in which black women are absorbed and rendered invisible yet again. Her essay remains, perhaps, too optimistic about the simple measure of sharing experiences and overcoming boundaries, because she is too ready to ascribe all tools of oppression as

solely the property of males. In addition she is too willing to attribute critiques of white feminism's racism to male Left-wing groups anxious to expose feminism as a distinctly bourgeois and counter-revolutionary phenomenon.⁴⁰ Despite its flaws, Rich's essay had groundbreaking potential by the mere fact that she acknowledged race to be white women's problem too, and suggested that white feminists should begin to examine the reasons for their ethnocentricity rather than simply summon guilt as a viable response. However, black feminist theorists of the eighties and nineties, committed to constructing a discourse which unseated the dominance of the white gaze, still found that their work was often consigned to the 'black perspectives' margins. Even though there are many black feminists such as Bell Hooks who see a future for feminism in a sharing of experiences, critiques and perspectives, they are also made increasingly angry and impatient by the seeming arrogance of some white feminist positions which situate themselves as though they are in a position to bestow the 'honour' of acceptance on to black women. Meanwhile black feminist scholarship has developed and expanded through producing collections devoted to black women's work;⁴¹ whereas within white feminism, black feminist critiques are still regularly marginalized as the token essay or footnote, and 'overviews' of Second Wave feminism are produced which appear to ignore the existence of black women altogether.⁴²

Bell Hooks characterizes the emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement as being dependent upon its voices being those of white, middle-class women, and that therefore it is inevitable that their experiences shaped and determined the main

agenda for feminism - 'what other group of women in the United States had the same access to universities, publishing houses, mass media, money?'⁴³ Even though white bourgeois women's initial hegemony in the movement might be partly attributed to their greater access to educational and other privileges, this alone can not explain their retention of the power to police the boundaries of feminism - not by excluding women on the grounds of race or class, but by dictating the range of 'acceptable' issues for discussion.⁴⁴ This is particularly apparent when race and class are considered, but maintained as subordinate to gender, as if gender oppression operates autonomously from other forms of social and cultural subordination. The tendency to distinguish gender difference as the most crucial issue for all women, denies black women the right to assert that racism plays an equally important role in the shaping of their lives and politics, and perpetuates a corresponding sense of 'them' and 'us'. In this way, Hooks's judgement of feminism as primarily founded on privilege (of race, class and education) is a correct one.

The prevailing sense that white feminism 'allows' black feminists to contest or 'correct' designated areas of discussion, inhibits the interrogation of what women can be deemed to share in terms of experiences of oppression, and prevents the revision of other features of feminist thought which currently do not reflect a female consensus across racial and class boundaries.⁴⁵ The rhetoric of equality itself is problematic; since if the central thrust of white feminist thought is formal social and economic equality with (white) men, is it assured that women (and men) from less privileged positions will attain the same

equality? One might predict that were white women's equality achieved, they might retain an investment in the continued exploitation and oppression of other non-hegemonic groups.⁴⁶ From this perspective, feminism's focus might be better relocated to concentrate on the removal of oppression, rather than a concern with equality. Such a change in emphasis does not appear to me to be incompatible with a sustained focus on the ideological construction of gender and a corresponding analysis of its effects upon women of all groups, as a contribution to the erosion of patriarchal oppression, rather than risking replicating pre-existing power dynamics.

At present - particularly in America - black feminist thought flourishes semi-autonomously, developing in academia via women's and black studies courses, and furthering the analysis of the nexus between racial and sexual oppression. Although black critiques of white feminism have foregrounded their questionable universalizing accounts of women's relation to economics, the law, medicine and the family, a primary focus (in common with earlier Second Wave white feminists) has been on the area of representation and ideology. As Patricia Hill Collins asserts,

From the mummies, Jezebels, and breeder women of slavery to the smiling Aunt Jemimas on pancake mix boxes, ubiquitous Black prostitutes, and ever-present welfare mothers of contemporary popular culture, the nexus of stereotypical images applied to African-American women has been fundamental to Black women's oppression.⁴⁷

Certainly in the area of cultural criticism and the theorization of the female gaze, white feminists have been largely blind to

the fact that the ideal-type feminine image which bombards all women, at least provides a point of identification with white women in that she is normally white. When white women have turned to black female experience, they show a tendency to admire black women's personal strength; though of course, this image itself is partially a myth, in that it tends to ignore the adversity of a racist society which supplies an interpretation of 'strength' to a situation within which black woman as subject may only be thinking in terms of survival.⁴⁸ Black feminists have devoted much of their energies to debunking such myths, while celebrating the endurance of their foremothers for surviving, and educating their 'daughters' - whether biological or affectional - to learn the necessity of resistance to the dominant culture's worldview of black inferiority. Many black writers - of both fiction and theory - emphasize the importance of the mother's de-socializing role in teaching their daughters self-confidence and self-worth.

Perhaps white feminists still tend to see black feminist theory as a threat to an epistemological centrality that they have enjoyed for two decades, instead of observing - as Collins does - that multifarious feminist standpoints all provide important but partial visions, which should explore each other's work not just as a corrective of their own but to enhance the overall growth in an increasingly non-racist, non-homophobic body of feminist thought. Bell Hooks argues that broadening and shifting the terms of the commonly accepted central feminist agenda is not in itself enough. She also suggests that feminists might adopt a linguistic shift in the way they identify

themselves, on the grounds that the statement, 'I am a feminist', implies that concerns of gender difference exclude all others. Hooks argues that a modification of this statement to 'I advocate feminism' implies one's commitment to a feminist viewpoint, but does not exclude the possibility of supporting other political movements.⁴⁹ Hooks' distinction appears to be a valid one, in an era where feminism has often come to designate individual lifestyle politics, which tends to prioritize certain exclusive interests: yet, to advocate feminism suggests a certain distance from its processes, giving the lie to the notion that feminism is a pre-established dogma. It also implies that feminism is irredeemably entrenched in a bourgeois vision of oppression. To identify oneself as a feminist at least indicates an active engagement and commitment to the further development of a feminist theory which can do justice to all groups of women, regardless of present access to social privilege. This is not to advocate complacency with the term feminism, which has till now been tardy in recognizing its ever-present potential for the perpetuation of dominance. As Hooks asserts in a later book, 'It is necessary to remember that it is first the potential oppressor within that we must resist - the potential victim within that we must rescue - otherwise we cannot hope for an end to domination, for liberation.'⁵⁰

PLAYING WITH DIFFERENCE: ESSENTIALISM, GENDER AND THE CYBORG

The term 'essentialism' has often been used in negative terms by many feminists; I have used it myself earlier in this work as shorthand description of a feminist stance which makes appeal to a discrete female 'nature'. Most feminists see themselves as social constructionist, believing that gender is an effect of culture rather than a condition for its current configuration. Thus, essentialism and social constructionism take on the appearance of binary opposites; the former celebrating the fixity of female difference, and a revaluation of its social meanings; and the latter expressing a concrete denial of the innateness of sexual difference, arguing that difference is an effect of social and historical relations of power. Yet, as Diana Fuss has pointed out in Essentially Speaking (1989), the two terms are not mutually exclusive, and the use by social constructionists of the category 'gender' constitutes an appeal to a community of women as a group with a single identity, which inevitably assumes a broad shared essence. In other words, all political movements that focus on a particular identity (femaleness, gayness) as the basis for action, effectively presuppose that particular properties define such groups, implying that there is an essence within identity which is fixed and can be unearthed through the foregrounding of an oppressed group's experiences of subjectivity.

All branches of feminist thought have valued experience, and the garnering of multifarious female experiences - in consciousness raising and in writing - has been a crucial

feminist activity.⁵¹ From the outset of the Second Wave, the explosion of experiential writing demonstrated that experiences are never unified or universal, but reflect differing relationships to class, race and sexual orientation - not to mention more localized variables. Yet the centrality of experience to feminist thought indicates a belief in the authenticity of experience, as if the woman who writes her own life as woman, reveals some previously suppressed truth about the state of being female. It is as if a woman can miraculously distance herself from the cultural and historical processes that make gender difference matter; yet as Fuss remarks, 'belief in the truth of Experience is as much an ideological production as belief in the experience of Truth.'⁵² Narratives of experience do regularly yield common elements, which enhance feminist theoretical activities, and in this way the politics of identity is a useful tactic to initiate collective resistance to the patriarchal status quo. But it must be recognized that appeals to experience as authentic reconstructions of the nascent self risk reinstating difference as essence, and have resulted in the dissemination of identities within feminism that are often perceived as counter-productive.

There has been a tendency in feminist thought to recognize the constructedness of gendered identities, but at the same time see female appropriations of 'masculine' qualities in purely negative terms. Judith Butler prefaces her book Gender Trouble (1990) with the proposition that the binary framework which informs notions of gender only has real currency within a heterosexual world view, and asks, 'what happens to the subject and to the

stability of gender categories when the epistemic regime of presumptive heterosexuality is unmasked as that which produces and reifies these ostensible categories of ontology?'⁵³ The meanings of gender, generally ascribed by feminists to the broad effect of patriarchal social organizations, is thus further problematized as being the product of a hetero-reality, where heterosexuality has a clear investment in such delineations of difference. Gender, in Butler's view, is less stable than its 'official' meanings suggest, and she uses the example of female impersonator/film 'hero(ine)', Divine, to argue that his 'impersonation of women implicitly suggests that gender is a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as the real.'⁵⁴ Drag, it is argued, can dramatize the fluidity of gender signifiers and can subvert and parody conventional meanings ascribed to gender difference in a pantomimic performance of their artificiality and arbitrariness. Butler, then, denies gender any originary credence, and considers how the parodic 'quoting' of gender binaries can decenter defining discourses within phallogocentrism for feminist purposes.

This thesis as a whole stands as testament to the fact that all feminists confront the problem that 'woman' as category cannot connote a common identity, and that it is debatable to what extent all women share a common form of oppression that outweighs other identities. If we accept that gender distinctions are an effect of culture, and that their meanings are constantly shifting within different historical and cultural formations, we necessarily accept that gender is always an ambiguous and contradictory category, which is independent of

sex, 'with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one.'⁵⁵ Within this context Butler argues that gay and lesbian citations of heterosexual conventions of gender organization (such as butch/femme) are not simply representations of heterosexual identities within a homosexual framework. Rather, such citation throws the constructedness of such categories into sharp relief, referring not to an original but a 'parody of the idea of the natural and original.'⁵⁶

Feminism's recourse to the representational category of 'woman' is also viewed by Butler as construct, in that feminism's appeal to the 'we' of womankind is always exclusionary. Butler asserts that gender's instability 'sets into question the foundational restrictions on feminist political theorizing and opens up other configurations, not only of genders and bodies, but of politics itself.'⁵⁷ In other words, if politics did not appeal to categories of subjects deemed to own pre-existing ordinary identities, the binarism of gender relations as they are now understood might be exploded in favour of a polymorphous range of identities, that would facilitate a better understanding of how gender identity, and all entries into subjecthood are negotiated. Compelling as Butler's argument is, the notion of parody suggests an imitation of something that already exists; and even if, in the case of gender difference, this is the imitation of the idea of gender binarism, that idea itself, rather than any sense of its naturalness, has been and remains the focus of feminism's contestation of dominant patriarchal

meanings of gender. The idea of appropriate gender socialization does have a material effect on the lives of women of whatever race or sexual orientation, although it is not the single determinant. Although the idea of parody as a tool in feminist politics is a seductive one, as I've suggested in the section on postmodernism, it is difficult to imagine a situation where the denial of the impact current meanings of gender difference have on women's lives would not result in a gender-neutral stance.

This is manifestly not the case in Butler's writing, and her thesis indicates the increasing tensions within lesbian feminism as to the range of sexual identities lesbians can or should have, which have instigated new theoretical explorations into the appropriation and manipulation of gender difference - such as the meanings attributed to butch/femme roles. Susan Ardill and Sue O'Sullivan are concerned that in this we lose a feminist challenge to continued gender divisions and inequalities - particularly in the roles adopted by butch/femmes:

Because lesbian experience is so untheorized and unsupported, even within radical or alternative cultures, any lesbian language of self-description and self-analysis has tended to remain underdeveloped. So these two words [butch/femme] have become dreadfully overburdened.⁵⁸

Butler would of course recognize in this a semantic richness, reflecting the continual dispersal of meaning around gender and the playful possibilities of ever-fluid butch/femme identification. Joan Nestle, in A Restricted Country (1987), demonstrates how important such identities were for lesbians in

the 1950s in making lesbianism visible on the streets as a sexual style of its own, in enraging the heterosexual spectator, and in signalling the eroticism of lesbian differences, despite the threat of violence and censure:

My understanding of why we angered straight spectators so is not that they saw us modeling ourselves after them, but just the opposite: we were a symbol of women's erotic autonomy, a sexual accomplishment that did not include them. The physical attacks were a direct attempt to break into this self-sufficient erotic partnership.⁵⁹

In an article on lesbian fashion in the 1990s, Inge Blackman and Kathryn Perry look at the increasing diversity of lesbian style signifiers that suggest and play with roles of butch/femme and S/M bottom and top. Although they add a cautionary note that, 'style may be subversive, but it can never become a substitute for direct political campaigning. If identity is a constantly shifting and changing phenomenon, it can no longer be a useful rallying cry for mobilizing people into action.'⁶⁰ Whether lesbian roleplay is subversive but not political continues to be debated, along with the question of whether the performance of difference necessarily reaffirms the power politics of heterosexual relationships.

