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Through the Lens of Gender. Sites of Gendered Representation and Discourse

THROUGH THE WINDOW AS LOOKING GLASS - ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S *REAR WINDOW*

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Undeniably, Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* is a classic narrative film. Is it, however, an unambiguously classic narrative film as Laura Mulvey (1989) or Kaja Silverman (1983) would understand it? *Rear Window* has long been considered a key cinematic text that - on the basis of its interpreter's theoretical assumptions - can be read either as one deploying the male gaze or as one subverting it. In this presentation I will investigate how the reasons for these ambivalent and often contradictory readings can be located in the play enacted by the film's self-reflexivity, and, at the same time, by the effect of suture, which is also undeniable. That is, I will explore how the oscillation between veiling and revealing the "technology of the film" contributes to the gaps in the apparently seamless narrative and visual representation. Furthermore, I will argue that the ambivalence concerning gender roles (and via that "Hitchcock's" misogyny or the feminist appropriation of "Hitchcock") can also be attributed to the ruptures in, and constant reaffirmations of, suture. In this way, my claim is that the "technology of the film" produces the "technology of gender" (as Teresa de Lauretis understands it (1987)), thus, this film by Hitchcock can be read not only as a paradigmatic classic narrative film that also questions its own paradigm, but also as a paradigmatic visual text which, via its self-reflexivity of (window) framing, displays gender as performativity.

In the following, I will proceed by establishing some basic theoretical grounds, see how suture functions, how self-reflexivity can also be claimed, and what the consequences of this oscillation are. In Laura Mulvey's analysis, among the most typical features of classic narrative cinema are the power of the male gaze, fetishism and voyeurism; it is a film text that exploits the woman as the one looked at and objectified, woman as image and man as the possessor of the gaze, a textual dynamism that implicates the "reader", the audience as well, and in Mulvey's claim, the audience, even the female members of the audience, in this structure, inevitably take up the position of the male viewer since this is how the other two gazes: those of the camera and of the male character create a position

for the “reader,” and there is hardly any way to establish an alternative position (1989:14-26).

Kaja Silverman’s approach to films, on the other hand, raises the question how this totalising effect of film as a medium is created, and she comes to the conclusion - which, actually, in theoretical terms, is not without its predecessors - that suture, that is, “the name given to the procedures by means of which cinematic texts confer subjectivity upon their viewers” (1983:195) “relies [...] on the process of signification, and its relationship to the viewing subject” (1983:203). The question is how the process of signification functions, and how it is related to the viewing subject - to go back to Laura Mulvey’s point: how the audience/reader is constructed if the film text is gendered by the camera and the technology of film in general.

As Silverman argues, “[t]heoreticians of cinematic suture agree that films are articulated and the viewing subject spoken by means of interlocking shots. [...] Shot relationships are seen as the equivalent of syntactic ones in linguistic discourse, as the agency whereby meaning emerges and a subject-position is constructed for the viewer” (1983:201). A key element of classic narrative cinema in this syntagmatic chain is the shot/reverse shot formation (even if Stephen Heath claims that this is only one possible element that can create suture (cf. Silverman, 1983:202-3)) because “it derives from the imperative that the camera deny its own existence as much as possible, fostering the illusion that what is shown has an autonomous existence, independent of any technological interference, or any coercive gaze [since] the gaze which directs our look seems to belong to a fictional character rather than to the camera” (Silverman, 1983:201-2).

This mechanism, the technology of classical narrative cinema, in less theoretical and more practical terms, functions as follows: it is based on three factors, two of which are closely related to the camera, one is more psychological, or, perhaps the result of how we have been taught, in the history of film, to read the interrelationship of cinematic syntagmatic units. The shot/reverse shot formation, as all the introductions to film studies describe it, creates a closed space based upon shot 1, showing an image from an apparently neutral perspective, but shot 2 (the reverse shot) delimits it by showing from whose perspective shot 1 is taken. Thus, what originally seemed to be, in Silverman’s psychoanalytic terms, “an imaginary plenitude, unbounded by any gaze, unmarked by difference, [...] thus the site of *jouissance*” (1983:203) is delimited by shot 2 as “the viewing subject almost immediately becomes aware of its limitations on what it sees”

(Silverman, 1983:203). Shot 2, the reverse shot, however, is not necessarily taken exactly from the eyeline of the viewing character: very often technically it means that the camera is located just over the shoulders or the head of the character concerned, in this way creating, ironically, an even more plausible effect of suture for the viewer: in spite of the fact that the camera and the eye/point of view of the character are more clearly distinguishable in this kind of shot, the psychological effect of the oneness of the camera and the gaze of the character is achieved all the same, and right away shot 1 is understood by the viewer as the image seen by the character (Bordwell and Thomson, 1997:288-289). This effect is typical of the classic narrative cinema, a major characteristic of which is the absolute observation of the 180° rule, which dictates that the camera should not cover more than 180° in a single shot, i.e. not more than what the human eye can cover, thus leaving the other half of the circle unrepresented (Bordwell and Thomson, 1997:285-287).

This is how the viewer becomes on the one hand implicated in the film as the spoken subject, furthermore, this is how film technology covers its own constructedness by eliminating its speaking subject, the camera, or, to put it in another way, this is how suture comes about, and to carry further on with the significance of this technology, this is how suture functions as ideological coercion at the same time and in the same way as classic realist texts conceal their apparatuses of enunciation, including the ideology that informs them (cf. Silverman, 1983:215-22). But, as Catherine Belsey - along the lines of Roland Barthes - claims, the classic realist narrative does not have a seamless operation, thus the perfect “readerly” text does not exist (Belsey, 1993:601-602; 1980:105). This idea is perfectly adaptable to reading cinematic texts as well, so one can claim that the classic narrative cinematic texts *cannot* either produce an absolutely transparent apparatus that can fully conceal its own constructed and discursive nature, but there are gaps, if you prefer “wounds” in the text that cannot be healed (to carry on with this metaphor) by the seams of suture.

In the following, I will try to explore how both suture and these “gaps” of totalising and coercive representation function in *Rear Window*, Hitchcock’s 1954 film, from his American, early colour-film period. This is the story of a photojournalist, L.B. Jefferies (James Stewart), whose leg is cast in plaster because he wanted to catch a particularly dangerous moment at a car race, thus he is immobile, sitting in his wheelchair in front of the backyard window of his two-room apartment in Greenwich Village during a summer heat wave, and watches his neighbours beyond the backyard as they live their life without

the blinds pulled down. This is how he catches sight of the travelling jewellery agent, who has an invalid, and in Jefferies' interpretation, "nagging" wife, and reveals that at one point the agent Lars Thorwald (Raymond Burr) kills his wife. In this exploration, Jefferies is assisted by both his insurance agency nurse, Stella (Thelma Ritter), and his girlfriend, Lisa Carol Fremont (Grace Kelly), and also partly by his wartime buddy, the police officer Tom Doyle (Wendell Corey), who is rather sceptical at first about the assumed "crime". The film, thus, even at the plot level is the par excellence film of the gaze (with Jefferies, and intermittently all the other characters, looking out of the window and watching the neighbours), an effect created and enhanced by the fact that Jefferies makes use of both his binoculars and his telephoto camera in trying to create the story of his backyard neighbours, on the basis of which he is quite justifiably labelled as a Peeping Tom at first by the nurse; later even the question of the "rear window ethic," i.e. the ethical implications of intruding into others' private lives by watching, by the gaze, is raised by Lisa.

The film, however, is about the gaze and its coercive power on more levels than that. Laura Mulvey has explored how this voyeurism is related to fetishism and the creation of the image of woman as the object of desire (1975:14-26), and Jeanne Allen investigates how Lisa is compelled to take three various roles so that she can catch Jefferies' attention, more exactly, to exist, to come into being, even if that implies her non-existence as an agent, or a subject: first she is the iconic fashion model wearing \$1100 dresses straight off the Paris plane; then she is forced to participate in the revelation of the secret, and thus gets into a very complex position that, on the one hand, creates her an active agent, on the other hand, posits her into a situation that almost inevitably ends up in another iconic role: that of the pursued maiden saved by the (masculine) authority of the police, who also represents order; and finally, she transforms herself into the adventurous, if you prefer, masculine modern woman apparently fitting into, and complying with, the designs of Jefferies to carry on with his former lifestyle of being a photographer in the most dangerous places (1988:31-43). As a result of this undeniable objectification and almost victimisation of Lisa, as Mulvey argues, to put it broadly, the viewer of the film is compelled to take up a masculine subject position as a result of the dominant gaze of the camera, in this case coinciding with that of Jefferies, which draws the viewer into this tightly knit cinematic texture (1989:23-24).

But how does this tightly woven texture come about? Or, to go back to the previous terms, how is suture created over the wound inevitably brought about by representation? In my view, this almost claustrophobic effect can be attributed to several factors. Undeniably, it owes a lot to Jefferies's immobility, who all through the film covers about altogether two or three square metres in his apartment, not even leaving that very limited area just in front of his window, and all the camera movements seem to take place in that single room, even those very rare ones which do not reflect either of the main characters' point of view, but seem to provide an objective perspective, looking at Lisa, Jefferies, and Stella watching what is happening on the other side of the backyard. This effect is enhanced by the other aspect of this claustrophobic space: not only where the gaze of the camera originates *from* but also where it is directed *at*, i.e. how far it can "see", and that is not too far: except for occasional shots when the gap between the two buildings of the backyard opens up and the street, including the other side of the street with the small café, where Miss Lonelyhearts goes every now and then can be seen; all that can be seen is that single room of Jefferies, and the view of the backyard (even the supposed kitchen, the other room and the bathroom of his place - spaces "entered" by Lisa every now and then, but never by Jefferies - belong to the space-off of the film).

There is a meaningful anecdote recalled by the assistant director in the *werkfilm* of the restored version: there is a telephone conversation between Jefferies and his boss at the magazine he works for. Originally, during this conversation, Hitchcock wanted to have shots from the magazine office, showing the boss, so they built up another space as an office, but this very assistant director suggested that not even that setting should be included in the film. Yet, first, Hitchcock insisted on his original idea. On the way to the set, however, Hitchcock asked him if he still thought it a good idea not even to have this short shot off the dominant set, and he said yes. Hitchcock's response was the following: as all the characters by that time had been waiting for them on the set, he thought the conversation should be shot there, but right away decided that in the film only the voice of the boss will be heard, but the shot will only include Jefferies and his flat. In this way, not even for a moment does the camera - and, as a result, the audience - "leave" the space of the room and the backyard.

This extremely, almost obsessively closed place (also in terms of conferring subjectivity upon the viewer), however, is primarily created by the interlocking shots, whereby - to refer back to Silverman - "meaning emerges and a subject-position is

constructed for the viewer" (1983:201). In this sense, I would claim, the most dominant pattern of interlocking shots of this film is not that of the shot/reverse shot formation, but a triple structure, which can either be described as shot 1/reverse shot/shot 2, or, paradoxically, as reverse shot 1/shot/reverse shot 2, which at first may obviously sound nonsense. But this basic triple pattern can be described as follows: first, we have a view of Jefferies (from a certain point on, that of Lisa or/and Stella as well), which may be interpreted as *the* shot of the shot/reverse shot formation, and as such creating that sense of plenitude and *jouissance* of wholeness, of the omnipotence of the viewer as a result of the identification of an apparently omniscient camera. Second, it is followed by a shot which is right away understood by the viewer as the sight at the other end of the 180° horizon, i.e. seen by the character gazing (and in this sense this is *the* shot, not the reverse shot, that is why the first shot is right away interpreted as *the* reverse shot, that is, the "logical", or rather, psychological link between the gazer and the sight is established). Furthermore, as if wanting to absolutely make sure that this circle is closed, as a third step (and shot), we see the face of the gazer again, with the difference that this time, the face reflects the effect of the sight gained - and this is why I claim that in a purely technical and chronological way it is shot 2, but, psychologically, this is rather *reverse* shot 2.

Now, if I go back to Silverman's terms, and accept that suture, that is, the perfect inclusion of the viewer in the film, and thus, as the creation of the viewer *as* the spoken subject is brought about by the shot/reverse shot formation as a basic tool, then I can go on, and draw the conclusion that this triple structure even more powerfully produces the viewer, leaving even fewer loopholes, if you prefer, even depriving them of the *jouissance* normally provided by the first shot, as it seems to me also obvious that in the same way as the syntagmatic units of sentences (and literary texts) are not only read in their successivity but also in reversed movements (that is, certain passages that come later reinterpret the ones preceding them), so in the same way, the third shot in this model absolutely confirms the first shot not as the first shot in the functional sense of the word but as a reverse shot: delimiting the second shot *before* it is seen (and in this respect, it does not matter that the shots of the gazers are taken from a perspective that is neutral in the strict sense of the word as it does not "bear" any of the characters' look). In this way, this triple structure seems to me the primary means by which the spoken subject is implicated in, and "produced", "hailed", "interpellated" or "spoken" by the cinematic texture.

If this film, however, conforms to the pattern of classic Hollywood narrative cinema as defined by Laura Mulvey, how can I claim that this film is also self-reflexive, and as such, its effect as creating suture is highly questionable since in the case of self-reflexivity the mode of production, the mode of signification is called attention to, whereas the primary “aim” of suture is to “sew up” these (loop)holes, to cover them, to undo them as wounds - if you prefer, to abolish them as frames of cinematic production. In *Rear Window*, I can see one shot which consciously steps out of the dominant camera position, and three other shots which imply a self-reflexive “comment”, all of which are also closely related to the window as a representational frame. The shot that in my view leaves the dominant camera position (which, as seen before, is always located in the room, gazing either at the characters, or at the characters gazing) is a kind of shot that is otherwise said to be quite typical of Hitchcock’s films (and any viewer of any Hitchcock film can confirm this opinion) that the audience has more information than the characters, and Hitchcock himself considered it a major means of creating suspense (Bordwell, 1997:104). As it is clear from what I said before, in this respect *Rear Window* seems to be exceptional since all through it is dominated by the point-of-view technique. There is only one instance of information given to the audience: at dawn after killing his wife, Thorwald leaves his apartment in the company of a woman, but this scene is not seen by Jefferies as he is dozing at that moment. This apparent information, however, I think rather functions as misinformation, as red herring: instead of confirming the viewer in Jefferies’ assumption, it deters them from it because it creates the impression that the detective is right, Thorwald has not killed his wife, but the wife really left the city, but in this paradoxical way maintaining the suspense: what happened then, or, in a different reading: what is this all about if there is no crime - a question that leads me on to the clearly self-reflexive shots of the film. Is it possible, then, that *Rear Window* is a lot less about Thorwald’s crime and the process of deciphering how it happened than about cinematic representation itself?

I would claim so. Apart from the emphatic presence of the gaze, via camera-like devices of all kinds (the binoculars and the telephoto), the window through which Jefferies and the others watch the backyard is emphatically created as a screen and a frame, which makes cinematic representation possible. In the opening shot, during the credits, Jefferies’s window can be seen, first with the matchstick blinds down, then slowly, all the three of them are rolled up, while the frame of the window, parallel with the frame of the shot, dominates the view, then the camera gradually approaches the frame; as a next step, the

window frame disappears, more precisely, it is blurred into, or made identical with the frame of the shot, till, finally the camera seems to take up a position *in* the window frame and starts panning the backyard. James Naremore in *Acting in the Cinema* claims that this element (including the stage-like appearance of the apartments in the backyard) contributes to the theatricality of the film (1988:239-40)). I would not completely deny that, but in this most self-reflexive moment of the film I would rather claim this shot as a synecdoche, a *mise-en-abyme* of the mode of representation the teleology of which seems to be the following: after establishing the film as a film, on the basis of the position and the movement of the camera, it blurs its own self-consciousness as a special mode of representation (something that does not really happen in a theatre as the stage remains there all through the performance), and fully implicates the viewer in that limited but totalising point of view (something that the theatre is incapable of doing again), and whereas the (window)frame does make occasional appearances in the film, it becomes fully meaningful again in the closing scene, when Lisa, transformed from fashion model into the adventurous woman wearing jeans reclines on the sofa, and is engaged in reading.

Otherwise, the primary narrative takes place in that space beyond and created by the window, at least *for* Jefferies (the photographer with the camera), although “he” could have a story of his own, a story that could find its various parallels, counterpoints, alternative parallels, if you prefer, in the backyard apartments, even if he is not conscious of it at all - whereas the two female characters are aware of it (the question is if he should marry Lisa, and what will/can happen in marriage - let me remind you: Thorwald’s crime is chopping up his wife). That Jefferies’s interest primarily lies in the story *beyond* the window frame is clear from the third, I assume, self-reflexive shot of the film: at one point Lisa is fed up with Jefferies gazing at the backyard only, she lets down the blinds, in a most tempting night-gown, and she wants to force him into a situation to talk about their own life and future, when all of a sudden a scream can be heard (the owner of the lapdog who “knew too much” of the crime, and whose body is found dead at that moment - and “the dog that knew too much” itself is a self-reflexive comment of Hitchcock’s: an allusion to his 1935 film, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*) - as if *the story* were reclaiming itself, its diegetic function “cries out” to the non-diegetic element which implies both the window and Jefferies watching.

In my view, it is quite inevitable as well that it is after *this* shot that Lisa makes a desperate attempt to enter the text beyond the window, in the space created by the window

frame, as this is the only way how she can leave the room, this non-diegetic place, the *site* of the production of representation, and can become a part of *the story*, even if this move - paradoxically but not surprisingly - means that partly she gains activity (as opposed to being the beautiful object), but partly she posits herself as the potentially victimized "pursued maiden", the only way in which she can arouse Jefferies's desire. But, let me emphasize again, this move in my view is the direct result of her realisation that there is *no story in the room from Jefferies's perspective* (in the two previous cases when she wants to argue about their common future and persuade Jefferies to give up his nomadic life, she always wants to gain space and Jefferies's attention *within* the window frame, without actually crossing the boundary, but she cannot do so, no matter how charming she looks), and this is how the shot in the room, with the blinds down, is, in my opinion, a self-reflexive element in the film, and, at the same time, a turning point.

The third self-reflexive element is another, functionally determining shot: the closing of the film I have already referred to. Here, significantly, Jefferies is sleeping again (in none of the four shots I read as ruptures in the suture of the film can he see: in three cases he is asleep, in one he is "blind" to the backyard because of the blinds), with his back to the window, Lisa reclining on the sofa in clothes drastically different from whatever she has been wearing before, first reading *Beyond the High Himalayas* (a book clearly indicating Jefferies's proposed plot), then, making sure he is asleep, *Haarper's Bazaar*. This shot is significant in several ways. 1. At the beginning, Lisa, reclining on the sofa is framed by the window, panned by the camera from toe to top, calling attention to the representational aspect, to the inevitability of the "frame" in any and every sense of the word (frame as window frame, as the frame in the film, as frame for the picturelike closure - functioning as a picture frame for Lisa in the position of a reclining nude; as representational frame; and as discursive frame); 2. while panning Lisa, the camera withdraws from the backyard, makes the reverse movement of the opening shot, and to make it more evident, even the blind goes down; 3. this shot is also important because whereas all the other stories on the other side of the backyard seem to have a nice and neat closure (Miss Lonelyhearts is saved from suicide, the composer can finish the song he is composing all through, Miss Torso's lover arrives, so she does not have to "juggle with wolves", the dead lapdog is replaced by a new one, etc.). At first sight, Lisa and Jefferies's story seems to have come to a nice closure as well, but the very change in the reading (Lisa

swapping Jefferies's plot of the High Himalayas for "her" plot of Haarper's Bazaar) indicates that "their" story is far from having reached a closure.

One cannot, however, be surprised at that since *this* story is *not the* story: all through it did not and could not develop for the very reasons I have discussed. This story remains loaded with tensions, with irreconcilable contradictions, with either/or options in which, from the point of view of gender two things may be remarkable: 1. in this framework, directed by the male gaze, the only options a woman can have are either the masculine or the feminine, but in both cases, ironically, she is created by the desire of the man; 2. Lisa, all through the film, is emphatically enframed by various modes of representation, and in this sense not even her apparently affirmative final look, reading *Haarper's Bazaar* in jeans, in masculine drag as Tania Modleski defines it (1989:84), can be interpreted as an autonomous choice since from the very beginning of the film, Lisa powerlessly trying to draw Jefferies's attention on her as the embodiment of *Haarper's Bazaar* is not more promising than her potential victimisation by "the High Himalayas", which can be read as a replica of her entering the story in the backyard. In this sense, the closing shot, without a closure, leaves the viewer uneasy, making them aware of the inevitability of representation, of gender as both the result of the male gaze and of performativity, a performativity, however, that still lacks the woman's point of view and perpetuates her as enframed by Jefferies's window as looking glass.

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**TEXT – SUTURE – SUBJECTIVITY: SUTURE AND SUBJECT FORMATION
IN MARGARET DRABBLE'S *THE WATERFALL***

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suture /'su:tʃə(r)/ *n* (*medical*) stitch or stitches made in sewing up a wound, esp following an operation.

(Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 1989)

Why do we need suture? What wounds do we have that need suture? What are the cuts that require sewing up? Are there certain cuts that we all share? Are there certain cuts that women have? In the following paper I seek the answers to these questions by attempting to interpret Margaret Drabble's novel *The Waterfall* (1969) along the lines of Kaja Silverman's suture theory as she synthesizes it in *The Subject of Semiotics* (1983).

One cannot talk sensibly about suture without establishing a link between it and Lacanian speech theory. Lacan claims that the subject constitutes itself through speaking, that is through signification. "Since signification results in the aphanisis of the real, the speaking subject and its discursive representative – i.e. the subject of the speech – remain perpetually dissimultaneous, at odds" (Silverman, 1983:197). In this sense, the basic cuts that we all share are that we are never the same as ourselves; that "I", the speaking subject has value as an "I" only in the act of speaking. My being as an "I" in no way equals my representation as an "I". The signifier "I" is activated not through its direct reference to myself as an actual speaker, but through its alignment with the *ideal image* in which the speaker – in this case, me – sees *herself*. Furthermore, according to Lacan, there can be no anchoring of meaning through a one-to-one relation between signifiers and signifieds, and that meaning emerges through discourse as a result of displacements along a signifying chain. In this sense, the subject can attain subjectivity only through the intervention of signification. Suture describes the instance in which the subject recognises its "own" subjectivity in a certain signifier, and at this specific point in the signifying chain *she* identifies with it.

I have consciously omitted the personal pronoun *he* from my statement as in this paper the focus of my investigation is a narrative of women, emphatically focusing on

women and suture. Silverman applies the theory of suture to interpret cinematic texts and to examine some of the textual strategies through which subjectivity is constantly reactivated. Having commented on the various theories of suture, she claims that suture always implies a sexual differentiation on the basis of vision, and it is precisely at this point where suture is joined with female subjectivity where it is most vulnerable to subversion (1983:236). For the sake of simplicity she defines suture as “[...] the procedures by means of which cinematic texts confer subjectivity upon their viewers” (1983:195). At the end of her chapter Silverman suggests that although the theory of suture has not yet been extended to literary discourse it has obvious relevance to that as well. Finally, she enumerates certain features of literary texts the theory of suture might be applicable to. In her opinion first-person narration and other indicators of point of view in literary texts seem to require that literary texts should be interpreted within this theoretical framework.

To apply the theory of suture to literary texts, however, it is inevitably necessary to define the term in literary context. On the basis of Silverman’s definition I propose that suture in literature is the name given to the procedures by means of which texts confer meaning upon their readers. But I have to call attention to the fact that terms like text, reader, or reading are not exclusively literature-related, as recent film theory also tends to use them frequently. This highlights the observable trend in which there is no sharp and definite border between the reception of cinematic and literary texts. On the basis of various suture theories Silverman arrives at the conclusion that there are three parties whose presence is inevitable in the case of a (cinematic) text: the speaking subject, the subject of the speech and the “spoken subject” or projected viewer (1983:198). As we can see, the very words are related to language and textuality – another aspect that strengthens the link between cinematic and literary texts. On the basis of this proposal, I shall attempt to read a novel that exemplifies the qualities enumerated by Silverman, *The Waterfall* by Margaret Drabble, and investigate how suture is present in the text, and how the point of view sorts out the various roles in the process of viewing/reading.

Margaret Drabble’s novel *The Waterfall* is the story of a poet, Jane Gray, who, having driven away her husband, gives birth to her second child, a little girl. In her solitude, Jane is often visited by Lucy, her cousin and *alter ego*, and her husband, James. In her womb-like room, in the maternal bed Jane starts a transgressive and incestuous love relationship with her brother(-in-law), and after years of frigidity she discovers the pleasures of her

own womanhood through the bodily experience of motherhood and sexuality. Through the extensive use of metaphors of childbirth and lactation, maternity becomes the semantic centre of the text, which confers meaning upon sexual experience and desire.

On the textual level the novel consists of first- and third-person narratives; the third-person ones constitute a romance story, while the first-person sections reflect on the validity of the third-person ones. The alternation of these two textual strategies as indicators of changing points of view furnish a more than particularly tempting invitation to apply the theory of suture whose major embodiment in cinematic texts is the shot/reverse shot technique.

In addition to these two textual levels, the first-person sections constantly refer to texts by 19th-century women writers, such as *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) by George Eliot, *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë and related pieces by Jane Austen. These 19th-century intertexts are used as points of reference that Jane Gray can always resort to for possible subject positions. Jane wants to live her life and her love as a heroine of a romance, and the fictitious heroines who haunt her serve as models of possible subject positions. She writes her own script, a romance – the third-person parts – in which she wants to star as the heroine, just like in a Hollywood movie.

The presence of the 19th-century intertexts highlights the fact that Jane is split not only into two – as exemplified by the first- and third-person narrative sections – but into three. The relation of the third-person romance and the first-person commentary is further modified by the presence of the intertexts, which are embedded in the first-person sections and reflect on the romance story. It is only in the first-person parts that Jane is aware of the self-reflexive quality of the 19th-century intertexts that, by definition, reveals the workings of this seemingly naïve narrative device.

To find suture in Drabble's text I separate these three narrative strategies and follow how the gap gradually closes between them. This covering up of the original cuts – on the textual level – should, in my view, parallel the psychic process of the suturing of Jane, or rather the Janes.

The third-person narrative sections, especially the first two of these (Drabble, 1971:7-45, 67-83), are more or less like parts of a film, or a script that conceals their own making. There are certain paragraphs that describe what the camera sees or hears, such as one that is full of the names of colours referring to the locale:

The bedroom had *dark blue* walls, like the night sky itself, and the bars of the fire were *red* and *glowing*. Heaps of *white* towels and baby clothes lay upon the chest of drawers, and on the table in front of the fire stood a large *pale yellow* pudding bowl, an ordinary mixing bowl, in which the midwife had bathed the baby. The *colours* of the scene affected Jane profoundly: they were the *violent colours* of birth, but they resolved into silence, into a kind of harmony (1971:9-10, emphases added).

This section sounds as if the camera were looking around, displaying the scene in detail. The frequency of colour names is striking in comparison with other parts of the text as there are hardly any colours mentioned elsewhere in the text. The references to sound are also condensed into one section, which works like the former one, as sound images are very rare in other parts of the third-person narrative, “[...] [t]he room was silent, except for the sound of breathing, and the sound of the gas fire, and the faint, small effervescence of the liquid in the glasses” (1971:13).

The fact that Jane Gray writes a romance story in the third-person narrative seemingly situates her in the position of the speaking subject. To a certain extent, she is the speaker of the third -person narrative, the romance, as in the first-person commentary she even reveals the truth about the technique she uses to present her story, “I’ve merely omitted: merely, professionally, edited” (Drabble, 1971:46). Further on, she elaborates the different angles she could have occupied, and the different views she could have achieved. This section sounds as if she were handling a camera, and admitting that what the camera sees is exclusive, there are no other possible views that could supplement or modify it. At this point in the first-person commentary, she calls attention to the making of the text, as the ”how” is revealed and not concealed by the “what”.

But I still do not find the question of whether Jane is the speaking subject of the third-person narrative fully answered. As subjectivity is always constructed within discourse, the speaking subject’s subjectivity is no exception either. Jane Gray in the third-person parts creates a love story along the lines of 19th-century romances that provide her with models of “the woman in love”. All these romance stories communicate women’s place in the patriarchal world, and rely on the stereotypical pairing of the hero with grand romantic feelings and the fragile heroine, the recipient of love, who can become integrated into society in her relation to a man, through marriage. Jane Gray wants to live her life along the lines of these model stories that resonate through the use of intertexts, but her intention and the workings of this imitation are revealed only in the first-person parts. The

third-person romance clearly conceals its own mechanism presenting the events seemingly omnisciently, but all the time sympathising with Jane. According to Silverman “[...] a gaze *within the fiction* serves to conceal the controlling gaze *outside the fiction*: a benign other steps in and obscures the presence of the coercive and castrating Other. In other words, the subject of the speech passes itself off as the speaking subject” (1983:204, emphases added). In this sense, this concealing gaze within the fiction is the product of that more overreaching gaze outside fiction. It conceals its own workings and passes off so innocently as if it did not exist at all. Keeping in mind that “[o]nly an ideological world outlook could have imagined societies without ideology” (Silverman quoting Althusser, 1983:218) and that “narrative may function on a small scale [in] the way that ideology functions on a large scale” (DuPlessis, 1985:3), it is not surprising to claim that Jane Gray in her third-person narrative is spoken by patriarchy on the large scale, and by the romance on the small one, in a miniature of the sex-gender system.

As for the first-person parts, without the intertexts, it is easier to posit Jane: in my reading she is the viewer of her own text. Although, Jane seems to be unified in the first-person parts, it is not absolutely so. Jane is undecided, as she hesitates over whether to accept or reject the romance story and often argues with herself in the first-person sections on the validity of the offered subject positions. Despite these uncertainties, I read her in the first-person parts as the viewer of her own text, but it is clear that she displays the hesitancy that is always present in a process of finding a liveable subject position. According to film theory, the viewer signifies lack as she is spoken, not speaking, and whose gaze is controlled, and not controlling. Although the viewer seemingly has the capacity of viewing, the only truly productive gaze in the cinema is that of the camera. All this lack and inability to control is highly stereotypical of women; it posits them as ideal viewers. In this sense, Jane in the first-person sections qualifies as the viewer of her own text.

Moreover, it is worth investigating the relationship of the shot and reverse shot. “The shot/reverse shot formation is a cinematic set in which the second shot shows the field from which the first shot is assumed to have been taken” (Silverman, 1983:201). In shot 1 the camera denies its own existence presenting a view of imaginary plenitude, unbound by any gaze, and unmarked by difference. After this overwhelming feeling the viewer discovers that this possession of vision is illusory, and feels dispossessed of what she is prevented of seeing. This lack inspires her to see something else.

Only then, with the disruption of imaginary plenitude, does the shot become a signifier, speaking first and foremost of that thing about which the Lacanian signifier never stops speaking: castration. A complex signifying chain is introduced in place of the lack which can never be made good, suturing over the wound of castration with narrative. (Silverman, 1983:204)

This constant confrontation with being castrated can – among other things – be interpreted as the position of women. This process of negation is evidently there in Jane Gray's reactions to her own cinematic text as its viewer. After the first two sections of the third-person text Jane starts with emotions of disagreement, disillusionment, of failure, “It won't, of course do: as an account, I mean, of what took place” (Drabble, 1971:46) or “Lies, lies, it's all lies. A pack of lies” (Drabble, 1971:84). The instance of suture is not present in these reactions. Not yet, as she has not “met” the subject position that is/will be conferred upon her by the text.

In the course of the narrative, the gap between the third- and first-person parts gradually closes. Jane is less and less eager to devote herself to the romance, and is more willing to give voice to reactions in the first-person parts. Furthermore, even the style of the two narratives gets closer and closer: the third-person parts become less engaged with the love story and more concerned with reflections, while the first-person parts turn more to actions than before. The intertexts that are embedded in the first-person parts gradually disappear by the end, so in the last sections the gap between the first-person and self-reflexive intertextual parts sutures, closes up.

Silverman claims “The operation of suture is successful at the moment that the viewing subject says, ‘Yes, that's me,’ or ‘That's what I see’ ” (1983:205). This victorious cry is never heard in the course of the novel. On the one hand, the difference between the split first-person Janes is covered up gradually. But on the other hand, Jane in the first-person parts never says that she is the same as the Jane of the third-person text, although by the end the distance between the two Janes is hardly visible. Seemingly, there is a sense of a modest suture at the end of the story. Jane no longer seems to look for subject positions offered by 19th-century romances, instead she manages to find a place of her own, a subject position that provides her with the possibility of distinct voice.

As a postscript to this paragraph I should note, that even this “authentic” subject position that Jane achieves is constructed within a discourse. Moreover, the fact that the

novel does not end with a sublime climax, but with several postscripts, as if the narrator could not finish the story, raises the question of to what extent Jane's original cuts become sutured. On the narrative level the gaps are gradually closed but on the structural level new ones are opened by the "endless" postscripts. In accordance with Lacan, suture can never be complete in the sense that the gaps cannot close without scars, that 'I' and 'I' can never be homogeneously united.

In my paper I have already emphasized the importance of vision in this theoretical framework. In an extremely influential essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", Laura Mulvey argues that the classic film text distinguishes sharply between the male and female subjects on the basis of vision. Men are defined in terms of their capacity to look, as voyeurs, and women in terms of their capacity to attract the male gaze (1975:6-18). This opposition entirely parallels the stereotypical roles assigned to men and women, since "[...] voyeurism is the active form of the scopophilic drive, while exhibitionism is the passive or 'feminine' form of the same drive" (Silverman, 1983:223).

Adopting the gender division of masculinity and femininity it is supposedly James who is defined in terms of his capacity to look in the novel. In the third-person parts, especially in the first two ones, it is James who keeps the night watch immediately after Jane has given birth to her daughter, and falls in love with her while looking at her in bed. For him vision is a central possession: it is his eyes that get hurt in the accident reminding Jane and the reader of the blind Rochester, and it is only after a long time that his eyes respond to any visual stimulus. But finally James regains his sight. What might be the cause for such a punishment of almost losing his vision? Immediately before the description of the accident in the first person, there is a strange sentence at the very end of the previous third-person part, " 'I love you,' he said, *looking at her through the mirror*" (Drabble, 1971:83, emphasis added). Never before this instance has James looked at Jane in the mirror, he has always looked at her directly. The mirror, since psychoanalysis discovered its importance, has always been a central image of recognition. The moment James is confronted with the recognition of Jane and himself through the mirror the accident takes place. It is as if after a rare moment of revelation punishment ensues.

But what is revealed and why should it be punished? Previously, Jane and James pretended to regress to a place where the Oedipal nexus of gender and, consequently, transgression and incest were not applicable. But looking into the mirror James has to recognise that he is not the same as Jane, thus their relation is liable to concepts, such as

transgression and incest. As soon as this is revealed to him, the Symbolic order intrudes into their world and sorts out things into their place, calling them incest and adultery.

In addition to this, another aspect of vision should be investigated here. Jane attracts James' gaze as an erotic object of desire. In accordance with her role as an *object* of desire Jane is denied the capacity to look: while James was awake “[s]he opened her eyes, to speak to him, but still she *did not dare* to look [...]” (1971:33, emphasis added). Later on when he fell asleep “[a]s she fed the child, she *glanced* at him from *time* to *time*. He lay there, breathing deeply, so *far away* that she felt in a sense cruelly abandoned, and yet in another way glad of the *distance*, because it gave her *time* to *look* at him [...]” (1971:34, emphases added). It is telling of the gender roles that she dares to look at him only when there is no threat of a mutual gaze. There is another surprising element in this section: distance and time hardly ever appear in the third-person parts, instead proximity and timelessness determine the experience. But as soon as vision appears as Jane's ability time and distance step in as two aliens in her world.

Later on as their love story proceeds, Jane starts to gaze at certain things, things that belong to James, but only when he is absent: his *Autocar* magazine, a cigarette pocket, a lock of his hair, or a photograph (1971:133). Or, when James is on holiday with his family, Jane gazes at the postcard James sends her: “It was the first of his handwriting I had received, and I *gazed* at it with such an ardour, re-reading it a hundred times, taking it with me wherever I went: I thought it would give me enough to think about for another week” (1971:157, emphasis added). It is not by accident that Jane gazes at things that signify double lack: lack of presence, lack of speech. In this sense writing appears as the absolute signifier of lack. Further on, the verb *to gaze* loses its importance in the text, and is often used with Jane as the subject of the sentence. The object of the gaze is no longer related to James, ordinary, everyday things are gazed at. Why is this gradual change in emphasis? James is threatened with the loss of his vision, Jane more often gazes, and what is more it is she who is in control of the ‘camera’s’ gaze. She is in control of the point of view that belongs to her. The object of the gaze becomes less important, but the capacity itself becomes more and more powerful. It seems, that Jane, by gradually becoming able to look, begins to heal her wounds, her castration, but, as on the textual level, however these wounds may be covered up they will never disappear without leaving a scar.

In conclusion, I would call attention to an interesting aspect of the text. Perhaps it is not by mere coincidence that there are several phrases in *The Waterfall* that echo the

imagery inherent in the metaphor of suture. Jane regains her autonomous subjectivity through childbirth and maternity, and later on through sexual experience. The first healing instance after giving birth to little Bianca, the first healing of a cut, is when the doctor puts in the stitches immediately after the delivery. In the course of the novel there is another suture, referring to the bone structure of the skull, as James has a fracture of the skull that has to be sutured. So, there is a male recipient of suture, to whom it is a stabilising instance in his life. Finally, there is another scar, the waterfall at Goredale Scar that both Jane and James visit. This is the last scar in the narrative and it reinforces the fact that although suture can cover up gaps and cuts, there always remains a scar that reminds one of the inescapable, that she is never the same as herself.

As the notion of suture is not the central point of a single fully developed theory but rather a meeting point of various overlapping theories it also offers several layers of interpretation for Drabble's novel. In this paper I have tried to illuminate the most relevant points to test whether the theory of suture is applicable to a novel at all. It has proved so. This interpretation has highlighted certain elements of the novel whose subversive quality had previously never been apparent to me. The application of suture to literary texts needs further elaboration but it seems to me worth attempting a tempting suture.

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DAYTIME UTOPIAS: IF YOU LIVED IN PINE VALLEY, YOU'D BE HOME

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[. . .] for only in art has bourgeois society tolerated its own ideals and taken them seriously as a general demand. What counts as utopia, phantasy, and rebellion in the world of fact is allowed in art. There affirmative culture has displayed the forgotten truths over which ‘realism’ triumphs in daily life.

Herbert Marcuse (1968:114)

A work of art opens a void where . . . the world is made aware of its guilt.

Michel Foucault (1965: 278)

It's Sunday night and my daughter is calling: "I hate that they have to kill off Eve," she moans, "although I don't blame her for wanting out of her contract - the show is definitely going downhill. And at least they're using her death to make a point about experimental drugs. Act-Up should be happy about that, if any of them are watching. Probably not. Even the rec.arts.tv.soaps.cbs crowd on the Internet seem to hate her, which I really don't get. She's the only interesting woman left on the show. What do you think?"

We are having our usual weekly check-in call about *Guiding Light*, the soap opera of choice among Pittsburgh women in the 1960s and 1970s, when she was growing up, and the one to which we have remained loyal for almost three decades, through good times and bad. Neither of us lives in Pittsburgh now, but when we watch and discuss our soap opera, we still share a common community and a set of friends and neighbours about whom we care deeply, even as we laugh at their often ridiculously implausible lives.

But what's this about AIDS, you are no doubt wondering. Dr. Eve Guthrie, after all, as you may know if you are a fan yourself, has died of a rare disease with no links whatever to any activity connected with sex or drugs or even blood transfusions. She has, it seems, picked up this virus while working as selflessly as Mother Theresa, (and with as little political sophistication), as a doctor in a war torn fictional nation. Nothing political or kinky about that.

Nonetheless, as Alison and I both understand, having followed and discussed the murky, contradictory, often subtextual politics of daytime soaps for so long, there is something progressive, in the most utopian sense of that word, about the conclusion of Eve's storyline. In a frenzy of what some would call "denial" about her fatal illness, Eve has made contact by way of the Internet with a colleague doing research on this disease,

and has been secretly medicating herself with an untested drug. Her fiancé, Ed, himself a physician of the more usual conservative variety, is adamantly opposed. But lo and behold, the cyber-researcher Eve has hooked up with is an old med school pal of Ed's - a woman no less - for whom he has the utmost respect. And this brilliant woman convinces him - in a series of inspiring speeches of the kind Alison and I love to savour - of Eve's courage, her intuitive scientific acumen, and her right to choose her own treatment. Eve even improves for a while on the treatment, but it is too little too late and she finally succumbs - as the contract of the actress who plays the role demands (and as we who follow the cyber-chat gossip have long known she would) - amidst sobbing friends, flashback clips of better days, and a eulogy in which it is predicted that her final act of medical courage will lead to an early cure for the disease. On soapville, this is credible.

The path that led my daughter and me to the soaps is worth tracing briefly, for it was as contradictory and unlikely as many soap storylines. In the 1960s, when Alison was very young, I was a full time graduate student increasingly caught up in New Left and feminist politics. In those days - hard as it is to remember this now - we of the democratic Left believed that revolution was around the corner; that a post-scarcity world of equality, beauty, pleasure, and material plenty for all was on the horizon (For a vivid example of the amazingly optimistic utopianism of the New Left see Michael Lerner, 1970).