Whether such a stance can be rendered politically useful in a broader feminist context remains to be seen; but such debates evidently enrich feminist discourse around the subject of compulsory heterosexuality and the politics of desire. Lesbian theorists remain the leaders in this field, since the political status of desire is as yet a much contested area, commonly

avoided by straight feminists, and the notion of gender as parody of a non-existent 'natural' origin offers some challenging possibilities. Butler accurately identifies a paradox in feminism's location of gender as at once constructed and originary, and perhaps her situating of parody as part of the politics of gay identity could be extended to heterosexual feminists' work on sexuality and subjectivity - to show the ways in which a sense of the parodic status of gender is already implicitly a part of the codification of heterosexual feminist discourse. Whether or not this extension of theories of otherness occurs, the value of such a position has clearly energized gay/lesbian theories, where the nineties has witnessed the modest beginnings of a new 'separatist' theoretical enterprise, with gay and lesbian theorists collaborating to produce such volumes as Inside/Out (1991); and new lesbian insights into feminist cultural criticism, such as New Lesbian Criticism (1992). In her introduction to Inside/Out, Diana Fuss asserts that 'what we need most urgently in gay and lesbian theory right now is a theory of marginality, subversion, dissidence, and othering'.⁶¹ Perhaps this would also make an accurate assessment of feminism's current needs, which in its institutional embeddedness in the mainstream, loses its purchase on the fact of its marginality and otherness.

Perhaps one of the most sustained critiques of gendered binarism, and one of the most compelling images to emerge from feminism's cross fertilization with postmodernist thinking, is Donna Haraway's 'Cyborg'. Neither organism nor machine, the Cyborg marks a post-industrial, post-humanist fission between

nature and culture, which transforms or deflects any originary meanings attributed to either term. The bio-technological contribution to social control remains, however, decidedly patriarchal, and 'the main trouble with cyborgs...is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism'; but, as she continues, 'illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins.'⁶² The cyborg, then, is not summoned by Haraway as a paradigm of the victim, caught up in the networks of what Foucault would term 'bio-power'; she is more interested in how cybernetics breaks down the humanist divisions between animal and human, mind and body, in a symbolic breach between nature and culture. For Haraway such an 'ironic' political stance as the one outlined in this essay, is an attempt to contribute to feminist debates around the politics of identity, by blocking the feminist tendency to retreat to pseudo-essentialist origins, extending the ground of 'new essentialist' discussions such as Butler's and Fuss':

Consciousness of exclusion through naming is acute. Identities seems contradictory, partial and strategic. With the hard-won recognition of their social and historical constitution, gender, race and class cannot provide the basis for belief in 'essential' unity. There is nothing about being 'female' that naturally binds women. There is not even such a state as 'being' female, itself a highly complex category constructed in contested sexual scientific discourses and other social entities.⁶³

Haraway identifies consequent risks in contemporary feminists constantly summoning the quality of 'being' female (particularly through experiential narratives) in its tendency to mark feminism as a totalizing discourse. Her intention here is to ironize female identity itself - something some lesbian theorists are also attempting to perform in their belief that gender parody such as butch/femme roleplay disassembles dominant meanings of gender identity, rather than simply replicating relations of dominance and submission. Haraway is signalling a position that might also facilitate a renewed rhetoric of resistance and opposition which does not simply rely on an acceptance of the 'realities' of oppressive mechanisms. In a curious fashion her work carries resonances of that of Shulamith Firestone's Dialectic of Sex, although feminist critiques of this text have of course focused upon its underlying biologism.⁶⁴ Haraway's account, however, denies biologism any privileged epistemological status; and in her portrayal of the cyborg she grounds biology and its possible connotations within shifting conditions of scientific discourse. Her ascription of the cyborgian subject does not deny the patriarchal rootedness of such a construction, but rather sees in the deflection of ordinary gender binarism, the possibilities of a new ironic form of resistance to existing relations of power.

CONCLUSION

No matter how enchanted one might be by the postmodernist redefinition of the categories masculine/feminine, and even male/female, feminists need to be able to 'crudely' assert that woman as category, encompassing the action and reaction of 'difference' in its many semantic layers, remains the subject and Subject of its political discourse. As Modleski avers, 'in the final analysis, it seems more important to struggle over what it means to be a woman than over whether or not to be one.'⁶⁵ The luxury of female anti-essentialism is still one only accorded to the privileged; non-white, non-heterosexual, non-bourgeois women are still finding political impetus in summoning up womanhood as identity, and femininity as a construct which excludes and punishes them most painfully of all - as Bell Hooks' summoning of Sojourner Truth's question, 'Ain't I a Woman?' as title for her 1982 text testifies.

One significant crisis in feminism is, I believe, the overwhelming consciousness that differing internal movements tend to create their own unwritten do's and don'ts; and women gaining access to feminist thought for the first time might be forgiven for feeling that they don't want to label themselves feminist because of the pejorative tone this term has culturally acquired. More importantly, they may feel that they cannot call themselves feminists, if they lack the 'qualifications' that certainly the more arcane branches of modern feminist thought seem to designate, a consideration strengthened by popular denunciations of feminism as prescriptive or even 'puritan'.⁶⁶ Alison Light

perceives the danger of a tone of piety creeping into feminism, perpetuating the complacency among (white) feminists that they are one of the 'chosen few', and she contests that 'Being a feminist, as I understand it, should not be like being in church: there are no blasphemies, no ritual incantations, no heretics and no saints.'⁶⁷ I would agree with these sentiments, which perhaps deserve restating - despite their 'obviousness' - because recent debates among feminists give the lie to the notion that there are some fairly tenacious 'heresies' which need weeding out. Yet, paradoxically, we are in a position where there are some 'heretics' who use feminism to annihilate it, prompting a need for greater explicitness around the question of what feminism as discourse and action intends to achieve, and whether demarcated 'boundaries' are feasible. Whether or not such boundaries are desirable, they seem to be urgently needed.

Writing in 1971, Juliet Mitchell prophesied that the biggest single theoretical battle would be between radical and socialist feminists;⁶⁸ here, Mitchell assumes that radical feminists will overcome their disaffection with the Left to combine their insights into women's experience and consciousness with a socialist feminist theory of women's oppression. Although the rift between these two positions has been demarcated many times since, in retrospect the major battle has been in the field of 'theory' itself and its possible disjunctions with a feminist political practice. Feminism has matured, and the potential sites for conflict - both within and outside feminist parameters - have multiplied. From largely eschewing political/theoretical coalitions with men during the seventies, in the nineties many

feminists are forging new connections with men - at least at the level of postmodern critiques. The new battle for feminism, assuming that it survives the most recent crises of confidence/meaning outlined in this chapter, will be to find epistemological measures to defend its autonomy while enacting bridges between the politics of race, class, and sexual orientation. Many women who previously felt that their concerns were not addressed by the dominant forms of feminism might then recognize a newly strengthened location for their own resistance within a politics of heterogeneity. We live in an era which offers academic feminism some confusing messages. The shape and scope of women's studies in face of critical 'acceptance', has been transformed, yet the ideological pressures exerted by a patriarchal social reality still hold sway, and arguably are reinforced in a climate of recession and economic shrinkage.

Speaking of the interfaces between black male and female experiences of oppression and those experiences of white females, Kate Millett comments on how in the case of women and the perpetuation of the ideology of femininity, 'a certain handful of women are accorded higher status that they may perform a species of cultural policing over the rest'.⁶⁹ It is tempting to see this tokenism filtering into increasing incidents of feminist interventions into 'high theory', particularly that of postmodernism. One of my chief concerns about the degree of acceptance, and even popularity, of feminist theoretical positions in academia is that such theorists are accorded by their male counterparts the 'honour' of being the cultural policeforce for feminism as a whole. Postmodern or

poststructuralist feminism is viewed in this light as a sign of feminist thought at its most sophisticated, a methodology which renders other forms of feminist expression redundant. It suggests that feminists are being encouraged to forget the tribulations of their recent past, and throw in their hard-won resources with the anti-humanist men, whose investment in exploding humanist binarism might still represent a somewhat different agenda from that normally associated with feminism.

Feminism has always devoted time and energy to the anticipation of utopian possibilities of social transformation, as do all radical political positions to a greater or lesser extent. Perhaps the value of utopian preoccupations is undermined by postmodern critiques. When I attempt to identify the desirability or otherwise of the continuing production of feminist utopias as a viable political tactic, I recall Foucault's distinction between utopias and heterotopias in his Preface to The Order of Things:

Utopias afford consolation: although they have no real locality there is nevertheless a fantastic, untroubled region in which they are able to unfold: they open up cities with vast avenues, superbly planted gardens, countries where life is easy, even though the road to them is chimerical. Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things...to 'hold together'.⁷⁰

Foucault (citing Borges as an example of a writer of

heterotopias) is here mocking conventional systems of coherence and classification, which comprise the formation of knowledges from which we seek access to the truth of being. Such ordering instances, it is asserted, provide the conditions of possibility of uttering 'truths', and of founding disciplines of empirical knowledge. Similarly, feminists have long been in the business of mocking, inverting or disrupting the existing 'order of things', particularly in observing that Western epistemology assumes orders which on closer scrutiny conform to and support the conditions of possibility of a distinctly masculine body of knowledge and truth claims. At the centre of this order is language which inscribes gendered and other identities in opposition to one another in the indefatigable tension of the 'either/or' logic of modern thought. In a sense feminists are out to destroy the syntax of phallogocentrism, to get to the cement that binds the logic of such thought together in such arbitrary terms, not in order to rebuild the structure of such syntax in a slightly different configuration, but in order to demonstrate that such a structure has no natural foundations whatever.

Utopias are the 'no-places' of a future where society has transformed into something other than our present realities. In order to construct utopias, writers of fiction or political theory have recourse to the dominant systems of the present to enact a critique of its inequities, or its mistakes. Feminist utopias also seek to enter that no-place where the meanings of gender and oppression are exploded as ever arbitrary relations of power with a chimerical link to the 'natural', which only proves to be an essence constructed from the meanings of social life in

its ever changing social and cultural contexts. In offering such utopias feminists remind us of the 'no place' for women in current dominant ideological representations - and as they seek to gesture a future 'no place' for women as well as men, they might also be viewed as venturing a heterotopia of their own. Feminists do not, after all, envisage a future which is simply the obverse of the present; often the aim is to dispense with classic binarist thinking in favour of a multiplicity, which denies all essence, including what are thought of as biological imperatives, in order to think what is, in current discursive formations, radically 'unthinkable'. If we regard utopian texts such as Shulamith Firestone's Dialectic of Sex in this light, it is clearly inadequate to simply view her work as riddled with essentialist truth claims about female biology. One might usefully review the intentions of Firestone's work, in common with other feminist writings, as an exhortation to women to think outside their current social reality, in order to articulate what has currently no 'language' of its own.⁷¹

As Angelika Bammer suggests, utopian visions remain partial 'in both senses of the word: partisan and limited.'⁷² As Bammer indicates, this invites both negative and positive interpretations of the term: the negative side lies in the threat of exclusionism (particularly of the needs of less privileged groups of women), although the threat of the exclusion of men remains a powerful rhetorical challenge. Utopias are positive in the sense that feminists' multifarious and sometimes conflicting views of the desired shape of its utopias, remind us that feminist thought is constantly reshaping and re-envisaging gender

difference, and still has to focus upon reclaiming women's part in historical and cultural processes as a political necessity. The term heterotopia reminds us that not only are possible visions of the future multiple and ever changing, but that our critiques of the present draw upon multifarious perspectives on present social realities, specific to class, ethnic and sexual locations within patriarchy. Finally, the term heterotopia seems happily compatible with my exploration and affirmation of feminism's heterogeneity, where diversity and conflict might better ensure that our future is not a covert repetition of the shape of the past.

CONCLUSION

One of the sad conclusions I have reached in writing this book is that feminists have reinvented the wheel a number of times.¹

As this thesis has progressed it has drifted away from the realms of grassroots political issues, and into more abstract areas of thought. Such a transition seems to me to mirror the movement from activism to internal debate within feminism, which many feminists have lamented over the years - such sentiments appear in the British Anthology What is Feminism? (1986). Nonetheless, during the nineties there has been a tendency to search again for feminism's 'lost' political edge, and the work of black and lesbian feminists has been particularly important in their insistent focus on the political and theoretical implications of the fact of women's lived experience, without resorting to naive individualist tendencies characteristic of earlier bourgeois feminism. Feminists have learnt, too, that complacency can be dangerous - mainstream matrices of power have the breadth and capacity to absorb and contain sites of resistance, to render opposition obsolete with ease and rapidity. By the mid-eighties, feminism was mourning the increasing stranglehold of the New Right in the West, and none of the dominant strands of socialist, liberal or radical feminism seemed equal to face the challenge alone. As the eighties drew to a close the boundaries which defined each strand increasingly became blurred. Such political and methodological distinctions were played out on the surfaces of identity politics, which was either construed as an instance of feminism's nascent humanism - its investment in the discrete

individual subject self - or as a creative problematic of the status of identity (in the singular) altogether.

In Britain, socialist feminism lost much of its initial investment in the Marxist Left. Indeed, Tessa ten Tusscher argues that the gender-blind political analyses of the British Left renders them unequal to challenging and understanding the nature of the New Right in America and Europe. Classic left-wing discourse, couched in economic and class-based terms, fails to account for the moral, traditional and familial aspects of current governmental policies and ideology. Tusscher asserts that the concept of individual freedom, fostered by Thatcherism, is a renewed freedom for men at the expense of women's newly-won economic and political freedoms.² The underlying themes of 'organic' Toryism are the family, duty, law and order, free economy and nationalism. Socialist feminism's emphasis on the pervasiveness of familial ideology highlights the moral and familial aspects of both the British and US New Right; and they began to place even greater emphasis on contextualizing the changing social and economic position of women since the 1950s. During the capitalist boom of the fifties, and the resulting expansion of the labour market, more women took up full-time employment and participated in trade union activism; in addition, women gained freer access to higher education, leading to entry into the professions. Greater social freedoms themselves facilitated the conditions of existence of a new women's movement; and gradually the media began to characterize the 'new woman' as wielding unbridled power, with the potential to threaten the masculinist status quo. Tusscher suggests that

feminism itself prompted a shifting of mainstream political agendas, arguing that, 'it was this crisis of patriarchy which prompted the birth of the moral right'.³

The conservative reaction against this supposed tidal wave of feminism and the rise of the so-called 'permissive society' strengthened in the wake of economic recession. Now the most widely publicized aspects of the 'Sexual Revolution' are the risks to society (or, more emotively, the 'family'), concentrating on disease (physical and moral), homosexuality and other forms of 'deviant' behaviour. As the seventies drew to a close, feminists, instead of being able to celebrate the 'victory' of having a woman at the head of the British government, have had to face the fact that women have suffered sustained attacks on their newly won economic and domestic freedoms. Unlike America's National Organization for Women, British feminists have been largely unsuccessful in effecting legislative changes: 'Instead British feminism has exerted pressure in a more vicarious manner, forcing the moral right to adopt more subtle and complex strategies to exert patriarchal relations.'⁴ At the heart of this swing to the Right lies a certain conception of the family as a natural unit as well as a morally desirable one, and therefore any feminist critiques of current familial organization, are characterized as antipathetic to the desires of human nature.

Of course a significant distinction made by feminists is the gap between familial ideology and actual families, who are less and less likely to conform to the perceived norm. 'Abnormal' families - such as single parent households, or lesbian parent

households are more than likely to suffer when the state continues to tailor its legislation and support facilities for the needs of the 'normal' minority. New Right ideology assumes that women are functional for the maintenance of familial stability, and the labour market - equal opportunities rhetoric aside - still operates along masculinist terms, subsuming 'female interests' within the family unit. This demonstrates that the New Right has done much to reaffirm contemporary gendered assumptions about women's place in society; moreover, the New Right has reinscribed difference - especially in the cases of gender and race/culture. It is not a new tactic to make reference to the natural to substantiate a preferred form of social order, but the New Right has worked hard to give the category of the natural a more urgent contemporary meaning. This is particularly evident in the construction of a new ideology of the natural, where in seeming to legislatively accommodate differing needs, otherness is an entrenched part of political reality:

For women, the New Right's political philosophy signals the undermining of many of the equal rights gains and freedoms won over the last decade. For Blacks, it provides the basis for an insidious form of racism, dressed up this time as common sense rather than science, which will undoubtedly be increasingly used against them.⁵

If we can identify a 'new racism' founded on the notion of irreconcilable cultural differences, rather than biological inferiority, perhaps we need also to investigate a possible 'new sexism', which has gained momentum by going 'underground'. The

New Right cleverly favours an indirect attack on feminism through ideological means, and despite feminism's commitment to an interrogation of dominant ideologies, feminism as marginal discourse has less access to forms of communication which would enable them to counter such attacks. Feminism is popularly portrayed as outmoded - media announcements herald a 'post-feminist' climate where young women are successful and independent, and less likely to espouse 'dangerous' feminist ideals. Those women who doggedly insist on proclaiming themselves feminist are lampooned as ugly, fat and undoubtedly lesbians, and who spend their time condemning men and tearing up pornography.⁶ In opposition to this, the 'post-feminist' of the TV advertisements is resplendent in her executive suit and unruffled by her male colleagues. Both images are, of course, outrageous distortions, but serve their purpose well: the first is 'masculine'; the second retains a quintessential femininity, despite its inherent contradictions. Yet these images neatly summarize one of the most insidious threats for contemporary feminists: if young women are internalizing the post-feminist ideal and the assumption that feminist politics are therefore redundant, 'consciousness raising' is again one of the most vital feminist activities - a consciousness raising that appeals to all women, whatever their background, but which avoids the pitfalls of divisive individualism. Here the legacy of radical feminist politics provides, perhaps, the strongest potential for both defence and counter-attack.

The idea of post-feminism has also been legitimized by a conservative backlash within feminist thought, typified by the later work of Germaine Greer and Betty Friedan, which announces a return to the sanctity of the 'private', and emphasis upon the family and childcare. Equality gives way to a celebration of difference and, in Greer's case, a utopian idealization of the extended family - demonstrating that an awareness of the heterogeneity of female experience can lead to a celebration of individuality, rather than initiate feminist collectivity. Judith Stacey remarks that this new pro-conservative feminism discards 'the most significant contributions of feminist theory and, more alarmingly, provides in their place a feminism that turns quite readily into its opposite.'⁷ Such women, who became public figures through feminism, continue to be received as feminists, and the feminist explosion of the 1960s and 1970s appears to risk implosion under the sheer weight of its contradictions. It is crucial, therefore, to focus upon contemporary issues which, depressingly, often turn out to be the 'old' issues in a new guise. The popular conceptions of feminist and Left-wing politics have suffered badly under the present government, and this must be largely attributed to a failure to recognize the ideological impact of the New Right, and the failure to devise a means of response. Feminists have always sought to avoid the 'star system' inherent in political manoeuvring, but recent developments in both politics and the media suggest a pressing need for a statement of intent, if not a mouthpiece for such intentions.

One of the central lines of attack of radical feminist

politics - the anti-pornography movement, and the challenge against the continued sexual objectification of the female form - has itself been hijacked by New Right moralist agendas. I briefly discussed the paradox of the unholy alliance between activists such as Dworkin with moral purity campaigners in Chapter Three, an alliance which clearly throws up wider ramifications for feminist coalitional strategies. The fusion of anti-porn with pro-censorship campaigners arguably dilutes the force of radical feminism's original attack, which was directed against a patriarchal ideology that utilizes the sexualized image of the female in all its cultural productions. Commentators such as Margaret Hunt have indicated that the moral crusaders' concept of obscenity and female degradation relies upon significantly different notions of 'appropriate' representations of women than does feminism:

Feminists should be casting their nets both more carefully and more widely. It is madness to put new repressive tools into the hands of the state at a time when conservatism is riding high (perhaps at any time). A better strategy, which some feminists in both England and North America are already pursuing, is to infiltrate the TV and radio networks, develop alternative media, formulate subtler and better analyses of the intersections of power and representation, break straight white monopolies on all kinds of image production, not just pornography, and make coalitions with other groups traditionally excluded from the making of images.⁸

Hunt recommends coalitions, nonetheless, but only with groups that have themselves suffered exclusion at the hands of the mainstream; in addition, her recipe for change includes gestures

towards offensive rather than defensive operations as an effective mode of resistance.

I believe that feminist academics, at least, are on the offensive in the nineties, particularly since the increasing sophistication of the 'men in feminism' debate has encouraged interventions by adversaries as well as allies. In 1992 American journalist Susan Faludi's Backlash was published in Great Britain: its title alone identifies the crux of the crisis in current feminism, which ought not to be attributed to a simple 'breaking of the ranks' among some of the most important feminist voices, but rather to the means used to undermine feminism's influence in society at large. In her book, Faludi tackles the dominant theme of apologists for 'post-feminism' - that feminism's battle for social and economic equality has made women depressed, susceptible to stress-induced illnesses, and even infertile.

The backlash is at once sophisticated and banal, deceptively 'progressive' and proudly backward. It deploys both the 'new' findings of 'scientific research' and the sentimental moralizing of yesteryear; it turns into media sound bites both the glib pronouncements of pop-psych trend-watchers and the frenzied rhetoric of New Right preachers. The backlash has succeeded in framing virtually the whole issue of women's rights in its own language.⁹

Faludi incisively demonstrates that the biggest danger confronting feminism today is the meanings attributed to it by the media and politicians alike, and the way that it has accordingly become an effective scapegoat for society's ills.

Neil Lyndon's No More Sex War was also published in 1992, predictably accompanied by a blaze of publicity that overshadowed Faludi's work. Several months before the book's publication, Lyndon was given space in the 'quality' newspapers to outline the terms of his critique of feminism, which rest largely upon his conviction that 'modern feminism was rooted in the totalitarian attitudes of the late Sixties when, in its search for a "class enemy", the New Left in America and the rest of the West appropriated the axioms of Black Power about white "honky" culture and applied them to sexual politics.'¹⁰ Such beliefs, which are being voiced with increasing regularity, are underpinned by conceptions of feminism as orthodoxy; and as the above quote suggests are bolstered by a fear that outgroups such as blacks and feminists are undermining some of the most cherished features of 'our' culture. Responses to feminism's perceived threat are regularly cast in the language of nostalgia, which as Doane and Hodges point out, 'is not just a sentiment but also a rhetorical practice'.¹¹ In other words, the practice of 'nostalgic' writing often claims recourse to a pre-existent 'reality' and naturalness of a certain set of social relations that any radical discourse threatens to destabilize. It is a popular form of reaction, because it offers its readers the comfort of the myth of a past status quo which has been wrongfully swept away.

With regard to feminism, as I have suggested, there has been a steady stream of such work since the seventies, and on the one hand this is itself a tribute to feminism's power to unsettle the popular consciousness; yet there are necessarily consequent

dangers in that 'The popularity of nostalgic texts and the power of these texts to appropriate dissident voices must be read as a massive effort to discredit and control feminist and other radical writing.'¹² Anti-feminist work does not always come in predictable guises, and sometimes the most threatening and difficult to challenge is that which uses the discourse of feminism, or at least refers to it with an aura of scholarly knowledge. Camille Paglia's Sexual Personae (1992) would be an example of this, where the writer situates herself as a disenchanted feminist, who now recognizes the pull of 'naturally' inscribed differences between the sexes and their contribution to men and women's predestined social roles. Even the phenomenon of the 'new man' - a term used to describe men who have acknowledged gender roles as oppressive, and have attempted to raise their own consciousness around the constraints of masculinity - is often ridiculed as an illustration of how feminism feminizes men. It is rare to find a positive appraisal of the new man that is not punctuated with scepticism and gloom;¹³ yet its emergence as a term is at the least a backhanded tribute to feminism's power to infiltrate the popular consciousness - although as yet we have little control over the shaping of popular 'feminism'.

One of the reasons that I have chosen to devote a good deal of this thesis to a critical re-evaluation of movement and transformation in the Women's Movement since the late sixties, is not to celebrate the evolution of feminist thought into the highly sophisticated academic business it has become. It is important to re-remember its origins in diversity, which in many ways explain its conceptual difficulties as well as its

strengths. As the editorial in the Spring 1989 edition of Feminist Review put it, 'feminists have learned - often painfully - that women's liberation, indeed any social movement, has no single point of origin; it is born in a diversity of times and places.'¹⁴ Much of this diversity has been essential to the development of a feminist position which can take account of the heterogeneous subject identities women achieve in their specific ethnic/cultural and historical locations. Perhaps we might establish some common ground with postmodernist thought in arguing that feminism's chief successes have been when they have devoted their attention to the constellation of power relations that are perpetuated at local and immanent levels. Certainly in an environment where the most basic demands of Women's Liberation have yet to be met - such as equal rights, equal pay, and the socialization of domestic labour - feminism must take heart from its origins in diversity, and use this as an object lesson in the necessity to keep shifting its focus, evading if not totally avoiding the absorption of a backlash.

If I had started the work on this thesis some years later, I suspect that its structural logic would have been somewhat different; in particular, I might not have adopted the logic of thinking in feminist 'strands' to facilitate a critical overview. For many contemporary feminists, the premises of such divisions have become stale already, and studies of points of conflict and comparison between opposing positions is the preferred critical stance.¹⁵ The title of this work itself suggests my profound conviction that conflict and heterogeneity are workable points of departure for a feminism that now has to contend with an

atmosphere of institutional absorption and political reaction. One of the most important intentions of this work was to link up the 'old' views of the 1970s and early eighties with the 'new' wave of ultra-sophisticated feminist theory, in order to argue that early Second Wave thinking is neither outmoded nor dispensable.