In my socialist-feminist consciousness-raising/study group, we devoured new feminist tracts which corrected for the masculinist biases and blind spots of traditional Left theory. And in our women's caucuses, we developed strategies which challenged traditional Marxist ideology and process, with its artificial splits between public and private, work and play, labour and sexual repression. In our feminist revisions, women would not only be integrated into the public sphere of work and power; the public sphere itself would be transformed, as values such as compassion, nurturance, mutual support and respect - long marginalized as relevant only to private, family life - were incorporated into public life.

Those were heady days. Also exhausting. I would drag myself home each afternoon - after classes and before the evening round of meetings - to find my grandmotherly babysitter faithfully watching *Guiding Light* while my two infants napped. And since she would not budge until her "story" was over, and I was too tired to budge myself, we would watch together as she filled me in on what I had missed. The habit stuck. In fact, *Guiding Light* became a daily delight to which I looked forward as a respite from my increasingly hectic

life. More than that - although at first I chalked it up to exhausted delirium - it seemed, at odd moments, to offer a vision of social and emotional happiness that echoed the social visions my friends and I were constructing in our position papers and organizing projects. “What does a woman want?” asked Sigmund Freud, of penis envy fame (Juliet Mitchell had not yet rehabilitated him for feminism) and I couldn’t help but think that in all the male-run world only the *Guiding Light* writers seemed to have a clue.

These were very different times in the academic and critical communities. “Women’s Studies,” as an academic programme, was just being developed, a result of the growing movement of university-based Women’s liberation unions. But efforts to bring the study of mass media and popular culture into universities, at least in this country, were not yet spoken of. These were the days, in any event, when feminist media analysis was almost exclusively of the “negative” and “positive” image variety. And the gender images which feminists were analysing in popular culture were rarely considered positive.

Nonetheless, say what they might about “mass culture” and its evils, the Frankfurt School theorists I was then studying could not dissuade me from my instinctive sense that a lot of what I was trying to teach my kids about what life was supposed to be like in the brave new world I envisioned could most easily be explained with soap examples. In the rest of their world - their school rooms, their friends’ homes, the cartoons and sitcoms they watched - women’s lives were marginalized and demeaned. But in Springfield, the fictional Midwestern town in which *Guiding Light* is set, and Pine Valley, the somewhat smaller fictional community in which *All My Children*, our other, occasionally watched, show was set, I glimpsed - entangled amidst the absurdities and contradictions of the form - a feminised world, in which women and their traditional concerns were central, in which women played key roles in every arena, in which, when women “spoke truth to power” - even back in the 1960s - power stood up and paid attention.

The idea that bourgeois culture incorporates utopian visions and values, moments during which we are liberated from the constraints of realism and can glimpse, in the distance, a vision of that better world in which our often unarticulated heart’s desires are fulfilled, is not of course new. Media scholars have been aware of this at least since Jameson’s seminal essay on “Reification and Utopia.” Nor is it news that popular culture, being taken so much less seriously than high art forms, has been the most powerful site of imaginative utopian protest. For as Jameson has written elsewhere, it is in times like ours, when “our own particular environment - the total system of capitalism and the consumer

society - feels so massively in place and its reification so overwhelming and impenetrable that the serious artist is no longer free to tinker with it "that popular forms - forms that are less "serious", less "massively in place"- assume "the vocation of giving us alternate versions of a world that has elsewhere seemed to resist even *imagined change*" (Jameson, 1991:233). While Jameson does not specifically mention soap opera, feminist media theorists have written extensively and insightfully about the utopian element in daytime soaps. Feminists have discovered on soaps a representation of "a world in which the divine functions;" a world which "exhorts the [real] world to live up to [women's] impassioned expectations of it" as Louise Spence nicely puts it (1995:193).

And John Fiske, taking a somewhat different perspective has described soap opera as a genre in which "feminine culture constantly struggles to establish and extend itself within and against a dominant patriarchy . . . to whittle away at patriarchy's power to subject women and . . . establish a masculine-free zone from which a direct challenge may be mounted" (Fiske, 1987:197). Other feminist theorists have pointed to any number of specific soap conventions and teased out their utopian implications. It is often noted, for example, that through the incorporation of multiple subjectivities and points of view; and the use of multiple, open-ended narrative lines, readers are potentially empowered to question dominant patriarchal assumptions about family and gender norms and to resist hegemonic readings (See especially Tania Modleski, 1982, and Martha Nochimson, 1992).

But most of this work has focused on the way soaps represent and negotiate the traditionally feminine sphere of private life - the home, family and gender relationships, marriage and maternity. My own pleasure on soaps - and my sense of their usefulness as a tool for raising feminist daughters and sons - came from something much less often mentioned: their implicitly utopian social and political vision. Raymond Williams has written that "community is the keyword of the entire utopian enterprise." And it was the sense of community - but of a feminised community closer to my feminist visions of the future than to classic literary utopias - that drew me to soaps;

"The personal is political" we used to say back in the late 1960s. And what we meant by that - and it is a sign of the times that this statement is so often misunderstood, even by feminists, today - was that it was *political* institutions that were responsible for personal suffering, and *political* institutions - the public spaces from which women had so long been excluded - that would need to be changed in order for women to be free and happy. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, themselves socialist-feminist activists, eloquently

articulated the vision and the demands of that utopian worldview: “There are no answers left but the most radical ones”, they wrote in the 1970s:

We cannot assimilate into a masculinist society without doing violence to our own nature, which is of course *human* nature. But neither can we retreat into domestic isolation, clinging to an archaic feminine ideal. Nor can we deny that the dilemma is a social one...

The Woman Question in the end is not a question of *women*. It is not we who are the problem and it is not our needs which are the mystery. From our perspective (denied by centuries of masculinist “science” and analysis) the Woman Question becomes the question of how shall we all - women and children and men - organize our lives together (Ehrenreich & English, 1978:323).

The answer to this question seemed vitally important to me as I was raising my children. And despite the derision of most people I knew (“Do you actually watch this stuff?” I was asked repeatedly when I first “came out” in print, back in 1973, in a column about soaps and women viewers in a New Left newspaper), the political imaginary of soap opera - in which courtrooms, hospitals and offices seemed miraculously to bend themselves to women’s desires - suggested some answers.

For those not intimately familiar with the always implausible, often incredible, world of soap opera convention, a bit of background on *Guiding Light*’s Springfield community may be in order. The series, which has been on the air since the beginning of television, and before that, as a radio series, focuses primarily on the lives of eight complexly intertwined families - the Bauers, the Marlers, the Reardons, the Coopers, the Lewises, the Thorpes, the Spauldings and the Chamberlains - who have lived in Springfield forever; who eternally intermarry, engage in personal, business and political battles with each other, and who see each other, when they aren’t feuding, through the constant barrage of crises - mental and physical illnesses, natural disasters, onslaughts by master criminals of the financial as well as physical variety, and more mundane events like adultery, unwanted pregnancies, financial setbacks, addictions - which afflict them all, usually in multiple doses and in intensely dramatic ways.

The show is distinctive - and this explains, in large part, its special appeal in Pittsburgh, where, until recently, the steel industry, and organized labour, collared the culture of the city - in its special emphasis on class differences within a context of

community harmony. Where many of the newer shows elide issues of class, *GL*'s Reardon and Cooper families are distinctively and proudly of working class backgrounds. They are proprietors, respectively, of a boarding house and a diner, both located on "5th Street" where street life, it is hinted, is a bit rough and tumble and folks look out for each other. This sense of working class community life, while surely foreign to audiences in other parts of the country, did indeed ring true in Pittsburgh, where ethnic communities, populated with large networks of extended families, remained for generations in the areas in which the steel mills had provided them work, at least until the demise of the steel industry in the eighties¹.

Despite the working class presence, it is, not surprisingly in a commercial TV text, the Bauers and Marlers, middle class professionals all, who provide the backbone and set the constant, stabilizing moral tone of the community. Dr. Ed Bauer, (grieving fiancé of Dr. Eve Guthrie) is, in fact, the Chief of Staff at the hospital where so many characters work and spend time healing from physical and mental trauma. And Ross Marler, his best friend, is the all-purpose, ever humane and democratic, attorney for the "good" characters and causes. Then there are the Lewises, Thorpes and Chamberlains who represent big money and high finance. But here too class difference is marked with moral distinction. The Chamberlains and Spauldings are "old money". But where the Chamberlains have class, breeding and humane policies based on a kind of noblesse oblige, the Spauldings are ruthless, competitive and cutthroat, among themselves and against all others. The Lewises, by contrast, are Texas oil upstarts of the "good old boy" variety, fairly new to Springfield and closer in style and sympathy to the down-home 5th Street crowd. And the Thorpes, represented by the rakishly evil Roger Thorpe, (so individualistically greedy and duplicitous that he cannot maintain a relationship with anyone long enough to establish a dynasty) represent an upstart business class, driven by envy and ire at the respect and love which the nicer and/or more established and self-confident families effortlessly attract. At any given time there are any numbers of other characters who arrive in town and remain as semi-permanent or permanent residents, usually by marrying into and/or working with one of the clans, until - most often - they wear out their welcome in some way and disappear.

Soap action takes place - and this is another distinctive feature of the genre - almost entirely indoors, so that interior spaces - kitchens, bedrooms, living rooms, offices, restaurants, hospitals, shops and boutiques, health clubs - are key elements in setting the tone and establishing the theme of storylines. On *GL*, besides the main characters' homes;

the Reardon boarding house; the Cooper diner; the Lewis and Spaulding corporate offices; the police station (where a Cooper usually seems to be working); the country club where the wealthy characters socialize, and where major social events, to which all are invited, are held - and of course, the hospital - are the major settings.

In fact, it was the eternal presence of hospital scenes in which healing and nurture were always needed and always provided, that inspired my first impulse to share my "escape" with Alison. With a typical 4-year-old's insistence on brute realism, she was refusing to consider the possibility that she might be a doctor rather than a nurse "when she grew up", since, as she scornfully explained to me, "everyone knows there are no women doctors", I could think of only one counter-example which might bear weight with her: *Guiding Light*. Here, even back in the sixties, women were as commonly cast as physicians and surgeons as men. And why not? On soaps all settings, all institutions, all workplaces are, on one level, merely extensions of the wholly feminised and personalized universe that is soapville

But this example served me well for reasons beyond the obvious one of offering a "positive" alternative to the *Good Housekeeping* image of Mom as homemaker. It also allowed me to suggest to her that if she did indeed become a doctor, she might be able to act a lot more as she wished the doctors she had often encountered with terror, would act. She could, best of all, get to run the hospitals as they did on soaps, and not in the truly terrifying and insensitive ways that hospitals - especially emergency rooms, where we spent more time than I care to remember - then were run. She liked that, for she could see that doctors on soaps, male and female alike, actually behaved like good Mommies at home, caring for and comforting the sick and frightened, and keeping the hospitals warm and friendly.

At Springfield General, for example, doctors and nurses were generally personal friends of their patients and so every illness was treated with personal attention and concern. Parents and other loved ones, for example, seemed to be allowed to stay with patients at all times and to elicit the most confidential medical information, always provided with kindness and sensitivity, about a patient's condition. This was hardly the case in our own experience. Alison, who suffered chronic ear infections as a child, was plagued by nightmare memories of being wheeled off by silent, white-clad figures, to hospital examining rooms where I was not allowed to follow. This did not happen on *Guiding Light*. Moreover, as I pointed out to her, bad, mean doctors - such as the ones we

had too often encountered - did not last long on soaps. They and their bad ideas about ignoring patients' feelings and living only for power and money soon came to a bad end, as would be the policy in a right thinking world.

As time went on, and Alison and her slightly younger brother Jon grew older, soaps continued to play a role in our life together, in our mother-child talks about life and love and politics. For one thing, on the simple level of "positive" images and examples, I found that issues of sexuality and gender were handled much more progressively on soaps than in other popular culture². And since these topics are always difficult for adolescents to talk about, soaps opened up a convenient discursive space for discussing sex and relationships without getting too personal. It was a growing interest in gender relations that first sparked Jon's interest. A girl on whom he had a crush was herself a *Guiding Light* fan and always went home at 3 p.m. to watch it with *her* mother. He wanted to find out what was up. As it turned out, we were then following a storyline about a girl named Beth - the daughter of Lillian Raines, one of the hospital nurses who has remained a standard character throughout the years - whose stepfather was sexually abusing her. Her boyfriend Philip - a Spaulding but one clearly uncomfortable with his heritage and heading for class defection - upon learning of this reacted as most boys would have: he ran out in a rage to find the brute and beat him up. But he soon returned, shame faced, to apologize for being so insensitive; for not realizing that Beth's feelings, not his, were important and that he should have stayed and comforted her. This was a far cry from what Jon was used to in the (to me) often terrifying boy's culture which he tried to emulate in those sexually insecure years. He said little at the time (he often pretended he was not "there" at all) although Alison made sure he got the point. But he still remembers Beth and Philip³ and mentions them on occasion.

The immediate drama of this storyline was of course intensely personal. But it is a feature of soap opera's strategies for presenting such issues that they never remain merely personal. Rather, they become political and social in the most utopian sense of those words, offering a vision of institutional procedures - board meetings, trials, hearings, even social gatherings in which serious debate occurs - in which more often than not a progressive community consensus occurs. This is what happened on the Beth/Philip storyline. The issue of secrecy and shame - both Beth and Lillian were abused and beaten by the "respectable" husband/stepfather - was endlessly explored, in conversations at a variety of settings, during the course of events related to a variety of other storylines. And

in this (long, drawn out) process, various community members were forced to accept that such atrocities might indeed be perpetrated in even the “best” homes and families, and that the women were in no way at fault. (Quite often in such storylines - although not in this particular case - characters are actually sent to support groups in which, in a most didactic way, information is provided - to the soap community and the viewer community at once - about the issue, and generally progressive attitudes and even policy suggestions are advocated.)

And then came the trial in which, in a more public, ritualistic, fashion, the entire community came to terms with and adjudicated the matter, freeing the women from fear and shame and meting out punishment - banishment of course - to the man. In the course of the trial, which, of course, went on for weeks, key characters were heard discussing the shocking events everywhere - at work, at the hairdresser’s, over breakfast - often arguing with each other, realistically enough, about who was to be believed. And as the pillars of the community - the doctors and grandmothers and policemen and women (of course there are always *policewomen*) - came to believe and side with the women, so did viewers for whom these characters were equally credible and important. This was back in the late 1970s it should be noted - long before issues of sexual abuse and violence against women were openly discussed or given the media play they receive today. But on this daytime soap opera they were indeed being discussed and dramatically represented in ways which seemed to me almost daringly oppositional.

How is it possible, in a form in many ways so hokey and even reactionary, for such progressive ideas to regularly appear? Well, for one thing, soaps are presented from a female perspective which is, by its very nature, anterior. The private sphere, as has so often been noted, is privileged and valorised on soaps, and the things women do in that sphere are seen as central to the maintenance and proper functioning of human life. But what is less often noted is the effect this valorising of private, feminine experience has on the representation of the public sphere. Soaps portray a world in which reality, as we know it, is turned on its head so that the private sphere becomes all important. But there is more to it than that. For in so privileging private values, soaps also construct a highly unrealistic but nonetheless prominent and important public sphere in which all institutions are forced to conform to private, feminine values.

The feminist idea that “the personal is political” was of course a critique of what had, since the rise of the industrial world order, been a sharp delineation between the male-

driven public sphere, in which work, business and public affairs were handled, and the female-driven domestic sphere - the haven in a heartless world - in which the work of caring for and maintaining family relations, the socializing of children and the negotiation of emotional and spiritual matters, took place. In this scheme, issues of morality, and emotional and spiritual health, were designated "female" concerns relevant primarily, if not exclusively, to the home and family life. The male world, by contrast, was understood to be ruled by the competitive, individualist values of the marketplace in which ruthlessness and greed and self-interest were largely accepted as inevitable, if not necessarily desirable. The need for men to return to the caring, nurturing, hearth and home where values such as caring, emotional openness and mutual support and concern for the welfare of the group - in this case of course the nuclear, or at best, extended family or immediate neighbourhood community where one lived one's private life, far from the madding crowd of the city - was understood to be necessary, in what had become a wildly schizophrenic and ideologically contradictory social system (cf. Hansen & Philipson, 1990 which collects some of the seminal classic texts in which the political nuances of the public/private split, as articulated by second wave socialist-feminists, can be found).

Most popular culture genres elide this contradiction by foregrounding one sphere and hinting, usually only indirectly, at the contradictions between the values which prevail in that world and those of the other. Thus, westerns and crime genres focus on the male world of competition, aggression and violence and hold up, symbolically, an image of the personal, feminine sphere as a reminder of what has been sacrificed in the transcendence of male-driven public values. By contrast, family melodrama foregrounds the private sphere of marriage and family, even as it refers to the family-destroying values which inform the public sphere and which must be overcome (and this is rarely seen as possible) for personal happiness to be achieved (See Schatz, 1991; Gledhill, 1987; Fiske, 1987. Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather* series is a useful example of how these contradictions may be used self-consciously to critique the very social structure which enforces them).

Soap operas handily elide this contradiction and manage not to acknowledge or deal with it at all, by ingeniously mapping out an entire public realm of political, economic and legal events and institutions, as prominent as the personal, in which women, and the concerns of the feminine, operate as visibly and importantly as in the domestic. By so blurring the distinctions between the proper concerns of the two spheres, they also alter the traditional representation of male figures - heroes and villains - and draw their male

characters more fully into the life of the family and the emotions than other genres. Thus even murderers and schemers are seen to be driven by obsessive love or family loyalties, just as are good doctors and lawyers. In this way, soaps create a world in which women are free to take their concerns for such values as compassion, cooperation, the valorisation of spiritual and emotional concerns and perspectives into the marketplace, the workplace and the arenas in which law, justice, public health and welfare and the business of maintaining democratic institutions are negotiated. And by extension, men themselves - now forced to operate in so feminised and humanized a public sphere - have no choice but to bring home the values by which they now run their public lives to their personal lives.

In discussing feminist utopias, Fran Bartkowski notes that unlike most traditional male utopias, they incorporate “tacit rather than reified models of the state”. What is “tacit” in feminist utopias, she suggests, and what distinguishes them from their male-defined counterparts, is a “discourse on the family” which sees the family as the “place where the inhabitants of the projected utopian state [are] formed” (Bartkowski, 1989:15).

It is just such a discourse on the family, as the foundational root of social and political ideology, I would argue, that informs the vision of community and public life on soap operas. If home is where the heart is, on soaps, as I have argued, home is located everywhere. The gathering spots of soap geography - the restaurants, the health clubs, the diners and malls, even the hospital nurses’ stations and corporate office buildings - all serve as “homelike” environments. This is a world of public space which is family-driven in every arena. Its laws and policies reek, implicitly, of the values - “interconnectedness, nurturance, responsibility, and mutual respect” (Gilligan, 1982:57) - which Carol Gillian has defined as informing the feminist moral universe which girls are socialized to maintain: on soaps the binary split between private and public is virtually dissolved. Thus, it is standard, on soaps, for police officers, district attorneys and lawyers - and they tend to be equally divided between genders, of course - to view their work in fighting crime, for example, as an extension of their roles as parents, keeping the city safe for their children, or wives and sisters and mothers, in the case of sexual predators. So thoroughly blurred are the sphere distinctions that there is *never* a contradiction between the two roles, never any possibility that one’s role as a family member might clash with one’s duty to defend a client or uphold the law. In fact, it is not uncommon, on soaps, for characters in these kinds of positions of authority to wilfully ignore the law when their own sense of what is best for the safety of their loved ones is involved. And they are always, inevitably, judged to have

been right - even heroic - in their judgment. On soaps, one's instincts about what is right for the family - no matter what the law might say - are always validated, since the laws themselves - in their utopian idealism - are assumed, implicitly, to be in the service of such values.

Soaps then conform nicely to Angelika Bammer's description of feminist utopia, as constructed by 1970s feminists. "Utopia," she notes, in her study of the subject, "identifies society as the site of lack. " Unlike ideology, she explains, which "represents things as they are from the perspective of those in power . . . utopia is the opposing view of how things could and should be different" (Bammer, 1991:44).

Soaps construct a world in which women - who do not, in any meaningful sense, participate in public policy formulation in reality - are allowed to "play house", as it were, with the world; to set up a public sphere informed by the very values they are, in reality, enjoined to maintain and pass on (but only within the home and family of course).⁴ Simone de Beauvoir once said that women were most grievously disempowered in not being allowed to "take responsibility for the world". On soaps, they are allowed to do just that. This is what is most empowering about the genre, because it is most at odds with the 'common sense' to which women-and-children are otherwise exposed.