There are of course dangers in foregrounding feminism's conflicts without suggesting that they are positive and organic to the wider aims of feminist discourse, which constantly remakes itself in newer guises of resistance. In this light the work of recent black feminist theorists such as Patricia Hill Collins can be viewed as a salutary example of theory which places sites of conflict and internal debate in the background, favouring an emphasis upon the common roots and extra-theoretical supports for modern black feminist thought.¹⁶ Her account of the development of black feminist thought includes references to fiction, journals, blues lyrics; in addition she identifies a tradition among American black communities where mothers teach their daughters independence and self-confidence from an early age, in order to combat dominant ideological strategies which otherwise might convince black women of their continued cultural invisibility. Not all of these women, as mothers, singers or writers would conceive of themselves as feminists, but their special language of resistance created the conditions of existence for black women to conceive of themselves as feminists whilst simultaneously denying the centrality of the white feminist tradition.

Nonetheless, most black feminists are adept at identifying connections between their work and that of white feminists - unfortunately the reverse is rarely true. I think that white feminism could learn many lessons from black feminism - one of which would be to reconceive what is often perceived as black feminism's relative theoretical 'naivety'. What is often neglected when feminisms are judged in terms of their 'sophistication' is that an important function of black feminism has been to keep alive the vitality of the social and political environment from which it emerged, particularly evident in celebrations of past black female activism and epistemological radicalism. In general, white feminists have lost any sense of a tradition of feminist thought - even the legacy of the seventies is neglected. Much of it may seem naive, ill-conceived and contentious, but it is evidence of a moment of success for women, when many chose to identify themselves as feminists without fearing reprisals - such as being dubbed man haters - and endeavoured to develop a theory which had a bearing on the lives of ordinary women. This is not to undermine the importance of locating points of tension in such works - especially elements of blindness to other forms of oppression which shape women's lives.

Something that has struck me most powerfully in writing this thesis, is that feminism as a site of contested meanings and strategies is increasingly problematized by the amount of feminist texts that emerge and sink rapidly out of print, while others survive and become landmarks in feminist thought. We need such 'landmarks' in order to communicate to others who wish to investigate the origins of Second Wave feminism. Yet their

continued existence in face of others' extinction gives the lie to the notion that a 'history' of feminist ideas is easily traceable and exists as a concrete phenomenon, whereas 'what is taken as history are some privileged and published histories of feminism, which have been all too quickly naturalized.'¹⁷

Although the last chapter of this thesis has been devoted to the abstractions and collisions in theoretical links made by/within feminism, it is important not to lose sight of the early aims of Second Wave Feminism. No matter how simplistic some of their constructions seem today, early critiques made those important steps towards forging a language specific to the experiences of women, whilst simultaneously facilitating the articulation of such experiences as manifestations of oppression by gender. In the race for theoretical sophistication it is easy to forget feminism's main aim as a tool of communication available to all women who desired means to express the specificity of their own hardships. Buzz words such as 'patriarchy' and 'gender socialization' have been challenged for their over-simplistic universalism, and up to a point these criticisms are pertinent, particularly reconceptions of patriarchal power and gender divisions which deny women the simple 'luxury' of being victims to a huge anonymous system of power wielded by biological males. Yet these terms, contested from the moment they were coined in a feminist context, provided the beginnings of a language of resistance, even though it is often hard from our perspective in the nineties to recapture, for example, what was so earth-shattering about Germaine Greer's Female Eunuch or Kate Millett's Sexual Politics. Sheila Rowbotham echoes these

sentiments when she recalls 'I remember when it was not obvious that housework was work - hence the initial excitement created by this assertion.'¹⁸

In tandem with the emergence of works of high feminist theory, there appeared publications such as Rowbotham's retrospective, The Past is Before Us (1989) and Michelene Wandor's Once a Feminist (1990), which attempt to offer personal and collective memories of the Women's Liberation Movement which are accessible and interesting to all women. There is no easy solution to the atmosphere of exclusionism endemic to a feminism which now does most of its maturing in universities, and where elements of cultural elitism are difficult to avoid. Nonetheless, it is worth recalling the writings of working-class women like Evelyn Tension, who entered feminism and attended conferences and meetings only to find that 'it's about hearing millions of words flying around our heads and it's not that we don't understand them, it's that they come from a different reality, a middle-class women's consciousness.'¹⁹ I would affirm the necessity for feminism to perpetually extend its scope, to interrogate its apparent past errors of judgement. Yet this widening of view should be supported by an awareness of why we continue to rejuvenate feminism in a semi-autonomous discursive field (yet remaining aware of its entrapment within dominant discursive practices), and specifically of the political reasons for this continuation. I have tried to look back, not to seek the origins of an authentic Second Wave consciousness in the interstices of our recent history, or to assert that there has been an evolution in thought in any simplistic sense, but to

resist the 'sad conclusion' expressed by Josephine Donovan in the epigraph to this conclusion - that to lose the sense of what has gone before is to be burdened with the task of constantly reinventing the wheel.

NOTES

NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

1. Elizabeth Wilson, Hidden Agendas: Theory, Politics, and Experience in the Women's Movement, Tavistock Publications (London), 1986, p.8.
2. Michel Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences, Tavistock Publications (London), 1970, p.xxiii.
3. Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics, Methuen (London), 1985, p.87. However, Moi fails to articulate her own political position in her endeavour to juggle the positive and negative aspects of both French and Anglo-American feminism.
4. This is not to say that I believe that the differences between feminisms can be simply obliterated at the level of theory. For example, I do not agree with Toril Moi that 'a lesbian and/or black feminist criticism have presented exactly the same methodological and theoretical problems as the rest of Anglo-American feminist criticism' (Moi, 1985, p.86). On the contrary, the introduction of the factors of race and sexual orientation are examples that profoundly affect feminism precisely at a methodological level - as I hope to show in later chapters.
5. See, for instance, Elizabeth Wilson, Only Halfway to Paradise - Women in Postwar Britain: 1945-1968, Tavistock Publications (London), 1980.
6. In the light of my concluding chapter, one might be tempted to add a fourth dimension - that of 'backlash' - although that would be to put an altogether negative construction on feminist theory. As I hope this thesis demonstrates, feminism, in common with other radical discourse, constantly lives under the threat of backlash.
7. 'Reflections on Twenty Years of Feminism', in Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (eds) What is Feminism?, Blackwell (Oxford), 1986, pp.34-48.

8. Kathryn Harriss, 'New Alliances: Socialist-Feminism in the Eighties', Feminist Review (Special Issue: The Past Before Us: Twenty Years of Feminism), No. 31, Spring 1989, p.37.
9. Michele Barrett, Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis (Revised Edition), Verso (London), 1988.
10. A thorough exploration of the extent of women's contribution in art and literature was instigated by 'gynocritics' such as Elaine Showalter - see, for example her pathfinding study of British women novelists, A Literature of Their Own, Virago (London), 1978.
11. 'At the deepest level of Western knowledge, Marxism introduced no real discontinuity; it found its place without difficulty, as a full, quiet, comfortable and, goodness knows, satisfying form for a time (its own), within an epistemological arrangement that welcomed it gladly...and that it, in return, had no intention of disturbing and, above all, no power to modify, even one jot, since it rested entirely upon it. Marxism exists in nineteenth century thought like a fish in water: that is, unable to breathe anywhere else.', Michel Foucault, 1970, pp.261-2.
12. Alice Jardine and Paul Smith (eds.), Men in Feminism, Methuen (London), 1987.
13. This article was first published in Raritan 3 (Fall, 1983), and is reprinted in Men in Feminism, 1987, pp.116-132.
14. Jardine and Smith, 1987, p.119.
15. K.K. Ruthven, Feminist Literary Studies: An Introduction, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge), 1984, p.8.
16. Ibid., p.10.
17. E. Ann Kaplan, Postmodernism and its Discontents, Verso (London), 1988, p.4.

18. During the main body of my thesis, as here, I tend to use this term in a wider sense, to embrace earlier feminist writings which were not originally acknowledged as 'theory' because of lack of 'rigor' or unorthodox methodologies.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. Drude Dahlerup, Introduction to Drude Dahlerup (ed.), The New Women's Movement: Feminism and Political Power in Europe and the USA, Sage Publications (London), 1986, p.2.
2. Reprinted in Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine and Anita Rapone (eds.), Radical Feminism, Quadrangle Books (New York), 1973, p.318.
3. Susan Brownmiller, Femininity, Paladin (London), 1986, p.9.
4. Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation (Second Edition), Basil Blackwell (Oxford), 1987, p.3. See also Ginette Castro, American Feminism: A Contemporary History, trans. E. Loverde-Bagwell, New York University Press (New York), 1990, pp.187-9.
5. Elizabeth Wilson, Only Halfway to Paradise: Women in Postwar Britain 1945-1968, Tavistock Publications (London) 1980, p.16.
6. Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique, Penguin Books (Harmondsworth), 1965, p.60.
7. In addition to Friedan's account of 'the problem that has no name', Elaine Showalter's The Female Malady (Virago (London), 1987) describes the categorization and treatment of female insanity from 1830-1980.
8. Elizabeth Wilson, 1980, pp.186-87.
9. Mary Wollstonecraft, Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Penguin Books (Harmondsworth), 1975, p.100.
10. Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own, Triad Grafton (London), 1977, p.93.

11. Ibid., p.94.
12. Simone de Beauvoir The Second Sex, trans. H.M. Parshley, Penguin Books (Harmondsworth), 1972, pp.159-160.
13. Ibid., p.295.
14. '[Freud] assumes that woman feels that she is a mutilated man. But the idea of mutilation implies comparison and evaluation... The little boy obtains from his penis a living experience that makes it an object of pride to him, but this pride does not necessarily imply a corresponding humiliation for his sisters, since they know the masculine organ in its outward aspect only - this outgrowth, this weak little rod of flesh can in itself inspire them only with indifference, or even disgust.' Ibid., p.73.
15. 'De Beauvoir speculates that woman's identity as Other and her fundamental alienation derive in part from her body - especially her reproductive capacity - and in part from the prehistoric division of labour dictated by the child bearing and rearing functions... Woman's mentality, her cultural outlook, and her religious world view are thus an expression of the fundamental role she has been cast in.' Josephine Donovan, Feminist Theory: The Intellectual Traditions of American Feminism, Frederick Ungar (New York) 1985, p.123.
16. De Beauvoir, 1972, p.730.
17. Germaine Greer, The Female Eunuch, Paladin Books (London), 1971, p.68.
18. Later Freudian critics have of course taken a less generous view of Freud's psychoanalytic practices, and have analysed both essentialist and prescriptive tendencies especially as evident in the case histories. See for example, C. Bernheimer and C. Kahane (eds.), In Dora's Case: Freud, Hysteria, Feminism, Virago Press (London), 1985.
19. Rosalind Delmar, 'What is Feminism?', in Juliet Mitchell & Ann Oakley (eds.), What is Feminism?, Blackwell (Oxford), 1986, p.9.

20. Anne Koedt, et al., 1973.
21. See for example Once a Feminist: Stories of a Generation, ed. Michelene Wandor, Virago (London) 1990. This collection of interviews focuses on various women's memories of the first ever British Women's Liberation conference held at Ruskin College, Oxford in February 1970.
22. Michel Foucault's The Order of Things is useful in its analysis of history as the cataloguing of differences in order to wrench heterogeneity into a system of relations of similarity and equivalence. Although Foucault does not address the problem of woman, what happens if we substitute 'women' for 'madness' in the following?
- The history of madness would be the history of the Other - of that which, for a given culture, is at once interior and foreign, therefore to be excluded (so as to exorcize the interior danger) but by being shut away (in order to reduce its otherness); whereas the history of the order imposed on things would be the history of the Same - of that which, for a given culture, is both dispersed and related, therefore to be distinguished by kinds and to be collected together into identities.' Tavistock Publications (London), 1974, p.xxiv.
23. Ginette Castro charts the processes and problems with consciousness raising as a political endeavour in American Feminism: A Contemporary History, New York University Press (New York), 1990, pp.20-25.
24. Ibid., p.20.
25. See Michelene Wandor, 1990.
26. Sheila Rowbotham, The Past is Before Us: Feminism in Action Since the 1960s, Pandora Press (London), 1989, p.13.
27. Tufnell Park group, Shrew October 1969, quoted in A. Coote and B. Campbell, 1987, p.15.
28. Ibid., p.36.

29. Reprinted in M. Wandor, 1990, pp.242-43.
30. Rosalind Coward, Patriarchal Precedents: Sexuality and Social Relations, Routledge (London), 1983, p.99.
31. Friedrich Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, Penguin Books (Harmondsworth), 1985, p.87.
32. Kate Millett, Sexual Politics, Virago (London), 1977, p.25 (my emphasis).
33. McDonough and Harrison 'Patriarchy and Relations of Production' in A. Kuhn and A. Wolpe (eds) Feminism and Materialism: Women and Modes of Production, Routledge (London), 1978, p.21.
34. This tension is explored in detail in Chapter Four.
35. Michele Barrett, Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis (Revised Edition), Verso (London), 1988, p.19.
36. 'Through a certain sleight of hand, Engels made the position of women synonymous with the family', Rosalind Coward, 1983, p.186.
37. Michele Barrett, 1988, p.205.
38. Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish, trans. A. Sheridan, Penguin Books (Harmondsworth), 1979, p.87.
39. Michele Barrett, 1988, p. 76.
40. AnnMarie Wolpe, 'Education and the Sexual Division of Labour' in A. Kuhn and A. Wolpe (eds), 1978, p.325.
41. Arthur Brittan and Mary Maynard, Sexism, Racism, and Oppression, Basil Blackwell (Oxford), 1984, p.77.
42. Sheila Rowbotham, 'Women's Liberation and the New Politics' (1969) in M. Wandor, 1990, p.11.

43. A. Coote and B. Campbell, 1987, p.27.
44. Rosalind Delmar, 'What is Feminism?', in J. Mitchell and A. Oakley, 1986, pp.26-7.
45. A. Coote and B. Campbell, 1987, p.11.
46. Liberal feminism seems to lie in between socialist and radical agendas, favouring both political interventions and localized protest (such as occupying men-only bars).
47. For example, Kate Millett's radical stance in Sexual Politics also contains elements which are quasi-Marxist in their thrust; Shulamith Firestone, in The Dialectic of Sex owes more to Marx than simply the book's title. She appropriates Marx's analytical model of class struggle to locate gender conflict as the prior determinant of social divisions.
48. Rosalind Delmar, 'What is Feminism?', in J. Mitchell and A. Oakley, 1986, p.28.
49. Bell Hooks, Talking Back: Thinking Feminist - Thinking Black, Sheba Feminist Publishers, (London), 1989, p.22.
50. Bell Hooks, *Ibid.*, p.47.
51. If one glances through radical anthologies such as Sisterhood is Powerful or Radical Feminism, the ratio of lesbian writers to 'heterosexual' ones (writers who ignore women-to-women issues altogether) is very small. This issue will be pursued in more detail in Chapter Three.
52. Ginette Castro, 1990, p.63.
53. *Ibid.*, p.64.
54. 'Women's Liberation Workshop Statement' (1970) in M. Wandor, 1990, p.241.
55. 'Joreen', 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness', A. Koedt, et al., 1973, p.296.

56. Rosalind Delmar, 'What is Feminism?', in J. Mitchell and A. Oakley, 1986, p.27.

57. From C. Brown and K. Olson (eds.), Feminist Criticism: Essays on Theory, Poetry and Prose, Scarecrow Press Inc (New York), 1978, p.52.

58. Juliet Mitchell, 'Reflections on Twenty Years of Feminism', in Juliet Mitchell and Anne Oakley, 1986, pp.34-48.

59. Rosalind Delmar, 'What is Feminism?', *ibid.*, p.11.

60. Drude Dahlerup, 1986, p.3.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. Karen Hunt 'Crossing the River of Fire: the Socialist Construction of Women's Politicization' in Judith Evans et al., Feminism and Political Theory, Sage Publications (London), 1986, p.47.

2. Judith Evans, 'Feminism and Political Theory', in J. Evans et al., 1986, p.2.

3. I have chosen to consistently refer to liberal, lesbian, black and radical feminism in the lower case, whereas I have chosen to capitalize Marxism because it is common practice to do so. I feel that to capitalize 'liberal' is to create ambiguities (not least since this has been the title of a parliamentary party). To leave liberal lower case is to encounter other kinds of ambiguities - not least to invite its more colloquial connotations of broadmindedness, unprejudiced, unrigorous and so forth. To some extent such diverse meanings serve my purpose well - which is ultimately to show cross-over points between strands, as well as to address the problem that male-oriented radical political thought often characterizes all feminisms as liberal - in other words as essentially reformist and obstructive to political (in a conventional sense) progress. Lesbian, black and radical positions are too fluid and capable of numerous sub-divisions (cultural and existentialist would be two examples of how radical feminism can be further unitized). None of these

strands, including Marxist feminism, offer a clearly articulated dogma (which is why feminism retains its lower case when conjoined to Marxist), but as I constantly argue, are negotiable.

4. See Thomas Hobbes, The Citizen (1651), Man and Citizen ed. Bernard Gert, Harvester Press (Sussex), 1978.

5. See, for example, Alison Jaggar, Feminist Politics and Human Nature, Harvester Press (Hemel Hempstead), 1983: 'Liberal political theory emerged with the rise of capitalism, it expressed the needs of the developing capitalist class and the liberal values of autonomy and self-fulfilment have often been linked with the right to private property.' (p.34)

6. Ibid., 1983, p.29.

7. Thomas Hobbes, 1978, p.116.

8. Ibid., p. 123.

9. Ibid., p.143.

10. Mary Wollstonecraft, Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Penguin Books (Harmondsworth), 1975, p.131.

11. 'Rationalism and Romanticism: Two Strategies for Women's Liberation', in J. Evans et al., 1986, p.17.

12. Mary Wollstonecraft, 1975, p.318.

13. Ibid., p.317.

14. Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique, Penguin Books (Harmondsworth), 1965, p.38.

15. Rosemary Tong, Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction, Routledge (London), 1989, p.24.

16. Alison Jaggar, 1983, p.47.

17. 'Liberal feminists may be "personally" or "privately" revolted or titillated by pornography, but they have no

"political" grounds for opposing it unless it can be shown to have a direct causal connection with the violation of women's rights.' Ibid., p.180.

18. 'The ideals of the rational sphere give us a character model of the human which is masculine.' Val Plumwood, 'Women, Humanity and Nature' in Sean Sayers and Peter Osborne (eds.), Socialism, Feminism and Philosophy: A Radical Philosophy Reader, Routledge (London), 1990, p.212.

19. Janet Radcliffe Richards, The Sceptical Feminist, Penguin Books (Harmondsworth), 1982, p.60.

20. Ibid., p.24.

21. 'If we had no more than the name to go by we could not tell whether something calling itself Women's Liberation was trying to free women from the power of men, or conventional stereotypes, or political responsibility, or the lure of the unfeminine, or even the blandishments of the feminist movement.' Ibid., p.88.

22. Ibid., p.226.

23. Ibid., p.233.

24. Ibid., p.230.

25. Ibid., p.320.

26. Andrea Nye, Feminist Theory and the Philosophies of Man, Croom Helm (London), 1988, p.5.

27. Rosemarie Tong, 1989, p.173.

28. Alison M. Jaggar, 1983, p.125.

29. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'Manifesto of the Communist Party', in K. Marx, The Revolutions of 1848: Political Writings Volume One, ed. David Fernbach, Penguin Books (Harmondsworth), 1973, p.96.

30. Louise C. Johnson, 'Socialist Feminisms', Sneja Gunew ed., Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct, Routledge, 1990, p.305.
31. Karen Hunt, 'Crossing the River of Fire: the Socialist Construction of Women's Politicization', in J. Evans et al., 1986, p.53.
32. Introduction by Michele Barrett, Friedrich Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, Penguin Books (Harmondsworth), 1985, p.78.
33. Alison Jaggar, 1983, p.72.
34. 'over 60% of the entire female workforce is concentrated in only ten occupations. These 'top ten' jobs for women are headed by clerical work, which takes 17.5% of women workers, followed by shop assistants, typists and secretaries, maids, cleaners, nurses, teachers, canteen assistants, shop managers, sewing and textile workers.' Michele Barrett, Women's Oppression Today: The Marxist/Feminist Encounter (Revised Edition), Verso (London), 1988, p.156.
35. Eva Gamarnikow, 'Sexual Division of Labour: the Case of Nursing', A. Kuhn and A. Wolpe (eds.), Feminism and Materialism: Women and Modes of Production, Routledge (London), 1978, p.114.
36. Michele Barrett, 1988, p.78.
37. Barbara Taylor's Eve and the New Jerusalem Virago Press (London), 1983 is an illuminating survey of this phenomenon.
38. Michele Barrett, 1988, p.157.
39. Of course, during the 1970s, feminists variously campaigned for paid domestic labour. This was a landmark in feminist politics, supported by liberals as well as socialists, but it is ambiguous: the danger lies in seeming to affirm that this is 'women's work' at all.
40. Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation (Second Edition), Basil Blackwell

(Oxford), 1987, p.79.

41. Rosalind Coward, Patriarchal Precedents: Sexuality and Social Relations, Routledge (London), 1983, p.257.

42. Annette Kuhn, 'Structures of Patriarchy and Capital in the Family', A. Kuhn and A. Wolpe, 1987, p.57.

43. Michele Barrett, 1988, p.199.

44. I do not wish to dwell upon a history of family forms here, but research has already confirmed the immense variation in the construction of the family system throughout history. For instance, Lawrence Stone argues that during the seventeenth century, all members of a household unit, including servants, were considered to comprise a 'family'. (The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800, Penguin Books (Harmondsworth) 1979).

45. Jackie West, 'Women, Sex and Class', A. Kuhn and A. Wolpe, 1978, p.222.

46. Michele Barrett, 1988, p.135.

47. Ibid., p.139.

48. 'British feminism was always more socialist than its counterpart in the United States.' Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, 1982, p.23.

49. Ginette Castro, American Feminism: A Contemporary History, trans. E. Loverde-Bagwell, New York University Press (New York), 1990, p.122.

50. See Elizabeth Wilson (with Angela Weir), 'The British Women's Movement' in Wilson, Hidden Agendas: Theory, Politics, and Experience in the Women's Movement, Tavistock Publications (London), 1986, p.100.

51. Karen Hunt, 'Crossing the River of Fire: the Socialist Construction of Women's Politicization', in J. Evans et al., 1986, p.56.

52. Lynne Segal, Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism, Virago (London), 1987, p.211. She specifically cites Ken Livingstone's engagement with Andrea Dworkin's position on pornography and male violence - one which is not usually accepted by socialist feminists.
53. Ibid., p.49.
54. Alison Jaggar, 1983, pp.77-8.
55. Michele Barrett, 1988, p.251.
56. Tessa ten Tusscher, 'Patriarchy, Capitalism and the New Right', J. Evans et al., 1986, p.66.
57. 'Socialist Feminism - Out of the Blue', Feminist Review, No.23, Summer 1986.
58. Ibid., pp.4-5.
59. Ibid., p.7.
60. 'As far as we can see, the role of the state and international capital in creating and perpetuating inequalities between black people and white people is lost through the use of a term such as ethnocentrism', Kum-Kum Bhavnani and Margaret Coulson, 'Transforming Socialist Feminism: the Challenge of Racism', Ibid., p.85.
61. 'Feminism and Materialism', A. Kuhn and A. Wolpe, pp.1-2.
62. Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, 1987, p.25.
63. Anne Phillips in 'Feminism and Class Politics: A Round-Table Discussion', Feminist Review, No.23, Summer 1986, p.29.
64. Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', J. Derrida, Writing and Difference, trans. A. Bass, Routledge (London), 1978, pp.282-3.
65. Ibid., pp.280-81.

66. 'Cogito and the History of Madness', *ibid.*, p.36.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. Judith Evans, 'Feminist Theory and Political Analysis', in J. Evans et al., Feminism and Political Theory, Sage Publications (London), 1986, p.112.

2. Interesting accounts of the development of black and lesbian feminist politics include, Bell Hooks, Ain't I a Woman, Pluto Press (London), 1982; Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought, Routledge (London), 1991; Margaret Cruikshank, The Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement Routledge (London), 1992; Lillian Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers, Penguin (Harmondsworth), 1992.

3. Joyce Gelb, 'Feminism in Britain: Politics Without Power?', in Drude Dahlerup (ed.) The New Women's Movement: Feminism and Political Power in Europe and the USA, Sage Publications (London), 1986, p.106.

4. Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation (Second Edition), Basil Blackwell (Oxford), 1987, p.22.

5. Ginette Castro, American Feminism: A Contemporary History, trans. E. Loverde-Bagwell, New York University Press (New York), 1990, p.124.

6. See Bell Hooks, Talking Back: Thinking Feminist Thinking Black, Sheba Feminist Publishers (London) 1989, pp.120-133; Jewelle Gomez and Barbara Smith, 'Talking About It: Homophobia in the Black Community', Feminist Review, No.34, Spring 1990, pp.47-55; and The Combahee River Collective, 'A Black Feminist Statement' (1977) in Gloria T. Hull et al., All the Women are White, all the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us are Brave, The Feminist Press, (New York), 1982, pp.13-22.