Of course, this is a somewhat unorthodox view of soaps. It is usually assumed that romance and the rituals of mating and marriage are what draw and hold women viewers. But while this is certainly a factor, I have always thought it was misleading to focus so heavily on these elements of soaps and to ignore what, to me, has always seemed so much more compelling - the sense of community. Men on soap operas - the good ones in their good phases anyway - are indeed wonderfully nurturing and caring. They become totally obsessed with the needs of the women in their lives and seem to devote every waking moment of work and leisure time to them. It is all too common, for example, to see a lawyer, doctor or cop stare soulfully into the eyes of a woman character in deep trouble and say "I'm going to drop all my other cases and devote myself entirely to your case, because I care about you so much." And somehow, this becomes possible to accomplish without total destruction of the man's career or business.

In a recent storyline on *GL*, for example, Alan-Michael Spaulding, one of the Young Turks prone to switching from evil tycoon to humanistic, selfless community activist under the influence of a good woman, disappeared for weeks at a time from his post as CEO of Spaulding Enterprises when his fiancée Lucy Cooper, (of the 5th Street Coopers) was being

held by a psychopath who had already committed date rape upon her. And even before her abduction, when Lucy was *merely* suffering the post traumatic stress of the rape, Alan-Michael seemed to leave his office continuously at the merest hint that Lucy - his office assistant - was feeling down, in order to take her out for a special treat, or whisk her to his palatial penthouse where she could be pampered and coddled, and allowed to weep, talk about her ordeal or not, as the need arose, or simply sleep. Every woman who has ever complained that her male partner had no time for her because of work, or had no understanding of what she was going through, after a traumatic experience, could only drool in envy.

Such are the common characteristics and behaviours of good men - and even the worst of them, if they become regulars, are periodically good - on soaps. But, as wonderful as they are, like their real life counterparts, these men come and go; the sorrows and joys they bring are always fleeting. The marriage vows and family structures to which they commit themselves are always already disintegrating even as their Friday afternoon wedding vows are being said. Thus, crisis and trauma are always imperilling the sexual and family lives of even the most fortunately partnered women. At the very moment when things seem, at last, to be blissfully perfect in a marriage, every viewer knows that catastrophe looms. In fact, if any marriage goes untroubled for too long, it is a sure sign that the characters will soon be written out, shipped off to another town or country to return, perhaps years later, in different bodies and with new threads of chaos and tragedy ominously looming.

To avoid such annihilation, it is customary on soaps for even the best of longstanding characters to periodically undergo serious character lapses, if not outright transformations, in which they abandon or lose their wives and families, in order to free them up for new storylines. Ed Bauer, for example, among the very best of the "good" men on soaps, almost all of the time (as Alison and I, who rarely agree on men in real life, agree) has, in his long career on the series, himself gone through many such periodic marital lapses. Indeed, there is hardly a longstanding, regular character on a soap that has not been through countless marriages and other romantic involvements, each of which, invariably, includes vows of undying love which are - as every fan knows - as easily forgotten as last year's hair style.

Marital and romantic upheaval and disaster, then, rather than family stability, are the norm in the lives of the most prominent and regular members of soap communities. But through all this family turmoil and crisis, the community itself always remains stable and

solid. This is what really holds the women and children together during this entire thick and thin. Every soap character - no matter how battered, how evil, how hopelessly fallen they may seem - can always rely on the emotional and material safety net of the soap community of extended family, social and political relationships. No sooner has crisis struck than the character suddenly has more friends and attention than ever before. Harley Cooper (another of the Cooper diner/police dynasty) had been something of a hellraiser as a teenager. Abandoned and virtually orphaned, by her negligent mother, she became, and remained, a central focus of Springfield concern and activity, and enjoyed front burner status in the storyline department, for a long while. As a young adult, however, she was transformed, by love, into a "good" girl, and the beloved of a "good", centrally positioned, man. As nanny to Josh Lewis' two children, after their mother's tragic death, she became Josh's emotional rescuer and ultimately his fiancée, a fate which brought personal bliss but placed her in storyline limbo for quite a while.

Eventually, however - luckily for the character and the actress - things took a turn for the worse in honeymoon heaven. Josh, upon hearing that his (supposedly) dead previous wife was spotted in Italy, took off to search for her, leaving Harley jilted and traumatized. Of course, the entire community came to her rescue. Suddenly new career and social opportunities came from all quarters and once more her life was filled with adventure. Marriage then, while always longed - indeed, often schemed - for, is in actuality far from the "happily ever after" event it symbolizes for soap characters. Indeed actors - who do not know the fates of their characters very far in advance and therefore watch for telltale signs, in their scripts, that they are about to be written out of a show - grow quite nervous as their characters' weddings approach. For this is generally a sure sign of less visibility if not total annihilation.

Weddings then do not signal the kind of narrative closure one finds in romantic comedies or fairy tales. Nor do they even focus, primarily, on the bride and groom as the central figures. Rather, as in other public events on soaps, weddings offer an opportunity for the entire community to gather and celebrate as a group. It is traditional, on soap weddings for example, for the camera to pan to one character after another, as the vows are read, so that the particular dramas of each of their storylines can be highlighted. A character whose own marriage is in trouble, for example, will look appropriately anxious as the vows are said. And characters involved in extra-marital affairs will typically eye each other furtively as the lines about fidelity are repeated by the marrying couple. Even

characters involved in shady business deals or political intrigue will be given a chance to remind viewers of their plights during the service in some, never very subtle, way. In this way viewers' thoughts are kept directly on the real action, the plotlines of those characters - and there are always many of them - who are engaged in the meaty issues that involve the community as a whole, as the marrying couple is swept gracefully out of sight and mind.

Thus weddings - far from focusing on personal romantic closure and family stability - are in reality more importantly a site of community unity and festivity, an anchor - and there are many such - which reinforces the sense of unity and cohesion within the community itself, amidst personal trials and tribulations. As such they are also among the most anticipated of delights for viewers, not only because they allow for the largest number of cast members to be seen collectively, but because they present visions of luxury and pleasure which, again, mark the genre's resemblance to feminist utopian visions. Indeed, many aspects of soap collective life - and this is among their most delicious features - suggest visions of a collective post-scarcity plenty and beauty of the kind we on the democratic feminist Left-back before recessions and Reaganomics gave our youthful optimism a jolt - believed in and planned for. Soaps characters all live in relative luxury; have an endless supply of always up-to-date furniture, clothing and (it seems) hairdressers. Should they choose, on the spur of the moment, to call some friends and share an evening of joy, or sorrow, or nervous waiting for the tense outcome of some storyline, they have at their disposal gourmet cooking from places like "The Pampered Palate" that deliver a world of earthly delights at a moment's notice, and more. Nor are the poorer characters excluded from such treats. Sharing is endemic on soapville, and, in fact, the first hint that a "bad" character is about to be converted may well be that a wealthy character invites her or him - out of compassion or an instinct that they are saveable - to share in some celebration or luxury.

Soaps, then, are in many ways similar to the socialist-feminist utopias of the 1970s. Marge Piercy's Mattapoisett, the utopian community of *Woman on the Edge of Time*, in fact, offers a similar vision of community, abundance and pleasure. Here technology, fuelled by collective decision-making, is used to produce the very best food and clothing for all, shared in communal dining and recreation areas or - as on soaps - alone if one chooses. Among the most delicious features, for example, of what a socialist-feminist imagination would do with technology in the service of pleasure and beauty - one which soaps mimic constantly - is Piercy's idea of disposable garments called "flimsies", which

can be whipped up instantly, cheaply and to one's personal taste and measurement, for special occasions where formal attire or costumes are required. After wearing, the flimsies are easily disposed of and recycled⁵.

A number of soap conventions resemble this kind of fantasized world of pleasure and beauty. Every soap periodically presents, for example, elaborate celebrations - masked balls, weddings, and so forth - at which everyone, rich and poor, seems to magically acquire the most elaborate, gorgeous evening wear immediately upon hearing of the occasion, even if it is scheduled for the next evening, as it often is. Here too, the costumes seem to magically disappear, never to be worn again, come the stroke of midnight. On soaps, in fact, the entire community seems to coordinate their attire in ways which allow for the whole event to take on a particularly collective, communal flavour. Such things do not normally appear in traditional male utopias, but Piercy's feminist world answers real women's dreams, as any proper, technologically advanced, post-scarcity utopia should.

Indeed, the entire utopian world which Piercy spells out in such economic and political detail is filled with feminist-informed, radically democratic, details which can be glimpsed, in a far less explicit, less rationalized format, on soaps. The idea of consensus and full community debate - made possible because each community in Mattapoisett was small enough to afford actual town meetings for all decision-making - is very much like what happens, in a more drawn out way, in Pine Valley and Springfield politics. The large permanent cast of town residents which make up the communities of these towns afford exactly the kind of structure in which entire populations can debate, differ and come to consensus. Indeed, the endlessly dragged out storylines in which every character must weigh every facet of every issue, are in many ways like the endless 'consensus-based' meetings which feminists and the more counter-cultural Left organizations employed in the 1960s. Like soap storylines, these meetings could become irritating, dragging out over many nights and into the wee hours of the morning. All voices, it was insisted, had to be fully, often repetitively, heard. Each interpersonal conflict and disagreement, whether political or personality-based, had to be aired and "processed", until, at last, everyone not only agreed but "felt okay" about every decision.

So it is on soaps. In fact, the inclusion of complex interpersonal factors not usually allowed in legal and political procedures is one of the most politically interesting aspects of the form. For in creating characters who live and interact with each other sometimes over decades, and are thrust into so wide a variety of storylines and conflicts and crises

over time and at any given moment, viewers are allowed to see characters as contradictory, complex and changeable. A good mother can be a terrible friend, or adulteress, or worse. A terrible tyrant in one sphere can be a doting godfather in another. A personally selfish, conniving woman can be a leading figure in a political or legal battle for a progressive cause. Alexandra Spaulding, for example, the matriarch of the Spaulding clan, dotes on the younger members of her dynasty and acts as a good and loyal friend to Lillian Raines and to newcomers to the community at times, even as she ruthlessly schemes to rob and cheat her business and political opponents. Because of this complexity of character and relationship, when consensus actually comes, it is a consensus far richer in impact and significance than in forms in which a single narrative line, involving a small group of less complicated, contradictory characters, is traced. The complexity of soaps structures and their open-endedness serve more than a merely personal, psychological function. There is also a truly utopian vision of a feminised, radically democratic political process in which difference and subtlety are recognized and honoured within a community structure.

To give one example, on an *All My Children* storyline developed over months of endless intrigue and complication in the early 1980s, a woman named Natalie Cortland, accused her ex-lover Ross - who was actually one of her husband's (Palmer - one of the town patriarchs) sons of acquaintance rape. As the community discussed the case, taking sides, reviewing in detail her past sins, and recalling bits of their own histories and those of other characters in an effort to come to terms with the moral nuances of this case, an ongoing 'community meeting' of sorts actually took place around this publicly charged issue.

All My Children, it should be noted, is set in a town even smaller and more bucolic than Springfield. Pine Valley is a suburb of Llanview, Pennsylvania (setting of *One Life to Live*, which follows it on ABC) which is in turn located somewhere outside Philadelphia. Pine Valley is thus almost village-like in social composition and in many ways far less socially realistic than *GL*'s Springfield. On *AMC*, the concept of class is elided in favour of a more fairy tale-like community structure made up of "rich" people - *really* rich people - and temporarily "poor" people. But here too there are longstanding characters who play police officers and lawyers and doctors and their roles in the life of community are central. Here too, there are key families who own and control most institutions and who intermarry and tangle with each other incestuously and eternally. There are just fewer of them. The Martins are the middle class professional equivalents of the Bauers - again the patriarch is

hospital Chief of Staff - and the Chandlers, Cortlandts and (matriarchal) Wallingfords are the property-holding, economic controllers of the town doings. And then there is Erica Kane, the glamorous, ever crisis-ridden, ever-married or in love, ever engaged in some major, glamorous business enterprise, diva of the show whose campy, over the top character gives the show its peculiarly self-reflexive stamp of irony and self-consciousness.

Nonetheless, even in the more rarefied, and more self-consciously campy, atmosphere of Pine Valley - indeed, perhaps *especially* in the fanciful realm of Pine Valley - social issues and serious, feminised, pubic rituals and institutional proceedings take place. AIDS, homelessness, gay and international relationships, as well as the more typically feminist-inspired issues such as date rape, domestic abuse, and even, briefly, back in the late 1970s lesbianism⁶ have all been touched upon progressively on this soap. Indeed, it is the very smallness, quaintness and *unbelievability*, of this particular soap community that has made it possible for *AMC* to lead the way in raising so many charged issues way before other shows (and primetime still hasn't caught up in most cases) dared. And the Natalie/Ross/Palmer Cortlandt adultery/date rape storyline was among the earliest and most daring examples.

As the trial itself played out, things - quite realistically in this case - looked bad for Natalie. Her own chequered past (she had arrived in town as a "bad girl" character, out for what she could get, and had not sufficiently been rehabilitated by the time of this storyline) and her recent adultery with the accused made it difficult to imagine a jury believing her. But then - as could only happen on soaps (certainly not, for example, in the O.J. Simpson case) - the defendant himself, having witnessed a gang rape which suddenly put his own act in a new perspective, actually confessed, entered counselling, and volunteered, upon release from prison, to work in a rape crisis centre. In this way viewers were taken through the experience in real time, in all its subtlety and nuance, and allowed to digest the emotional and political strands gradually, as one would indeed do in an ideal political setting in which all parties had adequate counsel and access to all the time and resources needed to locate and sift evidence, find and bring in witnesses, and deliberate. Soap operas, in this way, open a discursive space within which the characters and the audience form a kind of community. The experience is especially intense since the characters involved are so familiar to viewers and are "visited" virtually every day, for years on end. Court TV, in

its best moments, can only approximate the complexity and thoroughness of this kind of coverage of emotionally intense, politically contested issues of justice and equity.

The often bizarrely unconventional family and living arrangements which arise from the extended families and community relationships on soaps provide a similarly rich and complex representation of political structure and process. Again, Piercy's Mattapoisett is brought to mind in these utopian projections of a community which honours and accommodates the needs of all members for emotional and material support and security. In a feminist-informed manner Piercy's utopia articulates a private, family realm in which various choices of sexual and child-care arrangements are allowed, to suit the varied and often changing tastes and inclinations of citizens. Children in Piercy's world have three biological parents and do not necessarily live with any. They may choose households that suit them, just as those who remain childless may find ways to relate to the children of the community that do not involve custodial care or biological connection.

Similar things happen on soaps. A typical custody decision on *Guiding Light*, for example, ruled that two single mothers, one the birth mother, Bridget Reardon, manager of the boarding house, and one the adoptive mother, Vanessa Chamberlain, CEO of Lewis Oil, both of whose male partners were no longer present, (the birth father, Roger Thorpe's then-awful son, had disappeared; the adoptive father, Billy Lewis, was in prison) should share custody in a way which gave the child two homes and mothers linked by a common community of support. This storyline was particularly interesting to Alison and me because, at the time, she was herself - as a young single woman, recently out of a long-term relationship and deeply immersed in a career - worrying through the issue, so common to her generation, of how and when she might be in a position to have a child. Springfield certainly looked like a utopian heaven to the two of us at that time, for no "solution" to this common social and material dilemma offered in the real world even approached the beauty of the Springfield model.

But parenting isn't the only problem for which soap communities provide utopian solutions. It is also common, on soaps, for people to move in and out of relationships and households often; and the end of a relationship does not involve the kind of trauma and agony that today sends so many desperate people searching far and wide - even into cyberspace - in search of "support groups". Not on soaps. Support groups come to you. They find you sitting alone somewhere, or being beaten by a boyfriend, and they invite you to live with them, or with some other character in need of just the service you can provide.

Characters who are originally derelicts or ex-convicts or worse often wander into town and are immediately recognized for some wonderful character trait or talent and given a home and work.

The Reardon boarding house is always full to brimming with such characters. They arrive in town, crash at the Reardons, and promptly give up their wicked ways and criminal schemes to become whatever thing the show seems to need at the moment. A black character, David Grant, for example, arrived in town as an ex-convict with a bad attitude. After several years at the boarding house he changed of course. But it took a while to find him a career. He flirted with law, police work, restaurant managing and finally settled on becoming a civil rights activist - a job for which he was required to leave town and the show. But each of his previous interests were temporarily central to some major storyline, as, in each case, he worked with some other "good" character to solve a crime, try a case or support and care for a troubled, crisis-ridden female character. In this was he was integrated into the family and community life of the major characters and, while unattached and unfamilied (for the most part) was included in the (largely white) social and family rituals and gatherings⁷.

In the same way, children who have been abused, who are left orphaned and homeless, who simply runaway from their families because they reject their values, are always instantly incorporated into other, suitable homes, whether a nuclear family, a large home in which a sprawling extended family of relatives and friends live, or a commune-like boarding house, like the Reardons'. People, thus, do not really live alone on soaps, ever. Nor are they forced to conform to a single social or sexual norm or lifestyle or family unit, in order to have a "family" and community of support. It is no surprise that viewers especially love the holiday celebrations which take place, in real time, on every soap. For so many - especially older women living alone - it is the only family or community celebration they may be invited to.

The way in which these utopian structures and processes are presented on soaps is of course more fantastic than realistic. Issues of money and power are far less plausibly laid out than in Mattapoisett. Modes and forces of production and consumption, if you will, are so distorted as to be laughable. And rituals of order and law and social management are, while not nearly so bizarre, nonetheless far from plausible, by standards of realism. Contradiction and elision of course are inevitable in all commercial texts, especially those which are most utopian. But the ways in which soaps negotiate and mask their particular

contradictions are somewhat unusual in their explicitness and detail.

Most theorists who have discussed utopia in popular or feminist works have described the engines of state as implicit. Richard Dyer, in his well-known analysis of Hollywood musicals, describes the ways in which popular commercial texts attempt - not always successfully - to work through and resolve the contradictions inherent in their efforts to suggest a utopian world within a system of representation very much tied to and dependent upon the existing order. For him, the solution involves a substitution of emotion for detailed political mapping. “Entertainment does not . . . present models of utopian worlds, as in the classic utopias of Sir Thomas More, Williams et al.”, he says “Rather the utopianism is contained in the feelings it embodies.” Nonetheless, I am suggesting that there is indeed something much closer to an actual social model in the soap representation of community than Dyer finds in Hollywood musicals, although the soap model of course is textured with the same contradictions and “gap[s] between what is and what could be” that Dyer rightly attributes to all such commercial forms (Dyer, 1985:229).

To see how this is done, it is useful to compare Piercy’s Mattapoisett with the soap imaginary. Mattapoisett is a socialist-feminist utopia which does indeed include detailed, discursive blueprints for ownership and decision-making processes; which (if one assumes the existence of a state government willing, indeed committed to, investing in technological development for human rather than military or commercial ends) is plausible. The political and economic foundations of soap institutions, while also fairly elaborately laid out, are far more contradictory and implausible. The most important difference is in the portrayal of ownership and property issues. Where Mattapoisett’s public hearings and trials, elections and economic negotiations, family and child-care policies, all grow organically out of the radically democratic and collectivised ownership and decision-making structures which are established as foundational, soap operas simply impose a retrograde, almost medieval - and insanely implausible - structure of ownership and power relations upon their idyllic communities. In every soap there are two or three corporate lords - the Spauldings, Lewises and Thorpes; the Cortlands, Chandlers and Wallingfords - who own virtually everything in the town and so provide all the employment and control all the media and other institutions. Nepotism and monopoly are thus givens in these realms.

Nonetheless, while these powerhouses are often the most “evil” of villains at least in their dominant presentational mode - things always work out in the interest of democracy,

humanity and justice, because justice and virtue always magically triumph. And because the corporate, patriarchal tyrant, at the proper moment, invariably undergoes one of those (always temporary) periods of conversion to “goodness” which allow them, despite all their evil deeds and ways, to remain a part of the community. The Ross Chandler conversion is typical. But such things happen regularly to even the most powerful male figures. Adam Chandler, of *AMC*, for example, has a twin brother who is as pure and simple and good as Adam is usually evil, reactionary and elitist. Nonetheless, when Stewart, the twin, married a woman dying of AIDS and adopted her son, Adam eventually came around and supported the couple in ways which made it possible for him to remain within the feminised utopian community, at least for the moment. He soon - they always do - reverted to his wicked ways and had to be, yet again, caught, chastised, and transformed.

Thus, “good” always emerges out of the “goodness” of human nature, a human nature which - and this would horrify Karl Marx and Marge Piercy of course - has no relation whatever to the social conditions in which it thrives. Race and gender and class never play a role in one’s fate here - at least not for long. A “good” person - white or black, male or female, well born or orphaned - simply prospers, through the goodness of her soul and that of the equally “good” power brokers and owners who provide material security and mete out perfect justice. If soaps are informed by a feminist set of values, then, it is a set of values based, in its root, on the most hopelessly essentialist assumptions, if not about gender difference, certainly about human nature. And even this essentialism is not consistent. Characters transform themselves from “good” to “bad” at the drop of a hat, in accord with the workings of the behind-the-scenes producers and sponsors, who have myriad considerations of their own in making these things happen.