7. Carol Anne Douglas, Love & Politics: Radical Feminist & Lesbian Theories, ism press (San Francisco), 1990, p.23.

8. Bonnie Kreps, 'Radical Feminism 1', in A. Koedt et al., Radical Feminism, Quadrangle Books (New York), 1973, p.238.
9. Robin Morgan, Introduction to Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement, Vintage Books (New York), 1970.
10. See Koedt et al., 1973, pp.280-81.
11. Carol Williams Payne, 'Consciousness Raising: A Dead End?', *ibid.*, p.283.
12. Joreen, 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness', *ibid.*, p.286.
13. 'We have a membership quota: that no more than one-third of our membership can be participants in either a formal...or informal...instance of the institution of marriage'. 'The Feminists: A Political Organization to Annihilate Sex Roles', *ibid.*, 1973, p.374.
14. Gail Chester, 'I Call Myself a Radical Feminist', in Feminist Anthology Collective, No Turning Back: Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement 1975-80, The Women's Press (London), 1981, p.69.
15. *Ibid.*, p.68.
16. See, for example, Susan Brownmiller, Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape, Penguin Books (Harmondsworth), 1976.
17. Shulamith Firestone, The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution, The Women's Press (London), 1979, p.11.
18. *Ibid.*, p.193.
19. For critiques of this aspect of Firestone's agenda see Rosemarie Tong, Feminist Thought, Routledge (London), 1989, pp.78-84; Alison Jaggar, Feminist Politics and Human Nature, Harvester Press (Hemel Hempstead), 1983, pp.92-3.
20. Kate Millett, Sexual Politics, Virago (London), 1977, p.24.

21. Germaine Greer, The Female Eunuch, Grafton Books (London), 1971, p.14.
22. Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology, The Women's Press (London), 1979, p.2.
23. Ibid., p.328.
24. See, for example, Deborah Cameron, Feminism and Linguistic Theory, Macmillan (London), 1985.
25. Andrea Dworkin, 'Pornography: The New Terrorism' (1977), Letters from a War Zone: Writings 1976-1987, Martin Secker & Warburg (London), 1988, p.201.
26. Jeffrey Weeks, Sexuality and Its Discontents: Meanings, Myths and Modern Sexualities, Routledge (London), 1985, p.235.
27. 'The people behind the Commission are some of the same people who are demanding the closure of shelters for battered women (because they encourage women to abandon marriage), stringent crackdowns on lesbian and gay publications, social institutions, and civil liberties, ending teenagers' access to birth-control devices and information, and banning all abortions under any circumstances whatsoever.' Margaret Hunt, 'The De-eroticization of Women's Liberation: Social Purity Movements and the Revolutionary Feminism of Sheila Jeffreys', Feminist Review ('Perverse Politics: Lesbian Issues), No.34, Spring 1990, p.36.
28. Rosemary Tong, Routledge (London), 1989, p.123.
29. Rosalind Coward, Patriarchal Precedents: Sexuality and Social Relations, Routledge (London), 1983, p.271.
30. Ibid., p.272.
31. See, for example, Bonnie Kreps, 'Radical Feminism 1', A. Koedt et al., 1973.
32. The Feminists, 'The Feminists: A Political Organization to Annihilate Sex Roles', in Koedt et al., 1973, p.370.

33. See, for example, Paulina Palmer, Contemporary Women's Fiction: Narrative Practice and Feminist Theory, 1989; Carol Anne Douglas, Love & Politics: Radical Feminist and Lesbian Theories 1990; Robyn Rowland and Renate D. Klein, 'Radical Feminism: Critique and Construct' in Sneja Gunew (ed.) Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct, 1990.

34. Joyce Gelb, 'Feminism in Britain: Politics Without Power?', in Drude Dahlerup, 1986, p.108.

35. There is a passage where the protagonist Ginny Babcock and her woman-only commune friends decide to have a women's festival. In a series of episodes, Ginny's perceptions of the seminars that were taking place in various parts of the house are described:

Eddie's group, called 'Women and Politics', went on a tour of the Free Farm, taking such inspiring sights as the manure-filled barn, the eggs we had neglected to collect, the un-pruned orchard...Laverne's group 'Women and Their Bodies', in Eddie's and my first-floor bedroom, was in a fascinated cluster around Laverne herself. She sat in a chair, her knees drawn up to her shoulders like chicken wings. With the aid of a complex arrangement of an inserted plastic speculum, mirrors, and a flashlight, Laverne was demonstrating to the intrigued gathering how it was possible, if one possessed the flexibility of an Olympic gymnast, to view the inside of one's vagina and the mouth of one's cervix...In the living room was Mona's group, the 'Women and Rage' set. A woman in a Sisterhood is Powerful T-shirt was lying on the floor. Tears were gushing from her closed eyes and down her cheeks. She was shaking with sobs. Mona and her group were lined up on either side of her, slowly massaging the entire length and breadth of her shuddering body.

Lisa Alther, Kinflicks, Penguin Books (Harmondsworth), 1977, pp.353-4.

36. Robyn Rowland and Renate D. Klein, 'Radical Feminism: Critique and Construct', Sneja Gunew (ed.), Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct, Routledge (London), 1990, p.299.

37. Ginette Castro, 1990, p.106.
38. Radicalesbians, 'The Woman Identified Woman', Koedt et al. (eds), 1973, p.244.
39. Anne Koedt, 'Lesbianism and Feminism', Koedt et al., 1973, p.251.
40. 'I mean the term lesbian continuum to include a range - through each women's life and throughout history - of women-identified experience, not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another women', Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' (1980), in Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985, Virago (London), 1986, p.51.
41. Ibid., p.23.
42. Ibid., p.47.
43. Ibid., p.66
44. Ibid., p.72
45. Bonnie Zimmerman, 'What has Never Been: an Overview of Lesbian Feminist Criticism', in G. Greene and C. Kahn (eds.) Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism, Methuen (London), 1985, p.179.
46. Anne Koedt, 'The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm', Koedt et al., 1973, p206.
47. Elizabeth Wilson, Hidden Agendas: Theory, Politics, and Experience in the Women's Movement, Tavistock Publications (London), 1986, pp.142-3.
48. Ibid., p.180.
49. Sheila Jeffreys, Anticlimax: A Feminist Perspective on the Sexual Revolution, The Women's Press (London), 1990, p.301.

50. 'Revolutionary feminists have indeed turned decisively away from the early radical feminist principle of sexual freedom, as is indicated both by their hostility to heterosexuality as a personal choice and their growing antipathy to birth control, not to mention their loathing for any kind of sex they consider "incorrect".' Margaret Hunt, 'The De-eroticization of Women's Liberation: Social Purity Movements and the Revolutionary Feminism of Sheila Jeffreys', Feminist Review No. 34, Spring 1990, p.41.

51. Joan Nestle, A Restricted Country: Essays and Short Stories, Sheba Feminist Publishers (London), 1987, p.100.

52. 'Being politically correct ('p.c.')

 meant that one adhered to the various dogmas regarding dress; money; sexual behaviour; language usage; class, race, food, and ecology consciousness; political activity; and so forth...Lillian Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth Century America, Penguin Books (Harmondsworth), 1991, p.230.

53. Ibid., p.231.

54. See for example Susan Ardill and Sue O' Sullivan, 'Butch/Femme Obsessions', Feminist Review, No.34, Spring 1990, pp.79-85.

55. 'With dress codes an intrinsic part of their sexual practice, SM lesbians claim to be putting the sex back into lesbianism. Some argue that this represents an important challenge to feminisms's essentialist tendency to ascribe violence and aggression to men and caring and nurturing to women.' Inge Blackman and Kathryn Perry, 'Skirting the Issue: Lesbian Fashion for the 1990s', *ibid.*, p.70.

56. Sally Munt 'Introduction' to Munt, ed. New Lesbian Criticism, Harvester Wheatsheaf (Hemel Hempstead), 1992, p.xi.

57. Shulamith Firestone, 1979, p.104.

58. Kate Millett, 1977, p.80.

59. Ibid., p.80.

60. Bell Hooks, Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism, Pluto Press (London), 1982, p.3.
61. Ibid., p.8.
62. Ibid., p.9.
63. Ibid., p.156.
64. Barbara Smith, 'Towards a Black Feminist Criticism' in J. Newton and D. Rosenfelt (eds), Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class and Race in Literature and Culture, Methuen (London), 1985, p.5.
65. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's The Madwoman in the Attic (Yale University Press, 1979) is a case in point; the situation has improved marginally since the mid 1980s, when most anthologies of feminist critical work include an article by a black women, or consider the work of black women writers.
66. Pratibha Parmar, 'Other Kinds of Dreams', Feminist Review, No. 31, Spring 1989, p.56.
67. 'The history of black women in this country is the history of a labour force. Almost every black woman living in the United States has as her past the accumulated work of all her female forebears.' Susan Willis, Specifying: Black Women Writing the American Experience, Routledge (London), 1990, p.6.
68. Bell Hooks, 1982, p.71.
69. Ibid., p.72.
70. Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment, HarperCollins (London), 1990, p.7.
71. See Angela Davis, Women Race & Class, The Women's Press (London), 1982, pp.172-201.
72. Ibid., p.214.

73. Ibid., p.204.

74. Ibid., p.218; OWAAD, 'Black Women and Health', Feminist Anthology Collective, No Turning Back: Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement 1975-80, The Women's Press (London), 1981, pp.145-9.

75. Pratibha Parmar, 'Other Kinds of Dreams', Feminist Review, No. 31, Spring 1989, p.59.

76. See, for example, Diana Fuss, Essentially Speaking, Routledge (London), 1989; Differences, Volume 1, Number 2, Summer 1989; Judith Butler, Gender Trouble, Routledge (London), 1990.

77. Bell Hooks, 'Sisterhood: Political Solidarity Between Women', Feminist Review, No. 23, Summer 1986, p.127.

78. Ibid., p.128.

79. Ibid., p.129.

80. Bell Hooks, Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center, South End Press (Boston), 1984, p.12.

81. Patricia Hill Collins, 1990, p.15.

82. Bell Hooks, Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center, South End Press, (Boston), 1984, p.35.

83. Lynne Segal, Is The Future Female?: Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism, Virago (London), 1987, p.ix.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. Michele Barrett, Women's Oppression Today (Revised Edition), Verso (London), 1988, p.84.

2. Roxanne Dunbar, 'Female Liberation as the Basis for Social Revolution', in Robin Morgan (ed.) Sisterhood is Powerful: an Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement, Vintage Books (New York), 1970, p.536.

3. 'It seems admissable in some contexts to refer to patriarchal ideology, describing specific aspects of male-female relations in capitalism, but as a noun the term 'patriarchy' presents insuperable difficulties to an analysis that attempts to relate women's oppression to the relations of production of capitalism.', Michele Barrett, 1988, p.19.
4. Germaine Greer, The Female Eunuch, Paladin (London), 1971, p.60.
5. Kate Millett, Sexual Politics, Virago (London), 1977, p.26.
6. 'Those awarded higher status tend to adopt roles of mastery, largely because they are first encouraged to develop temperaments of dominance. That this is true of caste and class as well is self-evident.', *ibid.*, p.26.
7. Shulamith Firestone, on the other hand, accepts biological sexual difference as contributing to a 'natural' division of labour, and argues that an exploitation of the revolution in reproductive technologies is the only means by which women's social oppression can be eradicated - in the long term by means of artificial reproduction; in the short term spreading the child-rearing role as the responsibility of society as a whole:

Women, biologically distinguished from men, are culturally distinguished from 'human'. Nature produced the fundamental inequality - half the human race must bear and rear the children of all of them - which was later consolidated, institutionalized, in the interests of men. Reproduction of the species cost women dearly, not only emotionally, psychologically, culturally but even in strictly material (physical) terms: before recent methods of contraception, continuous childbirth led to constant 'female trouble', early ageing, and death. Women were the slave class that maintained the species in order to free the other half for the business of the world - admittedly often its drudge aspects, but certainly all its creative aspects as well. (The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution (1970), The Women's Press (London), 1979, p.192.)

Although Firestone talks about the impact of Freudianism, the 'culture of romance' and so forth, the main thrust of her revolutionary agenda is towards a change in material social practices rather than ideological aspects.

8. In Women's Oppression Today, Barrett is at pains to emphasize that women's oppression is not functional for capitalism in a direct way. There are conceivably other means of organizing the social formation whilst retaining the existing relations of production between capitalist and worker (for example, barracks, state-run nurseries, etc.): 'although domestic labour is vital to the present form in which labour power is reproduced, this need not necessarily be the case.' (Barrett, 1988, p.99.) In other words, although women's domestic labour may not necessarily be instrumental to capitalism, feminists are ultimately concerned with the social formation as it has developed historically - and there are obvious gains for capital in retaining the elements of a pre-capitalist family form, many of them functioning at an ideological level (love, monogamy, blood ties, etc).

9. Kate Millett, (London) 1977, p.27.

10. Ibid., pp.120-127.

11. Ibid., p.122.

12. Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)', in Essays on Ideology, Verso (London), 1984, p.6.

13. Ibid., p.7.

14. Ibid., p.17.

15. Ibid., p.17.

16. Ibid., p.20.

17. Ibid., p.30.

18. Ibid., p.35.

19. 'Introduction', Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment (eds.), The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture, The Women's Press (London), 1988, p.1.

20. Michele Barrett, 1988, p.31.

21. 'Both feminist and Marxist accounts of women's oppression have tended to slide uncritically into a mode of explanation which is undeniably functionalist; many feminist accounts explain various forms of oppression in terms of their supposedly self-evident functions of perpetuating patriarchal dominance...Clearly any account of women's oppression that is organized around its importance for the smooth reproduction of capitalist social relations must run the risk of over-emphasizing this supposedly functional relationship at the expense of a proper consideration of contradiction, conflict and political struggle.' Ibid., pp.93-4.