It is by presenting so patently absurd a view of money and power that soaps manage to wholly elide the “Procter and Gamble” problem - the problem, that is, of how to present a world in which gender justice really reigns without challenging the corporate structure that sponsors these fantasies and uses them to sell heart-breakingly inadequate substitutes for the pleasure and fulfilment which the characters on the shows and in the commercials - seem to enjoy. Things happen on soaps in the same “magical” way - to use Raymond Williams’ term - that they happen on commercials. On commercials, as Williams has shown, happiness, justice, freedom and so on are seen - quite magically - to arise out of the

consumption of commodities which, in fact, have not the slightest ability to provide them (Williams, 1980).

Similarly, on soap operas, justice and freedom and goodness and bliss arise quite magically out of a system that, if realistically portrayed, would inevitably thwart, by its very foundational principles, the very happiness it is shown to promote. The Ross Chandler date rape trial is a perfect example. A legal system in which, somehow, characters are compelled to act on principle, even if their very lives, fortunes or reputations are at stake, is a system very different from the one in which O.J. Simpson and William Kennedy Smith were tried⁸. For in the real world of course, money, class position and the gender biases that inform all institutions are driving forces not only in the legal proceedings themselves, but also in the moulding of a defendant's own character, and his own decision-making processes.

Soaps are a bit like extended version of commercials, then, in which the “magical” thinking of sponsors is drawn out - as in the famous Taster’s Choice Coffee romantic ‘mini-series’ commercial - into long, equally implausible storylines. A social system in which an elitist ruling class runs every institution in its own interest, somehow is presented as capable of meting out perfect justice and equity, even as - on commercials - A T & T and Taster’s Choice are seen as capable of smoothing the fault lines of a capitalist, post-industrialist world and bringing family and romantic bliss to all their consumers, through the device of seductive images and messages which have no basis in logic or reason. The relation between commercials and dramas, after all, is integral⁹. Dr. Cliff Warner - of “I’m not a doctor, but I play one on television” fame - shamelessly sells aspirins to an audience of viewers who wish to believe that the medical and pharmaceutical industries actually operate by the humane and ethical principles that drive the doctors and hospitals on the soaps.

The feminist-informed public world of soaps, then, is one that bears absolutely no relationship to economic and political reality. Nonetheless, as I have been arguing, there is a fairly elaborate set of laws and rituals and policies - unmoored as they are from economic and political reality - which governs the social world of soaps. The trials do indeed follow actual legal practice, to a point. The board meetings and nurses’ stations and police procedures - for all their clumsy gaffes and goofs in the interest of plotline - do operate according to a logic and system which are relatively coherent. If it is difficult to recognize these images of public life as ‘political’, it may be because the melodramatic conventions

of soaps render their political vision so unrealistic as to seem - as so often women's ideas about how to run society *are* dismissed as - muddle-headed and naive. But it is in fact the very use of melodramatic conventions that allows soap operas to so easily incorporate and transform traditional male political, legal and economic matters into an essentially feminine - and implicitly feminist - worldview. Again, the Chandler trial serves as a perfect example. It did follow understandable, recognizable, procedures of testimony from witnesses and principals, arguments from defence and prosecution, and sentencing hearings and decisions. The way in which characters were allowed to testify however, was often unbelievably absurd. Characters, for example, were allowed to simply rise up and demand to be heard, because of the "urgency" of the character testimony they were suddenly moved to share, or the events they were suddenly driven by conscience to reveal. No real court of law would allow such irregularities. Similarly, hearsay, personal opinion about motives and character, and so on, were included with no objections, if they were crucial to the feminist-informed understanding of what the issues in the case were. Ross' confession, for example, would have demanded any number of hearings and rulings to be permitted, once he had pleaded innocent. On soaps, however, doing the right thing, from a feminine, humane, point of view, is all that is needed for testimony to be considered relevant, or even crucial.

I have mentioned Carol Gilligan's moral vision as an implicit aspect of the soap imaginary. But even more telling in this regard is an essay by Kathleen Jones in which she applies feminist moral assumptions to traditional male theories of public sphere politics and suggests how they might lead to a radically transformed version of justice and political authority. "The standard analysis of authority in modern Western political theory begins with its definition as a set of rules governing political action, issued by those who are entitled to speak," she writes. But these rules, she notes "generally have excluded females and values associated with the feminine." Moreover, she argues, the "dominant discourse on authority," in placing "strict limits on the publicly expressible, and limit[ing] critical reflection about the norms and values that structure 'private' life and which affect the melodies of public speech", further ensures that female values will be marginalized within a private realm. Thus "compassion, and related emotions" are rendered "irrelevant to law and other policy matters," she explains (Jones, 1988:119; 130-131).

As Tom Hanks put it in *A League of Their Own*, "There's no crying in baseball." Or in court or the military or Mahogany Row.

This is hardly the case on soaps. There is indeed crying and wailing and gnashing of teeth, as well as other public expressions of emotion and personal concern, in all public arenas in which right and wrong, justice and human well being, are determined. And they are heeded and considered legitimate. Compassion, especially, is always relevant. Because of this all hearings and procedures arbitrate public matters in ways which implicitly, if implausibly, echo the political ideals of feminists. The 1960s model of consciousness-raising meetings and public speak-outs - in which women "spoke bitterness" and linked private emotional suffering to public institutions and policies - offers a useful comparison. In both there is an effort to correct for the failings of the masculinist public sphere by recognizing the subjective and emotional realities of women's experience and demanding that they be included in official notions of justice and the common good. Again, the Chandler date rape trial comes to mind. But so do many other situations. The Reardon/Chamberlain custody hearing, for example, was interrupted by Bridget Reardon herself who, for love of the child, suddenly offered - without benefit of counsel - the compromise suggestion about shared mothering which the judge, a woman herself, simply accepted as ideal, based on a shared notion of what was best for the child, with no consideration whatsoever of issues of property, money, or paternal rights. The key here was the wrenching, heart-breaking, sincerity of the emotions of the two obviously deeply loving women. The extent of their tears and wails was enough to convince the judge that they would do right by the child in this wholly unprecedented ruling. Nor was there ever any mention - and this would be unthinkable in the real world - of the financial arrangements between the two very differently positioned women; of the concern about the kinds of people typically housed in Bridget's boarding house; or any of the other social or material issues which, in real life, dominate custody hearings, (as economically strapped, unconventionally "lifestyled" women who have been through the process know too well).

That soaps are excessively melodramatic and emotional - and therefore highly unrealistic - is, from a feminist viewpoint then, affirmative. For in feminist theory - as feminist social theorists in so many disciplines have continued to demonstrate - it is the exclusion of the values of the private, domestic sphere from issues of justice and equality that must be addressed and corrected (Feminist legal theorists have written extensively and with particular relevance on this point. See especially Fineman & Thomadsen, 1991 and Fineman & McCluskey, 1996).

But of course, in so aggressively injecting such values into their portrayal of every sphere of life, and so flagrantly rejecting the conventions of aesthetic realism which are valorised in our culture, soaps risk the laughter and derision of those who maintain the artistic and literary canons.

The (gender- and class-based) shame which fans feel in watching soaps is thus understandable. But it is based on a faulty psychological assumption that too often fans internalise: that pleasure on soaps amounts to taking them at face value. This is hardly the case. In fact, laughter and ridicule are very much a part of the viewing experience of fans. Viewers of course understand, and laugh about, most of the contradictions and “gaps” of the form, as any casual scanning of the cyberspace bulletin boards which cover soaps will reveal. This, indeed, is among the more sophisticated pleasures of viewing. Fans happily suspend disbelief for the pleasure of escaping into a fairy tale realm in which dreams and desires and fantasies - despite what we know is plausible - seem magically to be fulfilled.

This aspect of viewership and fandom became an important element in the soap watching sessions I shared with my children. As they grew older and more experienced and sophisticated about politics and narrative, the issue of “realism” periodically came up, in contexts which engendered increasingly complex and sophisticated discussions about the vexed relationship between social reality and what is filtered through the lens of popular commercial texts. On soaps the distinction between what is possible and what is desired and deserved is elided if not dissolved. But in life this is hardly the case. Teasing out and dissecting these contradictions was among the most fruitful and exhilarating aspects of our soap habit. It still is.

Nor, as my own examples of my daughter’s and my talks illustrate, is such sophistication about media and politics bought at the expense of pleasure. On the contrary, the pleasure becomes richer, more empowering even, as it is inflected with increasingly complex, contextualized strands of knowledge and insight. ‘Against the grain’ reading practices, as is well known by now, are a common ingredient in the pleasures of fandom. As my opening example of a quite recent conversation between Alison and me indicates, there is, by now, a quite complicated set of assumptions which inflect our by now habitual short-hand discourse about soap opera. We readily jump from one plane to another in our discussions, now savouring a utopian moment, now laughing uproariously at the idiotic apparatus that enable such fantasies; now expressing contempt at the ways in which soaps deflect from and distort painful social realities.

Nor is our conversation as one-dimensional in its focus on representation and textuality as it was in the early days, when affirmative images were all we were after. Today, we are likely to jumble together, in ways which make perfect sense to us, facts and titbits from soap narratives, current headlines, and personal issues and behind-the-scenes information about the industry itself, in a given conversation. The reality of AIDS and AIDS research funding; the fantasy world of medical research on TV; the star system and its economics as driving forces in the development of storylines - all these are taken for granted as we continue to watch and derive pleasure from the events and characters on *Guiding Light*. This is, after all, the way in which fans everywhere - as the literature of readerships and interpretive communities teaches - read and discuss popular texts.

Michel Foucault, in writing about the relationship between art and madness, credits art with “interrupting” the long-standing, tyrannical, reign of bourgeois reason and creating a space for the return of the repressed. The work of art “opens a void,” he writes, “where the world is made aware of its guilt” (Foucault, 1965:278).

It is in the nature of oppositional works to invoke this kind of social guilt. But soaps go a bit further than that. They offer a glimpse of a social order in which the guilty may be redeemed. And when we laugh at the absurdity of this vision we are, at the very least, acknowledging the distance between our dreams and our realities in a way which those whose tastes run only to more fashionably cynical forms may be able to avoid.

Notes

¹ That *Guiding Light* is now in serious ratings decline, causing panicky speculation on the Internet that it will shortly be cancelled, is surely related to its rather old-fashioned social geography, in which a sense of old-fashioned working class culture, based on clearly delineated working-class communities - as was until recently still recognizable in cities like Pittsburgh - is still valorised. Alison and my nostalgic loyalty to the series is infused, to a degree, with nostalgia for the political climate of that city in those years in which we lived, and I was politically active, there.

² The importance of feminism's growing influence on women-oriented popular culture cannot be overlooked as a politically encouraging factor here, one which is not often enough recognized in these depressing political times. For it is an encouraging fact that soap operas - and a bit later other equally disreputable “women’s genres” - were far ahead of more highly regarded cultural and informational forms in treating gender issues progressively, in accord with feminist thought. At least one reason is surely that the producers of these forms were aware of, and responded to for economic reasons, the growing influence of feminism on the women viewers and consumers they targeted.

³ The actor who played Philip during these years has, as I write this, just returned to the show and the role, along with the actor who played Rick Bauer, Ed's son - now himself a doctor - and Philip's best friend. Alison and I are of course thrilled about this and eager to share the news with Jon.

⁴ This is a feature of daytime soaps, it should be added, which strongly differentiates them from their nighttime counterparts. Ien Ang, in her discussion of *Dallas*, for example, in *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (1985:71) points out that it is family that serves as a haven from the

heartless outside world of business and politics which is seen as “a hotbed of activity threatening to the family.” This is radically different from the daytime strategy, in which the line between the spheres blurs.

⁵ It is worth noting here that it was this very feature which often served most useful in my talks with my children about the sticky issues raised by consumerism, in a world in which social status and peace of mind often seem - to children and to all of us - to have so much to do with the crazy-making need to accumulate more and more of the right toys and clothing than others - or at least to keep up. In trying to tease out the negative and positive aspects of this culture - pleasure, beauty and fun after all are very real features of commercial culture for children and adults - and to suggest ways, in which a different kind of money and production system might help, was at least possible with the example of soap culture. For it was clear, from Pine Valley's example, that if one could indeed live in a world of plenty, in which individual and collective choices about clothing and other pleasure-providing items could be easily accommodated, without the anxiety-provoking pressures of competition, conformity, scarcity and the need to accumulate and hoard, even Barbie might lighten up and fatten up a bit. The Barbie issue of course is also a gender and sexism issue. In Piercy's utopia this problem is tackled and resolved, again through the device of offering infinite choice and variety in every sphere of life. On soaps this is hardly the case and this problematic issue must also be addressed in discussions with children.

⁶ The lesbian storyline involved a regular character who had - as all women soap characters have had - bad experiences with men. She became attracted to her daughter's therapist, an “out and proud” lesbian and began a relationship with her. As usual, the community was fraught with tension and heated debate. Finally, the decent characters, including the woman's mother, came to consensus: if the young woman was happy, it was all right. The storyline abruptly ended soon after, however. And even as it played out, no physical contact of any kind between the two women was shown.

⁷ The problem of race on soaps is vexed. Black characters do figure more and more prominently on soaps, and at times an interracial relationship will be portrayed, generally as a controversial issue for the community to tackle. However, for the most part, black characters simply merge into the larger community - as Clarence Thomas would like us to believe is so easy these days - with no attention whatever to race as a factor in their lives. Of course, they must be given a black love interest or remain celibate - except when the writers are willing to tackle “the race issue.” Thus, the matter of race is always awkwardly and inadequately handled.

⁸ I am not suggesting that the Simpson verdict was incorrect. I do not actually think it was, since the issues of racism and corruption in the LAPD were, in my view, determining factors that compromised the evidence against Simpson enough to produce reasonable doubt, certainly, in the minds of a largely black jury. I am only commenting on the behaviour of Simpson himself, as a man already known to be violently misogynistic, whether or not he committed the particular crime of which he was accused.

⁹ The tricky relationships among the various elements of soap textuality and viewership are cleverly developed in the Paper Tiger Television segment I did entitled *Elayne Rapping Reads Soap Operas*. The producer, Dee Dee Halleck, intercut my analysis of the form with ironically juxtaposed story clips, Procter and Gamble commercial clips, and interviews with residents of Staten Island - where the P & G plant is located - about the health problems they have experienced because of the toxic pollution caused by the guys who make Ivory soap “99 and 44/100% pure.”

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GENDERED DISCOURSES IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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Children's literature has been a focus of the modern women's movement since its inception, with 'sexist' children's stories being critiqued¹, advice provided for teachers, and non-sexist/anti-sexist/feminist stories (Adler, 1993) identified, welcomed and produced. The study of gender in children's books has often taken the form of *content analysis* (e.g. Nilsen, 1977; Petersen and Lach, 1990; Berman, 1998). Content analysis provides important background on what a text is broadly 'about', including potentially useful quantitative information, for example the number of female and male characters (protagonists and subordinate characters), and male and female characters' involvement in different activities². *Linguistic* analyses are rarer (though see Luke (1988, 1991) on different versions of *Dick and Jane* books), but can provide a more nuanced understanding of the less visible (and perhaps more pernicious) workings of texts - for example, effects of transactivisation (see Talbot, below), and verb types (for example, cognitive and material processes, and who is associated with which). This linguistic 'research space' suggests a range of possibilities for future studies. However, although it is possible to do linguistic analyses of entire books for very young (pre-school and infant) children, since these usually contain relatively few words, linguistic analyses of entire full-length books for older children (or adults) requires either computer analysis of an electronically-scanned text, or 'manual' analysis of just one or two features.

The focus in this paper is *discourse* analysis of gender in children's literature (including but not exclusively fiction). In John Stephens' *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction* (1992), *discourse* encompasses selection (what is stated and implied), mode (e.g. narration, description), point of view, sequence, setting, intertextuality, and narrative and receptive processes. Though I draw on all these to different extents, my concern is only occasionally 'receptive processes' (reader response) or even the implied reader. Rather, I interpretively identify a range of discourses in children's books, illustrating these with linguistic traces in the form of particular, telling extracts. Here I acknowledge the value and indeed necessity of researcher subjectivity, inference and experience of the world.

Discourse analysis in linguistics is usually done with non-fictional texts, fictional texts being more the province of stylistics. It is particularly unusual for *critical* discourse analysis to treat a work of fiction as a suitable epistemological site. There are, however, exceptions - for example Mary Talbot's (1998) analysis of gender representation in Harlequin Mills and Boon (popular light romance) stories, in which she critiques asymmetrical social representation. Talbot cites the following extract from a story called *No Guarantees*, by Robyn Donald (1990):

Her glance fell to his hands. Lean-fingered, tanned, they were more than capable of physically silencing her. She had a momentary vision of them, dark and strong against the transparent pallor of her skin, and swallowed, appalled at the flicker of forbidden excitement it aroused in her.

While this is not about actual violence (the woman and man are at an auction and the man has jokingly told the woman he will clap his hand over her mouth if she bids), it *is* about strength and eroticism - which in these books 'depends on the maximization of gender difference' (Talbot, 1998:199). What is selected for inclusion from the paradigmatic pool of available choices is important, and Talbot observes that 'the eroticised power is located in the character's hands', pointing to the lexical items *transparent pallor* (of the woman's skin) and the man's *tanned* hands.

Talbot also uses CDA in a study of verbal transitivity in the science fiction novel *Lair* (James Herbert). She selects a scene to show how the distribution of transitive and intransitive verbs establishes one person rather than another as 'making things happen', and does so in a gendered way (1995:134). The hero's actions are most often represented by transitive verbs (e.g. *reach, grab, shield, take*), the female character's by intransitive verbs (e.g. *stand, lean back, watch*). Fiction, then, is not a stranger to CDA³ - but does carry its own complexities for any analysis of social asymmetry and for the analyst who intends to offer some sort of *social* critique of the work (Stephens, 1992). I look at these complexities here since the majority of the children's books in this dataset are fiction.

Firstly, conceptual 'point of view' in fiction is not self-evident. Unlike, say, a newspaper editorial, which expresses a particular political perspective, a fictional text cannot be assumed to have an 'axe to grind', and certainly there is no clear 'mechanical' way of recognising any such axe. The narrator may clearly not be the author. Alternatively, there may be several narrators. But even when there is just one, omniscient narrator, she cannot be *neatly* equated

with the author, or as straightforwardly representing in fictional form some ‘argument’ on the author’s behalf.

The various characters who ‘populate’ the story also have voices and different points of view. Each character may ‘focalise’ (or ‘show their perspective’; see Mills, 1995; Benwell, 2002) at different points in the book, or some characters may not get to focalise at all. The characters may also argue with each other. Again, however, it makes little (perhaps even less) sense to ‘read off’ from the characters what the author thinks - though we might *speculate* whether the author sees herself in some relation to a particular character. Similarly, any sentiment expressed by a character cannot be taken as indexing *approval* by the author. Traces of a sexist discourse in a character’s words may for example have been included precisely so that the discourse can be contested. And characters’ words and thoughts will be ‘represented’ in a range of ways, in combinations of different forms of direct and indirect speech (Stephens, 1992; Fairclough, 1995; Semino and Short, 1997), presenting further layers of meaning and complexities for interpretation. And, of course, aside from the characters and the narrator, a range of other ‘voices’ carrying ideas and discourses will intertextually ‘populate’ the work (see Talbot, 1995).

A second question for discourse analysis of a fictional text is the role of irony, satire and humour. While these may be present in any text (written or spoken), they are commonplace in fiction - and meaning can never be ‘read off’ an ironical, satirical or humorous text in any straightforward way. Arguably, claims made about ‘meaning’ in fiction, perhaps especially about ‘significance’ (Stevens, 1992), should be particularly tentative.

A third issue is that of fantasy, common in children’s fiction in more than just fairytales. In a work of fantasy what happens is on a different dimension to what happens in ‘realistic’ fiction (which of course limits any comparison of the two). In particular, fantasy gives the writer more scope for an extension of female and male roles beyond what is expected in any ‘realistic’ context.

Fourthly, visuals are very important in young children’s literature. Analysis thus needs to be multi-modal, and should consider, for example, different readings of the text and visuals *as a totality*, and the relationship between the visuals and the written text. Do the visuals provide complementary, different or even contradictory details, for example? This raises questions about visuals and the fictional representation of animals, who are often given human characteristics. Since the sex of many animals is not obvious at first sight, there is a tendency and temptation for illustrators to anthropomorphically give animals stereotypically gendered

accessories, such as bowler hats for males, aprons and head scarves for females. Stevens (1992:2) comments on ‘the assumption that the implied human behaviour reflects social reality’.

The fictional children’s genre which has been the recipient of most feminist scholarly work to date is probably the fairytale (e.g. Zipes, 1986; Cosslett, 1996), a ‘narrative predicated upon magic’ (Knowles and Malmkjaer, 1996). Since the same fairytales are part of many societies’ collective consciousness, several *initial* commonalities can be identified, including some characteristic, traditional gendered discourses (though these may vary from version to version). Consider: Rapunzel imprisoned in her tower, Sleeping Beauty in her castle, and Snow White in her glass coffin; Snow White’s and Cinderella’s domestic responsibilities³; the passivity of the Sleeping Beauty and Snow White, awakened only by a rescuing Prince’s kiss; the cruel stepmothers in *Hansel and Gretel*, *Snow White* and *Cinderella*, the Wicked Fairy in *Sleeping Beauty* and the *Snow Queen*, and the Wicked Witch in *Hansel and Gretel*; the beauty attributed to Cinderella, the Sleeping Beauty, Snow White, the miller’s daughter in *Rumpelstiltskin*, the Twelve Dancing Princesses and many more; the transformations of ‘beasts’ into Princes in *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Frog Prince*; and the inevitable wedding after a period of brief acquaintance. It is not difficult to provisionally and interpretively identify a range of linked gendered discourses here, including what we might call ‘Some day my prince will come’, ‘Women as domestic’, ‘Active man/Passive woman’, ‘Women as beautiful or ugly’, ‘Women as jealous of other women’, and ‘Blissful heterosexuality = they lived happily ever after’. Heterosexuality and marriage are the overarching themes that shape the fairytale; these are perhaps expressed most extremely in Hans Christian Anderson’s *Little Mermaid*, in which the mermaid sacrifices her voice and tail for an opportunity to meet the prince.

These discourses circulate outside fiction, but they also resonate with those in other tales such as the British classic *Peter Pan* by J. M. Barrie (about a boy who never grows up - though this is not presented ironically), at the end of which it is arranged that Wendy will return to Peter once a year to do his spring cleaning. I should make clear at this point that I do not consider that these books have nothing to offer young readers - on the contrary. But these gendered discourses suggest that they are not *just* imaginative books which provide pleasure for young children.

Traditional fairytales have prompted feminist rewrites, such as Babette Cole’s *Prince Cinders*, and ‘new’ feminist fairytales such as *The Paperbag Princess* by R. Munsch and M. Marchenko. Feminist discourses are evident here. *Prince Cinders* contains traces of the ‘traditional’ gendered discourses manifested in the original *Cinderella* (Stevens, 1992, observes

that it inverts the original almost point by point), but even in the ‘new’ fairytales there are princes and princesses, knights and ladies, dragons and rescues. The humour (and indeed feminism) of these texts relies on the intertextuality and interplay between intentionally conflicted discourses⁴.

Of course, traditional fairytales do not have to be *read* in a traditional way (see Davies, 1993). Cosslett refers to the possibility of ‘reading against the grain’ (1996:84) and cites Gilbert and Gubar’s (1979) reinterpretation of Snow White’s stepmother as

a powerful, inventive, active, creative woman, constrained by demands of patriarchy. Her seeming vanity in front of the mirror is explained by [Gilbert and Gubar’s] interpretation of the voice of the mirror as the voice of the absent King, representing patriarchy, judging women by their appearance⁵.

This is of course ‘consumption’ - how a text is used. Even without reading ‘against the grain’, readers (or listeners), however interpellated, are in principle able to ‘negotiate’ their own position in relation to a text - a girl may for example adopt the subject position of the prince in *Sleeping Beauty*, perhaps aided by ‘androgynous’ visuals. An actively ‘resistant reader’ may construct alternative gendered discourses. Readers and listeners may be assisted here by interventions of primary/elementary school teachers, who these days are unlikely to draw only on traditional gendered discourses when teaching a fairytale. Teachers’ voices, comments from parents reading fairytales aloud, and indeed the reader’s own voice (audibly articulated or not) can all be seen as contributing to the intertextuality of a work of fiction (see Talbot, 1995) and to the co-construction of discourses.

To return to contemporary children’s fiction itself, Sue Adler (1993) makes a three-way distinction between non-sexist, anti-sexist and feminist children’s books. I feel this is somewhat problematic. Not only are there questions of satisfactory definitions and different readings, but also different parts of a book can warrant different classification (consider main and embedded narratives; consider the voice of the narrator and those of different characters). Feminist discourses can be seen in ‘realistic’ children’s stories featuring strong, independent female protagonists, struggles against traditional constraints, or boys engaged in non-traditionally gendered activities. However feminist discourses may also be evident in largely unfeminist books, including those manifesting traces of traditional or even sexist discourses. (And *topic*

and *plot* can always be misleading, since the oppression of and discrimination against women can be fictionalised by the feminist (exposing and challenging it) and the sexist (celebrating it) alike.)

Many modern children's books (fiction and non-fiction) are set in the recent or distant past. In non-fiction, as in any work of history, the writer must make choices about representation. In 'realistic' historical fiction (as opposed to fantasy tales), we would expect to find traces of gendered discourses broadly corresponding to contemporary practices, with women and men, boys and girls involved in traditionally gendered social practices. We might also expect a large measure of gender differentiation, and a range of opportunities and restrictions relevant only to men/boys, or to women/girls. And we might also expect traces of discourses of patriarchy in the words of the narrator, or the represented words or thoughts of the characters. However, many modern stories for children are, I suggest, thoroughly heterogeneous in terms of gendered (and other) discourses. Traces of traditional gendered discourses do not *preclude* traces of progressive or feminist discourses in the same book - *even though such discourses might not have been circulating at the time in which the book is set*. Such traces would be particularly interesting if the 'plot' could have proceeded in almost the same way without the details they carry, suggesting that the author had made a conscious, perhaps ideological choice to include them.

Gendered discourses in American award-winning books for children

The data for this study is a principled selection of recent award-winning children's books published in the USA, where there are two main annual 'medal' awards for children's books - Newbery and Caldecott (the latter for picture books)⁶. These can be for fiction or non-fiction. The Newbery criteria include 'distinguished writing' in interpretation of the theme or concept, presentation of information, development of a plot, delineation of characters and setting, and appropriateness of style; the Caldecott criteria include excellence of execution in artistic technique and appropriateness of style of illustration. The awards are 'not for didactic intent or for popularity'. 'Children' go up to the age of 14. The judges are members of the Children's Librarians Section of the American Library Association.

In deciding to study recent award-winners, I had not seen the texts prior to conducting the study. Perhaps because I am not American, I was not familiar with the authors. Working from a feminist standpoint, I was hoping to find evidence of feminist discourses, but I had no idea

whether this would actually be the case. The point is worth making since one of the criticisms levelled at CDA - which in a search for the presence and absence of, *inter alia*, feminist discourses, I was drawing on here - is that a particular text may be chosen for its capacity to allow the analyst to make a particular (ideological) point (see e.g. Widdowson, 2000).

I decided to look at eight recent books (four Newbery and four Caldecott winners) in order to arrive at some sort of overall ‘picture’ of gendered discourses. The books which have received the awards over the past four years, with a (woefully inadequate!) one-sentence summary of each ‘plot’, are as follows⁷:

Award	Book	Year of award	Author	Publisher	‘Plot’
Newbery	<i>A Single Shard</i>	2002	Linda Sue Parker	Clarion Books	A Korean boy learns to become a potter.
	<i>A Year Down Yonder</i>	2001	Richard Perch	Dial Books	A teenage girl goes to stay with her grandmother during the Depression.
	<i>Bud, Not Buddy</i>	2000	Christopher P. Curtis	Delacorte Press	A boy runs away from his unkind foster family to find his father.
	<i>Holes</i>	1999	Louis Sachar	Frances Foster Books/ Farrar, Strauss and Giroux	A boy sent to a Juvenile Detention Centre finds treasure and changes the life of another boy.
Caldecott	<i>The Three Pigs</i>	2002	David Wiesner	Clarion Books	The three pigs change the story in which they traditionally belong.
	<i>So You Want to be</i>	2001	David Small (text Judith)	Philomel Books	Characteristics of American presidents

	<i>President?</i> (non-fiction)		St. George)		from George Washington to Bill Clinton.
	<i>Joseph Had a Little Overcoat</i>	2000	Simms Taback	Viking/Penguin	Joseph turns his overcoat into smaller and smaller garments.
	<i>Snowflake Bentley</i> (non-fiction)	1999	Mary Azarian (text Jacqueline Briggs Martin)	Houghton Mifflin	The story of Willie Bentley, who took photographs of snowflakes.

The works of non-fiction are the two Caldecott winners *So You Want To be President?* and *Snowflake Bentley*. *So You Want To Be President?* is largely descriptive, but *Snowflake Bentley* bears a close generic resemblance to much children's fiction in that it is the story of a particular individual, narrated in chronological sequence. Both books raise issues of gender representation similar to those raised by fiction, as well as issues particular to non-fiction.

I read each book at least twice, trying to see traces of as many gendered discourses as possible. I noted such traces in the voices of the narrators and the characters, in the representation of the latters' thought or speech. I was broadly assuming that the writers' purposes would *not* be primarily feminist ones but similarly that writers working in the last ten years would be aware of and sensitive to feminist issues (this is what 'post-feminism' means to me) and thus might produce linguistic traces of these in their own work. I considered not only my first 'intuitions' about gendered discourses but also *presence* in terms of topic, linguistic items, embedded narratives, and considered whether these might index gendered discourses? Similarly, what was notably *absent*, that might logically have been present? It was also important to look both at linguistic traces, and at resonances with gendered discourses found outside the particular book, and indeed outside books in general. The premise was that different books would manifest different ways of deploying gendered discourses, i.e. that there was no single 'analytical framework' that could be applied across the board. These 'different ways' will I hope become clear in what follows, and enable other discourse analysts to co-construct or provisionally identify gendered and other discourses in children's books.

I interpretively identified four ‘sets’ of gendered discourses in these eight books. Evident in most of the books were traces of more than one gendered discourse - from more than one of these sets. Such constellations do not necessarily contain contradictions - though discourses may be *competing*, if, say, a discourse evident in the words of one character is contested in the words of another.

Traditionally gendered discourses

The first set of gendered discourses I refer to as ‘Traditionally gendered’. Traces of traditionally gendered discourses are perhaps most evident in Linda Sue Park’s *A Single Shard* (Newbery, 2002), set in 12th century Korea, which has as a protagonist a young orphan boy, Tree-ear. If child characters in historical fiction are ‘other’ in relation to modern child readers from the ‘same’ culture, Tree-ear is *doubly* ‘othered’ for Anglo-Saxon readers (see Stephens, 1992). Also important are Tree-ear’s friend, *de facto* guardian and mentor, Crane-man, and the potter, Min, to whom Tree-ear informally apprentices himself. The only real female character is Min’s archetypal serene and supportive wife (whose name we never learn). From the characters’ domestic and economic practices, it is not hard (partly since this book is set so long ago, and in very patriarchal times) to identify a gendered ‘Division of labour’ discourse in this book, with ‘men as household heads’, and, accordingly, ‘women as inside-the-house people’. Of course, it would have been inappropriate for Park to show things otherwise, given her intention to realistically recreate the events surrounding the creation of ceramics in the Korea of the time.

‘Division of labour’ is evident too in the non-fiction work *Snowflake Bentley* (Caldecott, 1999), by Jacqueline Briggs Martin and illustrated by Mary Azarian. Wilson (‘Willie’) Bentley, who was born in 1865 in Vermont, as a teenager examined snowflakes under the microscope and drew the snow crystals. He developed a way to photograph snowflakes, and eventually became famous. Willie’s mother is prominent in the story, but is almost always shown in a domestic setting, carrying out some domestic task. The family herd of ten cows is described as ‘[Willie’s] father’s’. In one sense we can also see traces of a traditional ‘Guardian of the hearth’ or ‘Woman behind the man (or ‘men’!)’ discourse here.

Constituting ‘Division of labour’ are thus those linguistic and visual traces indexing what men and boys (only) actually *do*, occupationally and in terms of other activities, and the importance attributed to this. In these books, not only is Min a potter and Willie’s father a farmer, Joseph in *Joseph Had a Little Overcoat* (Caldecott, 2000) appears to be a farmer *and* an amateur tailor and writer, and Bud’s grandfather Hermann Calloway in *Bud, Not Buddy*

(Newbery, 2000) plays in and leads a jazz band. (In *Bud, Not Buddy*, women do have jobs, but only in the contemporary *Holes* (Newbery, 1999) are occupations evenly distributed.) Interestingly, Min, Willie, Joseph and Hermann Calloway are also all artists of sorts - and this is crucial to each narrative. This 'Men as artists' discourse has echoes outside these books: consider the familiar question 'Why have there been so few really famous female cooks/playwrights/composers/sculptors?'

But let us take just one of these artists: Joseph. Joseph's artistry lies in his sewing of one new garment after (and out of) another (jacket, vest, scarf, necktie, handkerchief, button), the resultant garments getting smaller and smaller. The book is aimed at younger children, presumably with the idea that this story will be read to them. There is repetition and opportunity for interaction, with cut-out shapes to enable the child to work out what Joseph's garment will have turned into on the next page. There is just one line of text on the top of each page. The words follow the pattern of:

Joseph had a little overcoat. It was old and worn.
So he made a jacket out of it and went to the fair.
Joseph had a little jacket. It got old and worn.
So
[several pages]
Now he had nothing.
So Joseph made a book about it. Which shows ... you can always make something out of nothing.

'Garment' words are thus frequent, as is the preceding adjective *little* - not conventionally associated with the wardrobe of male farmers. The denouement of a story can retrospectively change the meaning of what has gone before, and Joseph could have been made to look ridiculous after all his (feminine?) creative work with textiles, or incompetent if he had failed. However, his sewing is presented very creatively (perhaps partly because of the association of tailoring with Jewishness).

A second related discourse we can call 'Boy as adventurer'. Knowles and Malmkjær (1996) identify 'the young (male) hero' as central to the 'adventure story sub-genre' within traditional juvenile fiction. Tree-ear in *A Single Shard*, Bud in *Bud, Not Buddy*, and Stanley in *Holes* are not 'physical' types who are presented with straightforward 'right or wrong' choices, as were the heroes of 19th century fiction. Tree-ear, Bud and Stanley however all travel, independently and under their own steam, exposing themselves to considerable danger. To take Bud in Christopher Paul Curtis's *Bud, Not Buddy* as an example: Bud is a 10-year-old black boy

living on the fringes of American society in 1936. His (single) mother died when Bud was 6, and when he is placed in yet another foster-home, where he is ill-treated, he runs away to find his father, who he thinks is a famous band leader and musician. The man he meets turns out to be his grandfather, who did not know that he had a grandson. The story ends happily, with Bud learning the saxophone. In contrast, Mary Alice in Richard Perch's *A Year Down Yonder* (Newbery, 2001), though she undergoes a similar psychological journey of maturation to Bud, Stanley and Tree-ear, travels to her grandmother's small-town house by train from Chicago.

However, things are often not quite as they seem, or at least not as simple. I will take the example of the mother of Willie Bentley (the snowflake photographer) here. Mary Azarian's illustrations, attractive hand-coloured woodcuts, show a range of scenes from Bentley's life, and there are as many female as male characters among Bentley's illustrated family members, friends and neighbours. Bentley's mother is more prominent than his father in many of these woodcuts. *Snowflake Bentley* also includes extra textual information (factual, sometimes scientific) in the margins, and his mother is textually foregrounded. Examples (from the main text, margin texts and illustrations) follow:

p. 5 Text:

He could pick apple blossoms and take them to his mother. But he could not share snowflakes because he could not save them.

Text in margin:

Willie's mother was his teacher until he was fourteen years old. He attended school for only a few years. '*She* had a set of encyclopaedias,' Willie said. 'I read them all.' [my italics]

Illustration:

Willie giving his mother (who is holding a feather duster) a bunch of apple blossoms.

p. 10 Text:

When he was sixteen, Willie read of a camera with its own microscope. 'If I had that camera I could photograph snowflakes,' he told his mother.

Illustration:

Willie talking to his mother (who is sitting in a rocking chair, knitting). He is showing her a document.

p. 11 Text:

Willie's mother knew he would not be happy until he could share what he had seen. 'Fussing with snow is just foolishness,' his father said. Still, he loved his son. When Willie was seventeen, his parents spent their savings and bought the camera.

Illustration:

Willie's mother showing Willie's father a document (presumably intended to be the same one, providing information about the camera).

The representation of Willie's mother can be read as traditional. Nevertheless, Willie's mother *is* represented as agentive in terms of being a shaping, influential force. She may be 'other-centred' (Lazar, 2002) in relation to her son, but she is also represented as playing a major role in his achievements - she teaches him, provides the encyclopaedias, and persuades his father to purchase Willie's special camera.

A work of non-fiction which is presented as a narrative however always raises special questions for analysts. In general, what is the relationship between what is known of the actual facts, and their chosen representation here? Did Willie's mother perhaps do much more for him intellectually than indicated in *Snowflake Bentley*? Did she do less, but have her contribution exaggerated by Briggs Martin's text and Azarian's woodcuts?

Whether we are reading traces of traditionally gendered discourses, or of something else, is arguable too in *A Year Down Yonder*. This book really has two female protagonists - 15-year-old Mary Alice (the narrator of the story), and Grandma Dowdel, with whom she is sent to stay during the Depression. Since it is 'woman/girl-centred' and gives a female perspective, this work could almost be described, in Adler's (1993) terms, as a 'feminist' book. Mary Alice is painted as a quiet, pleasant, observant girl who does not wish to make enemies, and who always tries to be co-operative. Grandma Dowdel, in contrast, is a large, hardy, feisty, unpredictable, distinctly 'unfeminine' woman who keeps a shotgun behind her woodbox, is intimidated by no-one and nothing, who might be described as a 'rough diamond'. One of her neighbours, a 'Legion Auxiliary Lady' observes, 'you're not everybody's cup of tea. But it's common knowledge, isn't it?' When Grandma Dowdel meets Mary Alice at the station:

You couldn't call her a welcoming woman, and there wasn't a hug in her. She didn't put out her arms, so I had nothing to run into.... The picnic hamper quivered, and she noticed. 'What's in there?'

'Bootsie,' I said. 'My cat.'

'Hoo-boy,' Grandma said, 'Another mouth to feed.'

This is however a rather 'traditional' book in the discourses it draws on and produces. Grandma Dowdel, who supports the wider family by 'taking in', feeding and clothing her

grand-daughter as best she can, may echo representations of actual pioneer American women, but is also not an unfamiliar figure in fictional representation (she is like those ‘strong women’ in UK soap operas who are the centre of their communities). There might be just a trace of a proto-feminist discourse in her response to the question, ‘Did your late husband go to war?’, which is ‘Only with me ... and he lost every time’, but this to me is more recognisable as a trace of a derogatory, even misogynist, provisionally-named ‘battle-axe wife’ discourse (though with a different focalisation here!) And although Mary Alice becomes a journalist in Chicago (after having written, anonymously, ‘Nowsy Notes’ for the town’s newspaper), the book ends with her marrying the boy she quietly ‘set her cap at’ while at school - with Grandma Dowdel ‘giving her away’. The last two lines of *A Year Down Yonder* are ‘Then I married Royce McNabb. We lived happily ever after.’ While it is impossible to see no irony in this (given the phrase’s dominant association with fantasy and fairytales), it remains a less than satisfying ending even in the book’s rather traditional own terms.

Feminist discourses

Several of the books contain traces of what I would call feminist discourses, manifesting these in interesting ways. By a ‘feminist discourse’, I mean that there is evidence of struggle against patriarchal practices, and/or that these practices are critically presented, and/or that an individual girl or woman is represented in a particularly progressive way. Three of the books here, *Holes*, *A Single Shard*, and the non-fiction work *So You Want To Be President?*, can be seen as deploying a feminist discourse. The ways in which they do this include, variously, the explicit inclusion of women where this was not necessary to the plot, counter-stereotypical characterisation of women, the use of propositional language which could be read as ‘feminist’, and embedded narratives in conjunction with ‘achronological intertextuality’ (Stephens, 1992).

So You Want To Be President? (Caldecott, 2001), by Judith St. George, has as its award-winning illustrations watercolour drawings of Presidents from George Washington to Bill Clinton by David Small. *So You Want to be President?* is a humorous but factual account of frequently shared Presidential characteristics, such as the first names James, John or William, being born in a log cabin, having several siblings, having pets and having been in the army - as well as of ways US Presidents have differed. It also points to the importance of being honest to keep the job - one picture is of a guilty-looking Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton slinking down the steps of the Capitol. An index matches faces with names, and there is also a (largely

positive) two-three line summary of each President, their years of office, and the main concerns of their Presidencies.