See also Mary McIntosh, 'The State and the Oppression of Women' in A. Kuhn and A. Wolpe (eds) Feminism and Materialism, Routledge (London), 1978, pp.254-289.

22. Ibid., p.31.

23. The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State (1884), Penguin Books (Harmondsworth), 1985, pp.113-15.

24. 'Structures of Patriarchy and Capital in the Family', in A. Kuhn and A. Wolpe, 1978, p.49.

25. Michele Barrett, 1988, p.xxiii.

26. Ibid., p.xxiii.

27. Sheila Rowbotham, Woman's Consciousness, Man's World, Penguin Books (Harmondsworth), 1973, p.57.

28. Michele Barrett, 1988, p.89.

29. Ibid., p.99.

30. Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)', in Althusser, 1984, p.3.
31. Sheila Rowbotham, 1973, p.61.
32. Ibid., p.69.
33. For the sake of brevity, I am assuming that the majority of black and lesbian feminist critical positions on ideology are derived from broadly Marxist or radical frameworks. This is not to imply that their conclusions are the same.
34. Introduction to The Rights and Wrongs of Women, Anne Oakley and Juliet Mitchell (eds), Penguin Books (Harmondsworth), 1976, p.15.
35. Michele Barrett, 1988, p.110.
36. Ibid., p.84.
37. An example of such an effect would be The Associated Examining Board's 'A' Level syllabus, which since 1991 has included Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale and poetry by Grace Nicholls.
38. Dawn Currie and Hamida Kuzl, 'Academic Feminism and the Process of De-radicalization: Re-examining the Issues', Feminist Review, No. 25, Spring 1987, p.77.
39. Kate Millett, 1977, p.xii.
40. 'As a literary critic, Millett plays little or no attention to the formal structures of the literary text: hers is pure content analysis. She also unproblematically assumes the identity of author, narrator and hero when this suits her case, and statements like "Paul Morel is of course Lawrence himself" abound.' Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory, Methuen (London), 1985, p.30.
41. Mary Ellmann, Thinking About Women, Virago (London) 1979, p.29.

42. Elaine Showalter, 'Towards a Feminist Poetics' in Women Writing and Writing About Women, Mary Jacobus (ed.), Croom Helm (London), 1979, p.28.

43. In her account of Virginia Woolf, for example, Showalter relates her critique of Woolf's work to what she regards as an inability to come to terms with the fact of femaleness:

Woolf's illnesses had always had some source in female experience; they had taken the classic female forms of frigidity, depression, and suicide attempts, and had been treated in female asylums with a therapy intended to induce female passivity...Deprived of the use of her womanhood, denied the power of manhood, she sought a serene androgynous 'oneness', an embrace of eternity that was inevitably an embrace of death. A Literature of Their Own (Revised Edition), Virago (London), p.280.

This piece would not be out of place among Mary Ellmann's examples of phallic criticism.

44. See also a collection of essays entitled Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives, Susan Koppleman Cornillon (ed.), Bowling Green University Popular Press, (Bowling Green, Ohio), 1972. The Preface states that 'these essays lead us into fiction and then back out again into reality, into ourselves and our own lives.', p.x.

45. Toril Moi, 1985, p.76.

46. Michele Barrett, 1988, p.91.

47. See The Madwoman in the Attic, Yale University Press (New Haven), 1979.

48. For an interesting investigation of the race-blindness of white feminism, see Barbara Smith's 'Toward a Black Feminist Criticism', in Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt (eds.), Feminist Criticism and Social Change, Methuen (London), 1985, pp.3-18; Bonnie Zimmermann also scrutinizes the way heterosexist assumptions colour the achievements of feminist critics in 'What Has Never Been: An Overview of Lesbian Feminist Criticism, Making

a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism, ed. Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn, Methuen (London), 1985, pp.177-210.

49. Barbara Christian, 'Shadows Uplifted', J. Newton and D. Rosenfelt, 1985, p.195.

50. Bonnie Zimmermann, 'What Has Never Been: An Overview of Lesbian Feminist Criticism', G. Greene and C. Kahn, 1985, p.186.

51. Bell Hooks, Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism, Pluto Press (London), 1982, p.191.

52. The situation is, of course, quite different when an entire critical work is devoted to lesbian and/or black issues. See, for example Margaret Cruikshank (ed.), Lesbian Studies: Present and Future, Feminist Press (New York), 1982; and Mari Evans (ed.), Black Women Writers, Pluto Press (London), 1985.

53. Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn, 'Feminist Scholarship and the Social Construction of Woman', G. Greene and C. Kahn, 1985, p.11.

54. Louis Althusser, 1984, p.46.

55. Michele Barrett, 1988, p.xviii.

56. 'A Letter on Art in Reply to Andre Daspre', Althusser, 1984, p.173.

57. Foucault's case-studies do, of course, admirably demonstrate the importance of his theoretical framework and its application to particular discursive functions in specific historical periods. Perhaps his most well-known and most accessible text, The History of Sexuality Volume 1, by interrogating the means by which theories of human sexuality have been couched in the language of repression, reveals how such a 'repressive hypothesis' fails to account for a veritable explosion of discourses surrounding sexuality. Foucault argues that this discursive explosion allows for the consolidation of networks of power and coercion which successfully police heretofore 'neglected' or 'invisible' deviant groups.

58. Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality - Volume One: An Introduction, trans. R. Hurley, Allen Lane (Harmondsworth), 1979, p.95.

59. Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', Critical Inquiry Summer 1982, Vol. 8, No. 4, p.785.

60. Michel Foucault, The Order of Things, Tavistock Publications (London), 1970, p.324.

61. Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge (trans A.M. Sheridan Smith), Pantheon Books (New York), 1972, p.55.

62. Chris Weedon, Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory, Blackwell (Oxford), 1987, p.10.

63. Diana Fuss, Introduction to D. Fuss (ed.) Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories, Routledge, 1991, p.2.

64. Michel Foucault, 1979, p.101.

65. Chris Weedon, 1987, p.36.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

1. Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley, Allen Lane (London), 1979, p.7.

2. Lynne Segal, Is the Future Female?: Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism, Virago (London), 1987, p.93.

3. Jeffrey Weeks, Sexuality and its Discontents Routledge (London), 1985, p.85.

4. Chapter One: 'The Language of Sex' in Jeffrey Weeks, Sexuality, Tavistock Publications (London), 1986.

5. Michel Foucault, 1979, p.43.

6. Sigmund Freud, On Sexuality, trans. Angela Richards, Penguin Books (Harmondsworth), 1977, pp.141, 340.

7. 'The Transformations of Puberty', *ibid*, 1977, pp. 143-4.
8. 'I cannot explain the opposition which is raised in this way by little girls to phallic masturbation except by supposing that there is some concurrent factor which turns her violently against that pleasurable activity. Such a factor lies close at hand. It cannot be anything else than her narcissistic sense of humiliation which is bound up with penis-envy, the reminder that after all this is a point on which she cannot compete with boys and that it would therefore be best for her to give up the idea of doing so.' *Ibid.*, 1977, p.340.
9. Juliet Mitchell, Psychoanalysis and Feminism, Penguin Books (Harmondsworth), 1975, p.xv.
10. Jeffrey Weeks, 1986, p.14.
11. Jeffrey Weeks, 1985, p.80.
12. 'Sex penetrates the whole person; a man's sexual constitution is a part of his general constitution. There is considerable truth in the dictum: "A man is what his sex is".' Havelock Ellis, cited by Jeffrey Weeks, *ibid.*, 1985, p.62.
13. Jeffrey Weeks, 1986, p.25.
14. Chris Weedon, Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory, Basil Blackwell (Oxford), 1987, p.49.
15. Rosalind Coward, Patriarchal Precedents: Sexuality and Social Relations, Routledge (London), 1983, p.280.
16. Michel Foucault, 1979, p.33.
17. Havelock Ellis, cited by Jackson, in Coveney et al., The Sexuality Papers, Hutchinson (London), 1984, p.54.
18. See Jackson, 'Sexology and the Social Construction of Male Sexuality', *ibid.*, 1984, p.66.

19. Margaret Jackson, 'Sex Research and the Construction of Sexuality: A Tool of Male Supremacy?', Women's Studies International Forum, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1984, pp. 45-46.
20. Beatrix Campbell, 'A Feminist Sexual Politics: Now You See it, Now You Don't', Feminist Review, No. 5, 1980, p.6.
21. Margaret Jackson, 'Sexology and the Universalization of Male Sexuality' in Coveney et al., 1984, p.71.
22. Michel Foucault, 1979, p.17.
23. Ibid., p.38.
24. Ibid., p.103.
25. Ibid., p.93.
26. Jeffrey Weeks, 1985, p.3.
27. Margaret Jackson, 'Sexology and the Social Construction of Male Sexuality', Coveney et al., 1984, p.46.
28. Collected in Koedt, Levine, Rapone eds. Radical Feminism, Quadrangle Books (New York), 1973, p.199.
29. Ibid. p.206.
30. Kate Millett, Sexual Politics, Virago (London), 1977, p.23.
31. Germaine Greer, The Female Eunuch, Paladin Books (London), 1971, p.44.
32. 'Koedt asserted that the vagina was utterly insensitive and incapable of feeling in order to support her idea that the clitoral orgasm liberated women from the necessity of vaginal sex...Lesbian writers did not necessarily agree with this. Jill Johnston satirised the insensitive vagina theory in her 1973 book, Lesbian Nation. She explained that she had never found the vagina insensitive and suggested that heterosexual feminists found it necessary to assert this in order to justify avoiding fucking. They had only experienced penises in the vagina she

guessed and had no idea how sensitive this organ could be to hands.' Sheila Jeffreys, Anticlimax: A Feminist Perspective on the Sexual Revolution, The Women's Press (London), 1990, pp.231-2.

33. Ibid., 1990, p.227.

34. Margaret Jackson 'Sexology and the Universalization of Male Sexuality', in Coveney et al., 1984, p.73.

35. Dana Densmore 'Independence from the Sexual Revolution', in A. Koedt et al., 1973, p.111.

36. Cited in Sheila Jeffreys, 1990, pp.233-7. For Jeffreys, Dodson was encouraging women to perform better for their men, rather than for than their own pleasure.

37. Margaret Jackson, 'Sexology and the Universalization of Male Sexuality', in Coveney et al., 1984, p.76.

38. 'Sexuality is something men have: problems are what women have, according to Forum.' Ibid., 1984, p.103.

39. Ibid., 1984, p.91.

40. Andrea Dworkin, 'Why Pornography Matters to Feminists' (1981), collected in Dworkin, Letters from a War Zone: Writings 1976-1987, Secker & Warburg (London) 1988, p.203.

41. Adrienne Rich 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', in Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985, Virago (London), 1986, p.40.

42. 'Pornography and Male Supremacy' (1981), in Dworkin, p.229.

43. Shere Hite, The Hite Report: A Nationwide Study of Female Sexuality, Summit Books (Sydney), 1977, pp.455-6.

44. Ibid., pp.456-7.

45. Ibid., pp. 527-8.

46. Ibid., p.130.
47. Radicalesbians, reproduced in Koedt et al., 1973, pp.240-45.
48. 'Loving Another Woman' (1971), An interview conducted by Anne Koedt, *ibid.*, 1973, p.91.
49. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell & Sharon Thompson (eds.), Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality, Monthly Review Press (New York), 1983, p.30.
50. An early example of such a critique is Anne Koedt's essay 'Lesbianism and Feminism', Koedt et al., 1973.
51. See Jeffreys, 1990.
52. 'Lesbianism and Feminism' in Koedt et al., 1973, p.255.
53. Adrienne Rich, 1986, p. 27.
54. Ibid., p.39.
55. Shulamith Firestone, The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution, Women's Press (London), 1979, p.44.
56. Elizabeth Wilson, Hidden Agendas: Theory, Politics and Experience in the Women's Movement, Tavistock Publications (London), 1986, p.173.
57. Sheila Jeffreys, 1990, p.3.
58. Ibid., p.3.
59. 'This separation of the public and private is a fundamental premise of sexual liberalism. In the short term it was helpful for gay liberation. But the idea that whatever takes place between consenting adults in private should be seen as exempt from politics has led to a sexual libertarianism in the 1980s which is in direct opposition to feminism.' Ibid., p.112.
60. Ibid., p.145.

61. Ibid., p.151.
62. Ibid., p.210.
63. See for example, Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment (eds.), The Female Gaze, The Women's Press (London), 1988.
64. 'Sexology has never been straightforwardly outside or against relations of power; it has frequently been deeply implicated in them.' Jeffrey Weeks, 1985, p.79.
65. Ibid., p.19.
66. Ibid., p.32.
67. Ibid., p.56.
68. Ibid., p.210.
69. Ibid., p.3.
70. Michel Foucault, 1979, p.83.
71. Ibid., pp. 88-9.
72. Beatrix Campbell, 'A Feminist Sexual Politics: Now You See It, Now You Don't', Feminist Review, No. 5, 1980, p.1.
73. Jana Sawicki, Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body, Routledge (London), 1991, p.35.
74. See for example, Judith Butler, Gender Trouble, Routledge (London), 1990.

NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

1. Susan Bordo, 'Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender-Scepticism', L. Nicholson (ed.), Feminism/Postmodernism, Routledge, 1990, p.152.
2. Mike Featherstone, 'In Pursuit of the Postmodern: An Introduction', Theory, Culture & Society, Vol.5, Nos 2-3, June

1988, p.205.

3. Editorial, Feminist Review, No. 31, Spring 1989, p.3.

4. Judith Stacey, 'Are Feminists Afraid to Leave Home? The Challenge of Conservative Pro-family Feminism', J. Mitchell and Ann Oakley (eds.), What is Feminism?, Blackwell (Oxford), 1986, p.222.

5. See Chapters One and Three.

6. Kathryn Harriss, 'New Alliances: Socialist feminism in the Eighties', Feminist Review, No.31, Spring 1989, p.37.

7. Pratibha Parmar, 'Other Kinds of Dreams', *ibid.*, p.58.

8. The footnote ends, parenthetically, '(True confessions: for a long time I fantasized publishing a response to Moi's response titled - to pun my own title - "Of Moi and Feminism: The Terrifying Toril" - a response in which I would analyse the series of rather aggressive attacks that Moi has leveled against a number of American feminists, particularly those whose work disproves the American/Continental opposition she constructs in Sexual/Textual Politics...)', 'Of Me(n) and Feminism: Who(se) Is the Sex That Writes?', J.A. Boone & M. Cadden (eds.), Engendering Men, Routledge (London), 1990, p.292. Boone disingenuously evades 'confrontation' by secreting these comments as 'supplement' to the main text.

9. Terry Eagleton, 'Response', A. Jardine & P. Smith (eds.) Men in Feminism, Methuen (London), 1987, pp.133-35.

10. Tania Modleski, Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a 'Postfeminist' Age, Routledge (London), 1991, p.6.

11. As Modleski indicates, Lee Edelman, a contributor to Gender and Theory foregrounds this point. Of the title of this volume, Edelman comments, 'the "and" identifies the dialogue itself as a type of union or wedding, thus inscribing within the very framework of the discussion, the essential heterosexuality of the project - a project that must always supplement the idealized pairings of "and" with a reproduction of the confrontational

sublime that operates "between".' 'At Risk in the Sublime: The Politics of Gender and Theory', Kauffman (ed.) Gender and Theory, Blackwell (Oxford), 1989, p.215. It should also be noted that Alice Jardine and Paul Smith, in their introduction to Men in Feminism, acknowledge the dearth of gay or black contributors to their volume, stating that 'this is largely a reflection of a serious institutional problem'. A. Jardine and P. Smith, 1987, p.viii.

12. Paul Smith, 'Men in Feminism: Men and Feminist Theory', *ibid.*, p.35.

13. Stephen Heath, 'Male Feminism', *ibid.*, 1987, p.1.

14. Judith Mayne, 'Walking the Tightrope of Feminism and Male Desire', *ibid.*, p.62.

15. 'Of Me(n) and Feminism: Who(se) is the Sex that Writes?', in Linda Kauffman, 1989, p.168.

16. *Ibid.*, p.174.

17. In a bold flourish, Boone elevates/relegates the terms feminist/feminism to gender-neutral status, therefore removing its investment in a meaning that designates it as a descriptive term of women whose political energy flows partly from their experiences of social/economic/ideological oppression. I have refused to follow his lead in this. Toril Moi, in 'Men Against Patriarchy' (L. Kauffman, 1989) - her response to Boone in the same volume - does not so much take issue with Boone's desire to use feminism as an ascription for his own work, but suggests compellingly that feminists need from men a clear conviction that they are working against the interests of patriarchy, not each other, a sense that pervades Boone's entire essay.

18. J. Boone and M.Cadden, 1990, p.2.

19. Introduction to Linda J. Nicholson, 1990, pp.1-2.

20. Nancy Fraser and Linda J. Nicholson, 'Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism', in L. Nicholson, 1990, p.20.

21. Jean-Francois Lyotard's 'grand narratives of legitimation', as discussed in Fraser and Nicholson's essay, *ibid.*, pp.21-2.
22. Fredric Jameson 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', E. Ann Kaplan (ed.), Postmodernism and its Discontents, Verso (London), 1988, p.15.
23. *Ibid.*, p.27.
24. Cynthia Cockburn, 'Masculinity the Left, and Feminism', R. Chapman and J. Rutherford (eds.), Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity, Lawrence and Wishart (London), 1988, p.326.
25. Jonathan Rutherford, 'Who's That Man', R. Chapman and J. Rutherford (eds.) Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity, Lawrence and Wishart (London), 1988, p.43.
26. Christine Di Stefano, 'Dilemmas of Difference: Feminism, Modernity and Postmodernism', L. Nicholson, 1990, pp.75-6.
27. Susan Bordo, 'Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender-Scepticism', *ibid.*, p.152.
28. Bell Hooks, Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics, Turnaround (London), 1991, p.24.
29. *Ibid.*, p.25.
30. Reprinted in Robinson, Sex, Class, Culture, Methuen (London), 1978.
31. Jane Gallop, Around 1981: Academic Feminist Theory, Routledge (London) 1992, p.5.
32. Teresa de Lauretis, 'Upping the Anti (sic) in Feminist Theory', in Hirsch and Keller (eds.), Conflicts in Feminism, Routledge (London), 1990, pp.255-70.
33. 'Criticizing Feminist Criticism', Jane Gallop, Marianne Hirsch, Nancy K. Miller, *ibid.*, p.350.

34. Ibid., p.368.
35. Bell Hooks, Talking Back: Thinking Feminist - Thinking Black, Sheba Feminist Publishers (London), 1989, p.43.
36. Adrienne Rich, 'Toward a Woman-Centred University' (1973-4) in On Lies, Secrets and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978, Virago, London, 1980, p.136.
37. See, for example, Bell Hooks, Talking Back (1989); Gayle Green, 'The Uses of Quarreling' in L.Kauffman (ed.) Feminism and Institutions (1989); L. Jeffries, L. Johnson, L. Hunter, V. Jones, M. Reynolds, 'Painting the Lion: Feminist Options' in A. Thompson and H. Wilcox (eds), Teaching Women: Feminism and English Studies, 1989.
38. Gayle Greene, 'The Uses of Quarreling', in L. Kauffman (ed.) Feminism and Institutions: Dialogues on Feminist Theory, Blackwell (Oxford), 1989, p.82.
39. Adrienne Rich, 'Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism, Gynephobia' (1978), in Rich, London, 1980, p.281.
40. Ibid., p.290.
41. See, for example, G.T. Hull et al., But Some of us are Brave: Black Women's Studies, The Feminist Press (New York), 1982.
42. Rosemarie Tong's Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction (Routledge, London, 1992) was first published in 1989 and has become a useful textbook for students of feminism. Yet this volume does not address black feminist issues in any explicit way, and only discusses lesbian as a separatist wing of radical feminist thought.
43. Bell Hooks, Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center, South End Press (Boston), 1984, p.6.
44. 'We could be heard only if our statements echoed the sentiments of the dominant discourse.' Bell Hooks, 1984, pp.11-12.

45. One important focus for disagreement lies in whether or not the family should be perceived as the central site of women's oppression; indeed how one defines the 'family' is a point of contestation. See P. Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought, Routledge (London), 1991, pp.43-66.
46. Bell Hooks, 1984, p.15; p.18.
47. Patricia Hill Collins, 1991, p.7.
48. Ibid., pp.116-18.
49. Bell Hooks, 1984, p.29.
50. Bell Hooks, 1989, p.21.
51. 'The category of "female experience" holds a particularly sacrosanct position in women's studies programs, programs which often draw on the very notion of a hitherto repressed and devalued female experience to form the basis of a new feminist epistemology.' Diana Fuss, Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature & Difference, Routledge (London), 1989, p.113.
52. Ibid., p.114.
53. Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, Routledge (London) 1990, p.viii.
54. Ibid., p.viii.
55. Ibid., p.6.
56. Ibid., p.31.
57. Ibid., p.142.
58. Susan Ardill and Sue O'Sullivan, 'Butch/Femme Obsessions', Feminist Review, No. 34, Spring 1990, p.80.
59. Joan Nestle, 'Butch-Femme Relationships: Sexual Courage in the 1950s', A Restricted Country, Sheba Feminist Publishers

(London), 1987, p.102.

60. Inge Blackman and Kathryn Perry, 'Skirting the Issue: Lesbian Fashion for the 1990s', Feminist Review No. 34, Spring 1990, p.78.

61. Diana Fuss (ed.) Introduction to Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories, Routledge, London, 1991, p.5.

62. Donna Haraway 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s', in E. Weed (ed.) Coming to Terms: Feminism, Theory, Politics, Routledge (London), 1989, p.176.

63. Ibid., p.179.

64. This has already been discussed in Chapter Three.

65. Tania Modleski, 1991, p.20.

66. Such criticisms are not restricted to anti-feminists: Shelagh Young, a feminist cultural critic, declares that 'many feminist women do perpetuate a sort of alternative puritanism which can be very boring indeed.' in Gamman and Marshment (eds.) The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture, The Women's Press (London), 1988, p.178.

67. Alison Light, 'Putting on the Style: Feminist Criticism in the 1990s' in Helen Carr (ed.), From My Guy to Sci-Fi: Genre and Women's Writing in the Postmodern World, Pandora Press (London), 1989, p.28.

68. Juliet Mitchell, Woman's Estate, Penguin Books (Harmondsworth), 1971, p.91.

69. Kate Millett, Sexual Politics, Virago (London), 1977, p.57.

70. Michel Foucault, The Order of Things, Tavistock Publications (London), 1970, p.xviii.

71. There are several interesting texts on utopian writings and feminist criticism. See for example Sarah Lefanu, In the Chinks

of the Worlds Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction, The Women's Press (London), 1988; Anne Cranny-Francis, Feminist Fiction, Polity Press (Oxford), 1990; and Rosemary Jackson, Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion, Methuen (London), 1981.

72. Angelika Bammer, Partial Visions: Feminism and Utopianism in the 1970s, Routledge (London), 1991, p.155.

NOTES TO THE CONCLUSION

1. Josephine Donovan, Feminist Theory: The Intellectual Traditions of American Feminism, Frederick Ungar (New York), 1985, p.xii.

2. Tessa ten Tusscher, 'Patriarchy, Capitalism and the New Right', in J. Evans et al., Feminism and Political Theory, Sage Publications (London), 1986, p.69.

3. Ibid., p.75.

4. Ibid., p.78.

5. Arthur Brittan and Mary Maynard Sexism, Racism and Oppression, Basil Blackwell (Oxford), 1984, p.152.

6. An example of such a characterization appears in Jaci Stephen's newspaper review of a BBC Omnibus programme which reported on the work of Andrea Dworkin. Stephens remarks, 'Why is it that the women who speak up most defensively about their own sex, are such an unappealing bunch of creatures? I'm not suggesting that they should all be beautiful, nor that they should have the moles that seem to proliferate on their faces surgically removed; only that they make a bit of an effort on the presentation front so that viewers won't be tempted to think that they've accidentally tuned into a horror movie.' 'The Big Issue for Large Ladies', Daily Mail, Saturday, 26 October, 1991, p.30.

7. Judith Stacey, 'Are Feminists Afraid to Leave Home? The Challenge of Conservative Pro-Family Feminism', in J. Mitchell and A. Oakley, What is Feminism?, Basil Blackwell (Oxford), 1986, p.235.

8. Margaret Hunt, 'The De-eroticization of Women's Liberation: Social Purity Movements and the Revolutionary Feminism of Sheila Jeffreys', Feminist Review, No. 34, Spring 1990, pp. 42-3.
9. Susan Faludi, Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women, Chatto & Windus (London), 1992, p.12.
10. Neil Lyndon, 'Feminism's Fundamental Flaws', The Independent on Sunday, 29 March 1992, p.28.
11. Janice Doane and Devon Hodges, Nostalgia and Sexual Difference: The Resistance to Contemporary Feminism, Methuen (London), 1987, p.3.
12. Ibid., p.12.
13. See for example Guardian 'Women', Thursday, 21 June, 1990, p.38.
14. Feminist Review, No.31, Spring 1989, p.2.
15. See for example, Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller (eds) Conflicts in Feminism, Routledge (London), 1990.
16. See Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment, Routledge (London), 1990.
17. Katie King, 'Producing Sex, Theory, and Culture: Gay/Straight Remappings in Contemporary Feminism', in M. Hirsch and E. Keller, 1990, p.82.
18. Sheila Rowbotham, The Past is Before Us: Feminism in Action Since the 1960s, Pandora Press (London), 1989, p.294.
19. Evelyn Tension, 'You Don't Need a Degree to Read the Writing on the Wall' (1978), in Feminist Anthology Collective (eds.), No Turning Back: Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement 1975-80, The Women's Press (London), 1981, p.86.

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