Relative to men, few women are illustrated. Gender representation is of course a challenge here, since all US presidents to date have been men. It is interesting to see how David Small has responded to this: several recognisable female characters (wives, a daughter, a reporter and a vice-presidential candidate) are pictured, and named in the index. They are:

- p. 7 Eleanor Roosevelt (drinking tea in the White House garden with Franklin Roosevelt)
- p. 8 Pat Nixon (standing in the background with Henry Kissinger and Gerald Ford while Richard Nixon plays ten pin bowling in the White House)
- p. 26 Ethel Roosevelt (daughter of Eleanor and Franklin) with her four brothers and some of the animals in their White House 'zoo'
- p. 31 a 'woman reporter' (unnamed) who snatched John Quincy's clothes while he was skinny-dipping in the Potomac River, and sat on them until he gave her an interview
- p. 32 Andrew Johnson's wife/teacher who taught him to write (which he did not learn to do until after he was married)
- p. 43 Geraldine Ferraro standing (with Jesse Jackson) in a cordoned off area at a gathering of all (white, male) US presidents

On page 43, the text reads:

Every President was different from every other and yet no woman has been President. No person of color has been President. No person who wasn't a Protestant or Roman Catholic has been President. But if you care enough, anything is possible. Thirty-four Presidents came and went before a Roman Catholic - John Kennedy - was elected. Almost two hundred years passed before a woman - Geraldine Ferraro - ran for Vice President.

The illustrator and writer of *So You Want to be President?* appear to have worked hard, together, to create a children's book which tries to interpellate both girls and boys, despite the obvious historical constraints - and to make the interpellated addressee of *You* in the title female or male. Gender in the above paragraph can be seen to take precedent over ethnicity: Ferraro is mentioned by name; Jackson is not (though he ran for President). The propositions in the sentence 'Every President was different from every other *and yet* no woman has been President' (my italics) constitute I suggest traces of a feminist discourse: an elegant way of saying 'Why

not? Surely this is surprising', and 'But if you care enough, anything is possible' is optimistic and constructive. The cordoning off of Ferraro (and Jackson) can be read as a semiotic trace of this discourse, one which represents barriers, not inability.

The darkly humorous *Holes* (Newbery, 1999), by Louis Sachar, is set (apparently) in the time in which it was written - the late 1990s. In this it is the only 'contemporary' book in the dataset. The protagonist of *Holes*, Stanley Yelnats, is a quiet, overweight 14-year-old white boy who is sent to the Green Lake Juvenile Detention Centre for stealing a pair of sneakers (his actual crime is of a lesser demeanour). A male counsellor who keeps reminding the boys that they are not at a Girl Scouts camp is represented unfavourably. An important female character is the powerful and sadistic Warden (Stanley was expecting a man, as I imagine are most readers).

However, a more important female character is the feisty outlaw 'Kissin' Kate Barlow', who robbed Stanley's great-grandfather, and for whose accumulated loot the Warden is making the boys dig the holes. Katherine Barlow was the schoolteacher in Green Lake 110 years before Stanley's story starts. Her story is embedded at intervals in the 'present day' one. Katherine fell in love with 'Onion Sam', the black man who 'turned the old run-down schoolhouse into a well-crafted, freshly painted jewel of a building that the whole town was proud of' (p. 110). (Sam 'wasn't allowed to attend classes because he was a Negro, but they let him fix the building.') Their first and only kiss is observed and Sam (and his donkey) are shot. The schoolhouse is destroyed while the sheriff sits back and says to Katherine, 'You're sure pretty You kissed the onion picker. Why won't you kiss me?' Chapter 26 concludes:

Three days after Sam's death, Miss Katherine shot the sheriff while he was sitting in his chair drinking a cup of coffee. Then she carefully applied a fresh coat of red lipstick and gave him the kiss he had asked for.

For the next twenty years Kissin' Kate Barlow was one of the most feared outlaws in all the West.

Kate dies laughing twenty years later, as a result of having been bitten by a poisonous yellow-spotted lizard in the presence of a rejected suitor from Green Lake who is trying to get her to reveal where her loot is buried.

The representation of this female outlaw, I suggest, constitutes traces of a feminist discourse: the traces contain an implicit critique of the sheriff's sexist assumptions. I also

suggest that this representation would not have taken the form it did, nor have been enjoyed and recognisable by readers, before the advent of the second wave of the women's movement (nearly a century after these fictionalised events). Importantly, Kissin' Kate Barlow is not ridiculed, but rather admired by Stanley:

Actually, Stanley had been impressed when he first found out that his great-grandfather was robbed by Kissin' Kate Barlow. True, he would have preferred living on the beach in California, but it was still kind of cool to have someone in your family robbed by a famous outlaw. Kate Barlow didn't actually kiss Stanley's great-grandfather. That would have been really cool, but she only kissed the men she killed. Instead she robbed him and left him stranded in the middle of the desert.

'He was *lucky* to have survived,' Stanley's mother was quick to point out. (p. 10)

And, of course, 'Kissin' Kate Barlow' has a real-life historical counterpart in Martha Jane Canarray, the 19th century 'Calamity Jane' of Arizona and Dakota who wore men's clothing and was no stranger to a gun. Texts about and knowledge of Calamity Jane constitute important intertextual links, which I suggests contribute to the feminist discourse apparent here.

The last observation about *Holes* is that traces of anti-racist discourses are evident *in addition* to those indexed by the relationship between Katherine and Sam, and its consequences. Anti-racist discourses can be seen as intertextually-linked with feminist discourses, and when these co-occur this mutual support multiply positions readers as open to these discourses, and helps constitute a discourse of equality and anti-discrimination more broadly. Discourses can be seen as taking their identity in part from *accumulations* of intratextually discoursally-related traces.

The third example of a feminist discourse comes, in some ways surprisingly, from the historical *A Single Shard* - set in 12th century Korea. This includes two interesting sets of extracts in which Linda Sue Park seems to have intentionally drawn on a feminist discourse.

The first set of extracts concerns 'Min's wife', whose clearly subordinate status is gently problematised. First, Tree-ear, who has received a continuous supply of food for himself and Crane-man from her,

wished he could think of a way to show his gratitude for her kindness. What was it she

wanted? She seemed to have no desires of her own ... or perhaps her wishes were those of her husband's. (p. 90)

This last sentence, with its particular form of focalisation', is, I think, capable of being read ironically, and is a critique of the gender relations of the time. I am suggesting this not only on the grounds that this sentence *could* have been omitted (but was not), but also because of related discursal traces. The first of these related traces occurs on the following page, when Min's wife agrees to ask her husband if Tree-ear can be his emissary to the court on the condition that 'from now on, you will call me *Ajima*' [*auntie*] (p. 91). There is no suggestion that this request originated with Min or had even been discussed with him; this wish appears to be hers. Relatedly, Min's wife is, I think we are expected to assume, agentive in bringing about Min's full acceptance of Tree-ear.

The second, related trace of a feminist discourse is Tree-ear's persuasion of Crane-man to accept Min's wife's offer of work while he (Tree-ear) is away. Crane-man says:

'Are you thinking of me, my friend? Do not worry. I fed myself - and you, for that matter - for many years before you worked for Min. I can do so again. Do you think me so helpless now?'

'Not you!' Tree-ear shouted, flapping his arms in frustration like a giant bird. 'I am not talking of you! It is Min's wife I am thinking of! She is an old woman now - would you have her poor back ache from pulling weeds? And those long walks into the mountains, for mushrooms or berries - she should long ago have earned rest from such tasks! From her husband she gets no help at all. He thinks of nothing but his work!' (p. 102)

A critical discourse is being articulated here in relation to patriarchal practices of the time. As with the previous example, *accumulations* of intratextually-related traces (in *A Single Shard* these facilitate the production of discourses).

The second set of linguistic traces which index something other than very traditional gendered discourses consists of references to a (n alleged) historical event. Crane-man has advised Tree-ear to make a stop on his journey to the court at the 'Rock of the Falling Flowers', just before the city of Puyo, an old capital city. Five hundred years previously, the T'ang Chinese had invaded. Crane-man tells Tree-ear:

'The King and his party were forced to retreat to the very highest point of Puyo - a cliff overlooking the Kum River. There was no escape. Bravely, the King's guards placed themselves a little way down the path between the enemy and their sovereign. They were overrun in moments.

All of the King's concubines and ladies-in-waiting crowded round him, determined to protect him to the last. The women knew well that the T'ang would not kill them; no, they would be taken prisoner, probably to be tortured. Their terror can hardly be imagined ...

The T'ang army charged up the hill. All at once, as if their minds had become one, the women began jumping off the cliff. Every one of them preferred death to becoming a prisoner.

Can you see it, my friend? The women jumping one after another from the cliff, their beautiful silk dresses billowing in the air - pink, red, green, blue ... indeed, like flowers falling.'

Tree-ear gasped, his eyes round. What courage it must have taken!

'The T'ang were victorious that day, but the women's efforts were not in vain, for they have since been an inspiration to all who have need of courage. Their memory will live for a thousand years, I am sure of it.' (p. 116)

This is significant on two counts. First, the interpretation of this mass suicide as an act of *courage* (the word is repeated) - focalised again as Tree-ear's own perspective, through his 'represented thought' - is returned to later in the narrative (p. 121). Secondly, in the extract quoted, the women's action can be seen as actively *choosing* suicide over both protecting the King (now left defenceless) and submission to torture (interpretable by an adult reader as sexual abuse in all forms). Though the representation of the act as 'flowers falling' may be seen as sentimental, it is significant that the word *sacrifice* (often a trace, I would argue, of a very traditionally gendered discourse) is notably absent. What we have here, I think, can be seen as a (muted) feminist discourse evidenced in the description of these women's agency, and their resistance to a particular set of patriarchal social practices - and, indeed, in the reference to these patriarchal practices themselves. And while the focus of *A Single Shard* is the maturing of Tree-ear, within a carefully detailed historical setting, it is possible to see this 'thematic complex' as a 'carrier' of 'an ideological position [which] ... includes a desire to promote social change in the modern world' (Stephens, 1992: 238)⁸.

Like Louis Sachar in *Holes*, Linda Sue Park in *A Single Shard* has achieved these traces of a feminist discourse through embedding a narrative within the main story. Both sets of

narratives refer to periods of time considerably *before* the main stories (several generations before *Holes*, several centuries before *A Single Shard*). More interestingly, using ‘achronological intertextuality’ (Stephens, 1992:85), these embedded feminist narratives refer to periods of time well before even the first wave of the modern Women’s Movement.

Non-androcentric discourses

Five of the eight books have human male protagonists and in a sixth (*So You Want to be President?*) men outnumber women. The focus is thus largely on *masculine* experience⁹. *Bud, Not Buddy* is actually narrated by Bud, in the first person, and in *Holes* and *A Single Shard* events are frequently focalised through Stanley and Tree-ear. It could thus be said that a ‘Male-as-norm’, androcentric discourse is pervasive in this small corpus. However, in *none* of the books is the discourse entirely androcentric. We have already seen how *Snowflake Bentley*, *So You Want To Be President?*, *Holes* and *A Single Shard* avoid this. I will now look at how the question of limited gender representation in books with male protagonists is addressed in *Joseph Had A Little Overcoat* and *Bud, Not Buddy*.

Joseph Had a Little Overcoat (Caldecott, 2000) is illustrated as well as written by Simms Taback. The page-size illustrations include (quasi-)photographs, portrait-style, on the walls of Joseph’s house. There are also lots of ‘texts’ within the visuals - posters and mottoes on the walls, newspapers on the floor ('Fiddler on the roof falls off roof'). The illustrations suggest that Joseph is a farmer, but they include many other human characters who provide a backdrop to the different things he does with what was once an overcoat. Taback seems to have addressed the question of what to do with a book with a male protagonist in terms of wider gender representation by including large numbers of women in these illustrations. There are male and female adults at the fair, women and men at his nephew’s wedding, his married sister and family in the city, and women and men in his house watching him make a button out of the last remnant of cloth. (There are, however, slightly more men than women represented, without counting an illustration of the men’s chorus in which Joseph sings.)

In *Bud, Not Buddy* (Newbery, 2000), there are important female characters: Bud’s most recent foster mother, Mrs Amos - abusive, but no more so than his foster father; the librarian Miss Hill who had helped him with books in the past and another female librarian who (unintentionally) helped Bud plan his journey; Miss Thomas, the singer in his grandfather’s band, who looks after him properly; and of course Bud’s dead mother, Angela Janet Caldwell, who told him that his name was ‘Bud, not Buddy’, by whom he has been greatly (and

positively) influenced. These women are all instrumental to the plot, as well as highly relevant to the way Bud sees the world, and together combat the absolute dominance of androcentric discourse here.

A subversive discourse?

The Three Pigs (Caldecott, 2002), written and illustrated by David Wiesner, is a very different sort of book from the others, being fantasy, and an animal story. It is in fact a reworking of the traditional *The Three Little Pigs* ('Who's in charge of this story? Who gets to decide? Has anyone asked the pigs?') The absence of *Little* from Wiesner's title may be telling!

In Wiesner's award-winning watercolour illustrations, these pigs do not wear clothes. They are all, however, referred to as *he* (as is the wolf). The story starts off in traditional mode, with the wolf watching the first pig build a house out of straw. When he huffs and puffs, however, the first pig is pictured falling backwards off the page, saying (in a speech bubble), 'Hey! He blew me right out of the story!' The same happens to the second pig, encouraged by the first (who puts his snout round the traditional picture, dislodging it) and the third. They are then pictured walking on top of the pages of the traditional 'Three Little Pigs' story: they turn this into a paper aeroplane which takes them to a world of children's pictures and story books. The pigs find themselves in a fairytale with a dragon about to be slain by a prince - and rescue the dragon. They then come across a picture of the third pig's house (made of bricks), and go home, taking the picture. When the wolf tries to blow their new brick house down, he is repulsed by the dragon. They 'all lived happily ever after' - with the wolf having to settle for sitting on the hill outside.

In the award-winning 'multi-modal' illustrations, one text is laid upon another in a very post-modernist, inter- and hypertextual way. Wiesner has also creatively shaken up and indeed 'disturbed' the text of both *The Three Little Pigs*, and a traditional 'dragon-slaying' fairytale, in what might be called a very 'writterly' way (Barthes, 1974). The 'dragon-slaying' tale recasts the dragon, as victim, *and* the hypothetical princess - here there is no need for rescue, since there is no princess (other than a tiny line drawing of a (possible) one in association with a possible other story). At a higher level of abstraction it is possible to see a relation between these 'reworkings' and that of feminist fairytales, both of which challenge the traditional, the familiar and the patriarchal. A *general* subversive discourse in relation to fairytales (at least) can thus be noted here.

Conclusion

Using related traces within the texts, relationships between these books and other texts, and a measure of inference, I have identified a range of gendered discourses, including traces of several gendered discourses in the same book. By extension, this multiplicity of discourses is likely to obtain in other works of children's literature. Fiction has a special status here, given that it is almost always dialogic – and in this study this extends to the narrative of the non-fiction work *Snowflake Bentley*. Dialogue allows for a range of alternative and perhaps oppositional discourses, as well as dominant ones, and for the former to constitute an implicit or explicit challenge to the latter (Bakhtin (1981) refers to the importance not just of *heteroglossia* but also of *polyphony* – autonomous characters' voices - here.)

Feminist discourses have to an extent been mainstreamed, and hence circulate widely. They may be evident in books without an explicit feminist *stance*, their traces sometimes popping up in unlikely places. Other gendered discourses (from those I have provisionally identified here) could I am sure be co-constructed (though I suspect that other feminist analyses would not result in completely different sets). I say *co-construction* since, ultimately, recognising a gendered discourse must be a matter of negotiation between text and reader (normally, one who is reading for pleasure, not primarily for the purpose of discourse analysis).

I hope I have shown that interpretive discourses apparent in children's books may be of more interest and concern to the critical analyst (and perhaps more relevant to issues of 'consumption', including reader interpretation) than the simple distribution of female and male characters and what they do. I hope also to have pointed a way for others to identify gendered discourses in children's literature, bearing in mind that different books require - and suggest - different approaches to analysis.

The paper reproduced here is an amended version of chapter 7 of Jane Sunderland's book *Gendered Discourses*, which will be published by Palgrave Macmillan in Spring 2004 in hardcover and paper. Palgrave Macmillan hold exclusive publication rights.

Notes

¹ For a short bibliography of studies, see <http://www.ling.lancs.ac.uk/groups/clsl/home.htm>.

² More widely, content analyses may show ‘how sex categories can be made to matter in the most mundane descriptions of social doings’ (West *et al.*, 1997:127).

³ Of *Cinderella*, Stephens writes: ‘the main character … is always defined by her appearance and roles, deprived of individual subjectivity, and subjected to the wills and actions of others (step-family, godmother, prince). Ideologically, she represents a model of perfect wifehood - she is beautiful but abject, and she is available but submissive, in that the slipper symbolizes her sexual aptness and her passivity, ‘fitting’ but waiting to be found’ (1992:140).

⁴ These books and their reception by pre-school children are the topic of Bronwyn Davies’ (1989) *Frogs and Snails and Feminist Tales*.

⁵ Gilbert and Gubar (1976) carry out this reinterpretation as a metaphor for the plight of the nineteenth century woman writer. In relation to this, Cosslett continues: ‘Her murderous hatred of her stepdaughter is excused by interpreting Snow White as the ideal of the passive, good, angel-in-the-house woman, who would kill the Queen’s chance of being an artist’ (1996:84)

⁶ See websites http://www.ala.org/alsc/newbery_terms.html, and http://www.ala.org/alsc/caldecott_terms.html. In the UK the two main awards are the Carnegie and the Greenaway. The USA does not constitute a special epistemological site.

⁷ Some would pounce on the fact that the majority of these authors (and illustrators) are male, and that this ‘discursive practice’ may be relevant in terms of authorial success. J. K. Rowling (of *Harry Potter* fame) was apparently dissuaded by her publisher from using her first name, ‘Joanna’. This is however a separate issue from gender representation and gendered discourses. Women writers will not necessarily create more positive and progressive representations of female characters, or of gender relations, than will male writers, neither will they necessarily draw on feminist or egalitarian discourses more, or even on different discourses.

⁸ See also Stephens’ (1992) Chapter 6 for an interesting discussion of historical fiction written for children more generally.

⁹ This may not be true of these award-winners more widely. For example, in the previous year (1998) the Caldecott winner was Paul O. Zelinsky’s *Rapunzel*, and the Newbury winner Karen Hesse’s *Out of the Dust*, about a girl growing up in poverty in Oklahoma during the Depression. However, the 2003 Newbury winner, *Crispin the Cross of Lead*, is about a 13-year-old boy in 14th century England.

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Women in a Changing World

“I LOVE A MANLY LIBERTY”.
A POSTSOCIALIST APPROACH TO GENDER STUDIES IN ROMANIA

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The Romanian situation is marked by general and specific traits when compared to other East- and Central European contexts. I would like to mention first some of the stumbling blocks that obstruct the smooth evolution of the discipline of gender studies as an autonomous and respectable discipline – that is to say one read with scientific validity and epistemic authority - and try to account for the backlash against the incipient forms of feminist studies and feminist activism that have so far become manifest in Romanian society – for what we may call a kind of pre-emptive anti-feminism. We can describe the socio-political landscape of Romania as featuring a self-styled superimposition of a traditional patriarchy onto a modern patriarchy, assorted with egalitarianism in the public sphere. Across the Romanian political spectrum the main trends and options present a prevailing cocktail of leftist and rightist conservatisms. Romanian society is a *retro society* (Miroiu, 1999) hide-bound and backward-looking, seeking the preservation - except for minor attempts at reform – of the status-quo: the same patterns of social practices and the same institutions prevail, the same mechanisms for producing and reproducing social relations overlaid with some hasty, skin-deep and unassimilated attempts at reform. In an article analysing the results of one of the latest opinion polls, according to which the future of Romania continues to be identified by a large bulk of the population with Ion Iliescu - a former apparatchik of the communist regime, Radu Călin Cristea considers that the political left is unredeemable from the viewpoint of democracy; it is fraught with deep-seated communist nostalgias and a quite solid proclivity towards a return to the lost paradise of the golden era of communism with its full employment and low costs of living (2003:1). The president's lukewarm, if not downright inconsistent stances towards privatisation, his preference for social egalitarianism, his recent categorical statements about an income tax of 80% for those whose income is in excess of 10,000 USD, are but a few illustrations of leftist conservatism in contemporary Romanian society.

The underlying principle of the conservatist agenda is that all social changes must be natural and organic; thus the market economy will emerge organically out of the centralized and planned socialist economy, and democracy will emerge out of totalitarianism. Romania needs to develop a market economy, apply the rule of law and everything, including gender balance, will follow. The process of decollectivization is slow; capitalism in Romania (whose main representatives are mostly revamped former communist apparatchiks) is merely an organic growth out of the collectivist and atomised, non-civic, illiberal society that existed before 1989.

A worrying feature of post-socialist transitional societies is the growing dependency of women upon status: a few years ago 40% of female high school graduates either married or embraced the status of kept woman, a situation that fully reflects the disastrous effects of traditional socialisation practices for women, with the stress being laid on false autonomy, submissiveness and vicarious life projects – a Romanian avatar of the American feminine mystique of the 50's or an illustration of the *Bonsai syndrome* (Daly, 1984:200). The proliferation of prescribed gender roles is a prominent feature of Romanian society. It casts women as scapegoats for the severe decline of fertility rates, for the increase of divorce rates or the low school performance of their children. Anthony Giddens in his *The Third Way and its Critics*, airs his belief that the great problems that blight the socio-economic systems of developing countries are not so much attributable to globalisation or the selfish conduct of developed countries, but rather to those societies themselves, to the authoritarianism of their governments, the high levels of corruption and overregulation of their economic systems and, last but not least, *to the low levels of women's emancipation* (2001:121).

The high level of poverty is another obstructor of progress in the field, over 70% of the population are forced to concentrate on survival strategies (30% being in absolute poverty or just meeting the threshold of poverty criteria and 40% living in relative poverty) and, as expected, women are hardest hit by poverty (Miroiu, 1999:64). The disparity between women's decisive contribution to national wealth, to the GDP, and the male-oriented distribution of that wealth is fully illustrated by the gender pay gap in Romania which stands at 25%. Job and pay segregation remain features of women's participation in the labour market: where occupations are dominated by men, average earnings tend to be the highest and where occupations are dominated by women average earnings tend to be the lowest.

The civic and liberal minimalism of Romanian society coupled with a political front stage dominated by left- and right-wing conservatives cum populists -, beset the processes of reform and modernisation with insurmountable problems. Many such reforms are commissioned by the European Union and other, global, organisations and the action of implementing them reveals the existence of an underclass in a rural population (52% of the total population) still living “in the early Middle Ages”, 1,300,000 Roma women whose condition and status is testimony to the strength of patriarchy in one of its subcultural heartlands and with 7,000,000 women peasants for whom Romanian reality is nothing but a figment of the imagination - “a movie” (from Mihaela Miroiu’s presentation at the *Gender Dimension of Educational Reforms* Symposium, Bucharest, 28-29 Oct. 2002). Miroiu thinks that four parallel societies are discernible in contemporary Romania: a pre-modern, a pre-capitalist, a post-socialist and a bureaucratic one, heavily dependent upon the masculine state.

I have already mentioned civic minimalism, and I think that maybe at this stage the situation is worse than ever. Gross cases of encroachment upon the basic standards of democracy make just a timid blip on the radar of an apathetic civil society. A recent poll conducted by the Institute for Public Policies and the Gallup Institute whose results have just been published places Romanians not only among the most apathetic civil and political participants in Europe, but also among the most intolerant Europeans. On such issues as homosexuality and the right to abortion, the results are only comparable to Lithuania and Ukraine, whilst our attitude towards divorce makes us the least permissive in Europe. Our profound intolerance of difference is shown in the finding that 86% would not have homosexuals as their neighbours. The rejection of democratic institutions and practices is also noteworthy, 42% came out in favour of military dictatorship as the best-suited political regime for Romania (Gabriela Adameșteanu believes that this should be put down to our inaccurate perception and warped representation of political extremism, the terminology being actually used as an outlet for long accumulated frustrations and resentment (Adameșteanu, 2003:1)). A similar percentage are against the establishment of democratic institutions, and 84% came out strongly in favour of an authoritarian leader, a father figure - the *pater familias* of the nation, portrayed as a male in his 60’s or even 70’s; more than half would favour a return to capital punishment (*Evenimentul Zilei*, Nov 2, 2003:2). Acute dread of novelty, of risk-taking and entrepreneurship as well as of more just and balanced power arrangements complete the general picture. Any social project

designed to enhance the chances or visibility of marginalized groups and communities is viewed with suspicious eyes as a potential threat to social stability and order. More often than not the public discourse invokes the necessity of prioritising: such emancipatory projects are not devoid of any progressive potential for society on the whole but they have to be put on hold as socio-economic and financial reforms must take the lead. Amartya Sen, (Nobel Laureate for Economics in 1998, a leading authority in the study of developing and underdeveloped societies) in his *Development as Freedom* warns us that developing civil and political rights, opting for substantial investments in education and health do not constitute luxuries, they cannot be put on hold until a certain level of economic development is reached. Democracy, he thinks, remains the best shield from poverty. As to the need for prioritising the sector of education I think that Finland and Ireland are telling examples of how poor countries can progress significantly by investing in education. Even neo-liberals have long abandoned the belief that a market economy can create by itself the social goods and the ethical framework that a decent society needs in order to function at all.

The intellectual context in Romania illustrates best the resistance to cognitive dissonance (I am using the term in the meaning assigned to it by Leon Festinger, the American psychologist as early as 1957, i.e. the conservative strategies deployed by non/anti-feminist researchers in order to preserve or even strengthen a situation that caused a dissonance) and Habermas's belief that all knowledge has a vested interest. It is no accident - although I am not alluding to any conspiracy here – that those Romanian scholars who have become important voices in the agora are anti-feminist, anti-multiculturalist, anti-participative democracy intellectuals with marked elitist, rightist conservative views. A leading name and a very influential opinion shaper is Horia-Roman Patapievici, an essentialist, an elitist conservative who articulates ultra-retrograde political theories in his writings. Although he is a very liberal and democratic speaker, in his writings he decries the universal suffrage of 1919 as a historical catastrophe and craves the abrogation of this foundational right (1996:67-68;88); he decries civic minimalism on the one hand, but he abhors any affirmative action designed to facilitate de-marginalization and civic inclusion. He is allergic to any ideology that he sees as a reductionist and primitively simplified view of society, based on resentment and intolerance, on brainwashing propaganda (1996:124). For him feminism, multiculturalism (multiculturalism means after all equal respect for every human being's dignity, which is a

fundamental principle of modernity, it means nothing other than the need and demand for recognition) or ecologism are redolent of the barbed wire of concentration camps (98:1). It is no accident certainly that such understandings of ideologies are decried by the Cassandras of the right whilst the virtues of ideologies as Andrew Vincent describes them in his *Modern Political Ideologies* (1992:16) “concepts, values, symbols that incorporate concepts of the human nature, prescribing goodness and justice, legitimising social practices and integrating the proponents in a coherent set of values” are completely neglected. Conservatism is the ideology of anti-ideologies (Miroiu, 1999:34) and Patapievici’s acknowledged mentor is Edmund Burke who is considered to belong to the Counter or Anti-Enlightenment version of modernity (Isaiah Berlin), and who according to J. Gray laid the foundations of English conservatism, which on the one hand is inclusive of liberal values, but on the other is sceptical about progress, about any attempt at perfecting social order, at fighting injustice and oppression. For Edmund Burke - the old whig who became (in) famous for exclaiming: “Thank God we are not enlightened” in his equally (in)famous *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, the man who boasted over loving a *manly liberty, moral and regulated* (2000:44) - politics was but a prolongation of morality, nothing but the “ancient order into which we are born”, in which each individual exerts the equality of restraint, a *virile liberty* ascertained by wise laws and secured by well-constructed institutions. There is a universal order which is of divine origin. To change within the limits of human nature means changing within the bounds of tradition. Our fallen age, claims Patapievici is marked by the systematic rejection of this Burkean idea of tradition (2001:112).

Tradition which is understood as lived social practice, is ‘naturalised’, it becomes a vital growth that helps people manage their lives and in this context *any project of social reform, of emancipation is taken as symbolic rape*. Humans are not improvable, hence any project aimed at progress, personal growth and enhancement are doomed. Affirmative action is discarded indiscriminately: it is unacceptable both from a deontological viewpoint – social injustice led to the historical oppression and stunted opportunities of entire communities and positive discrimination is needed temporarily in order to restore the balance, nor consequentialist - the more people are attracted into emancipatory projects the higher the competitiveness level and the more reduced the social anomie. Andrei Cornea in his *Khazar Tournament* of 1997, subtitled *Against Contemporary Relativism*, remarks that feminism is circumscribed by those manifestations of contemporary sophistry (in its

posmodernist variant), that in the name of a triumphalist plea for parochialism, forced through an agenda of homogenization, multiculturalism, political correctness and cast their anathema on cultural and curricular canons, universalism and translocal values, *preaching a new tribalism, a new nihilism and anarchy and aiming to enforce thought police* (17-18; 130-131).

The academic market as a whole is choked with translations of Edmund Burke to Fukuyama and Edward Behr (I am referring here in particular to his *A Frightening America* - translated into Romanian in 1999 - which I consider to be one of the most virulent and unfair attacks on second wave feminism, and which had been translated into Romanian long before the general reading public had a chance to sample any second-wave feminist texts. I do think that it is extremely important to initiate a real, democratic, plurivocal exchange of opinions in our society fuelled by the most diverse writings and theories. However, far too often for it to be deemed a mere accident, translation politics has prioritised titles that demonise political correctness, feminism, multiculturalism, and ecologism, before they have been given the slightest chance to prove their social, political, cultural worth.

In the Romanian context we cannot invoke a strong emancipatory historical tradition. If we browse through the works of the most outstanding Romanian theorists from mid-19th century onwards – the period when Romania embarked upon a most spectacular process of modernization and synchronization with the progressive movements of western Europe - whether they were liberal, conservative or socialist, we come upon the same noninclusive generalizations and abstract treatments of humanity, the same androcentric practices of constructing the human actor on the normative mould of the male, the same masculinization of history. According to a recent anthology of political texts (*Patriarchy and Emancipation in the history of Romanian political thought*) women existed only inasmuch as they could doctrinally embellish certain political theories which were in tune with European agendas. They appear as recessive realities, relegated to the gynaeceum, mothers of the nation, objects of the political processes. Even liberal politicians can be found delegitimizing women's interest in claiming autonomy, individualism, self-interest and inclusion in the public sphere. All theories outline asymmetrical relations, no partnership between men and women.

Another telling feature is the way the national culture, which could not do without its own founding myths, articulated femininity. The “fundamental” myths of Romanian

modern culture were identified in the most monumental and extended *History of Romanian Literature*, written by G. Călinescu and published in 1941 (Călinescu, 1986:61-65). In it Călinescu stated that there are four founding myths of Romanian culture. One of them - a literary motif widely distributed in Europe: human sacrifice for the duration of artistic creation - features Manole, a master mason whose construction kept crumbling overnight and who, following divine inspiration and a plot of his comrades who kept their wives and sisters at home, has to build his pregnant wife into the wall of the church, as a sacrifice required in order to finish his church - and, with all due desperation, so he does. This myth, claims Călinescu, "symbolizes the conditions of human creations, the incorporation of individual suffering in the work of art" (1986:60). Romanian textbooks, quite anachronistically, still include this critical reference as the canonically acclaimed comment on the ballad. Now to consider this story as a founding myth of Romanian (modern!) culture is quite a strong claim (Năchescu, 2003:114). The myth sanctions the proliferation of the myth of women as reproducers, whilst men are cast as producers; it is women's lot to create life and men's destiny to assign meaning to it. Secondly, the myth renders violence acceptable from a cultural point of view; it legitimises violence against women as long as it is done in view of a higher, artistic, goal. The one who suffers, claims Călinescu, is Manole, the generic "creative human" being male, just as male as the generic "individual" whose suffering is required in order to create. Ana, Manole's wife, even if pregnant, is a negligible quantity, just as negligible as her suffering of being built alive into the wall, which the ballad dwells upon, but which is obscured in Călinescu's reading, for whom the murderous artist's suffering prevails.

I do not mean to say that we have to turn our backs on tradition; I do not say that we have to discard it altogether; what I mean is that not everything in it is worth preserving or that several agendas are too badly and poorly dissimulated in these allegedly innocent pleas for preserving untouched the sacredness of tradition. And I also think that tradition as well as democracy in Romania needs to undergo a profound process of further democratisation that can lead to more transparency, to more responsibility in all fields, to the critical exposure of archaic symbols and privileges that can no longer dovetail with our times.

Despite the relative success of NGO-s concerned with gender or women's issues and despite the academic success of gender studies in as yet all too few university centres in Romania, despite the *de iure* effort of giving legislative support to some parliamentary

initiatives regarding domestic violence, sexual harassment and equal opportunities policies, *de facto* there has been no substantial transformation addressing the overall imbalance of gendered power distribution, in the overall effort made by the main frameworks of socialization in promoting equality through difference. An egregious case of gender discrimination is encountered in the area of the curriculum, where women are treated as secondary, epiphenomenal, if not as downright invisible and absent entities. The general approach to the curriculum continues to view Romanian students as abstract, disembodied beings, with social status and roles ready made for them by society. The various studies commissioned by the Ministry of Education, the Institute for Educational Sciences and Education 2000+ regarding students' preparation via education for a healthy private and personal life concluded that private life illiteracy is prevalent in Romanian schools (Vlăsceanu, 2002). In the introduction to their study the authors (Cristina Ştefan and Elena Bălan) claim that the very mechanisms of market economy and the necessity of assimilating the values of democracy have shifted the emphasis onto the cultivation of such values as autonomy, capacity for good communication, of relating to other people and their problems, negotiating interpersonal relations, conflict-solving, assuming responsibility, initiative, competitiveness, tolerance, self-respect, respect for difference, gender partnership. Although we find these values stated in various theoretical documents, little has so far been done to implement them. At the same time whilst education is becoming more and more feminised - and that should be read as a massive gain in the endeavour to promote gender parity -, the prestige of higher education is on the wane and here as everywhere else women must still struggle with the atrocious glass ceiling policy, since only 7 % of female academics have the status of being full professors, and there are only two women rectors (and those of private universities).

The resistance to a gender paradigm or gender perspective in most academic disciplines is out of all proportion and many academic subjects continue to assume the *gynopia* that Shulamit Reinharz referred to (1992), the critical lack of any empathy for a gender perspective. The academe is still dominated by what the Romanian sociologist Vintilă Mihăilescu calls *xenophobic epistemologies*, where the objectification of personal relations calls the tune, otherizing the object of research and holding it at a distance, whilst in an *epistemology of hospitality* the researcher is a neighbour, even a relative of otherness and the object of research and the researcher's subjectivity overlap in a convivial ritual of

comprehension (1999:256-257). As the author suggests, an empathic, reflexive research paradigm is only one of the advantages of adopting a gender perspective.

Recently however important steps forward have been made in sociological research in which gender is no longer viewed as a demographic or social variable but a complex fundamental social category, an outstanding instrument of social analysis (Grünberg, 2002:16). It is a fact with the discipline of Women's Studies not only in Romania but in many other countries that social sciences, sociology in particular, viewed by many as the most left-leaning of the social sciences, English, History and Philosophy – sites of more radical and progressive thinking – are key disciplines within which Women's Studies in higher education emerged.

The first domain that opened to feminism in Romania was philosophy and this was due to what we might call the right person being in the right place at the right time. She was Mihaela Miroiu who defended the first doctoral thesis in feminism in 1994 (before an all-men board of examiners). It was a unique academic enterprise that was mostly founded on the philosophical, professional and academic prestige of the author. She started in the very same year a feminist course at the faculty of Philosophy in Bucharest, she created a nucleus of feminist philosophers who very soon set about a feverish activity of translations from Western feminist literature. The various strands of the project were brought together in the gender series of one of the most prestigious Romanian publishing houses Polirom, but despite the notable headway in this direction the paucity of translations blocks the initiation of a necessary dialogue between the sceptics and converted when it comes to the impact of feminism on various fields of knowledge. The production of Romanian, localized research in the field emerged and volumes like *Gender and Education*, *Gender and Educational Policies*, *Gender and Integration*, *Gender and Discrimination*, *The Romanian Gender Barometer* conducted by the Soros Foundation in conjunction with The Gallup Organization Romania, gender journals like *AnA*, the journal of the Romanian Society for Feminist Analyses in Bucharest or *Gender Studies* in Timișoara are worth mentioning. The Gender Interdisciplinary Group created in Cluj is an example of team teaching worth emulating, particularly because of the necessity of eroding the monadic existence of departments in Romanian universities, where a climate of atomism, of non-cooperation, of strict bureaucratic boundaries is still prevalent. In a similar attempt Timeshare is initiating a post-graduate two-year course starting with the next academic year where psychologists, sociologists, journalists, political scientists and philologists will

work as a team offering the course to a mixed group of students and also opening it up to the needs of the community, NGOs, administrators, managers, educationalists, and political parties. The recent publication of *Women and Men in Multiethnic Cluj* shows a developing interest of Romanian feminist sociologists for an extensive approach, for the analysis of the interactions between the processes of genderisation and ethnicisation.

The separatist methodology of autonomous Women's Studies/Gender Studies postgraduate or MA courses seems to have been the preference of Romanian feminists so far. On the one hand, establishing postgraduate courses rather than undergraduate courses is less cumbersome bureaucratically, less costly and generally institutions are less heavy-handed about setting MA courses than undergraduate ones.

On the other hand, we should not view the approach to gender studies along dichotomist lines, in adversarial terms, as an *either-or, something vs. something else* methodology, but rather in terms of an *and-and* methodology - separation plus integration. It is true that the separate institutionalised programmes of gender studies might be criticised for their attempts at self-marginalization or ghetto-ization, but in the Romanian context and definitely for the short term separation or autonomy (in the British feminist literature the same methodological debate is couched in 'autonomy vs. integration' terms) has proven effective. It has created a sense of healthy emulation, it has spawned off many educational and NGO initiatives, it contributed to the promotion of criteria for gender parity, for good practice in demand for gender equality in higher education, it created expertise, it disseminated information and enlivened research, it produced Romanian know-how in the field. It has demonstrated that epistemic authority, production of norms and standards, of original knowledge can be construed in a feminine key.

We are at the same time aware that taking a long term view we need to pave for these new epistemological and methodological feminist perspectives the way to the centre, to the mainstream of knowledge, to the gendering of a greater number of traditional disciplines, so as to make them more inclusive, less gender-blind, and more porous to emancipatory strategies.

The Timișoara academic experience in Gender Studies is quite recent, it all started with the setting up of the Women's Studies Centre four years back and the initiative itself was met with indifference at the time and with little having changed since. We benefit from no institutional support and the scarce resources we have are the result of individual dedication and of the initiative of the Centre members. The Centre had been a non-spatial

concept for almost two years; we finally secured a small room thanks to the English Department. We sought assistance and won several grants that made possible the acquisition of a modest library collection, but provided a recently submitted grant to the Ministry of Education, through its special national committee for research meets with success, we will benefit from some more substantial funding to extend our activities. We have organized mini-conferences, one-day symposia and panel discussions on such hotly debated topics as: Postmodernism and Feminism, Female Identities, Contemporary Feminisms, International Women's Day, Gender and Nationalism, The New Feminism; we have participated in televised and broadcast programmes focusing on women's rights, gender discrimination and violence against women; we have published many reviews and essays on feminist issues and coordinated volumes of Gender Studies;

The centre has functioned as an institutional support for introducing Gender Studies as an elective course for students from several faculties of the university, especially third and fourth year undergraduate course students. It led to an impressive number of graduation papers written on feminist theory or on a range of topics viewed from a gender perspective. Subversiveness was an important feature for our beginnings as the leadership of the faculty became quite worried about disestablishing the traditional, respectable humanist sciences taught within these modules. So in connivance with the English Department we worked under a protective umbrella, incognito for the first year teaching the subject under the label of Fundamental Authors. The irony of the situation lies in the fact that the course previously taught by a well-known literary critic and colleague of mine dealt with the very authors that gynocriticism mordantly exposed: D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller and James Joyce. Gradually the course has become a very popular optional course with an enrolment rate of over 150 major and minor English students. We have also secured a module within the English Department MA course, entitled "Difficulties in translating the gender discourse". The next step in the development of the discipline of Gender Studies will be the construction of a postgraduate course around modules from diverse disciplines with a Women's Studies content – such as Psychology, Sociology, Political Sciences, Geography and Journalism where team teaching and interdisciplinarity can become a further choice for our students and would further contribute to developing a more open and comprehensive ethos in our academic environment.

A specific goal of the strategy of teaching gender at Timișoara is that of strengthening ties with feminist activism. Feminist theories have often been accused of

losing connection with activism, with the less artistic everyday problems of the many, and thus not only of offering no solution to the discrimination faced by real women, but sometimes completely losing sight of it. While the high degree of theoretical knowledge necessary to understand the works of Kristeva, for example, and the fact that the immediate social effects of such reading or teaching are not particularly striking, may be advanced in support of this claim, I think that Gender Studies can and should produce new insights that do not lose sight of social problems. For the Romanian situation where anti-feminism is so strong, bridging the ever widening gap between academe and activism in the field of feminism is of crucial importance. To that effect we have become not only staunch supporters of but also full members and consultants for one of the most effective feminist organisations in Romania: The Association for the Advancement of Romanian Women (in Romanian the acronym is APFR). The campaign that we have conducted over the last two years entitled *Stop Violence against Women* – has spawned a number of substantial reactions in the country, it was a complex campaign, well structured, aimed at awareness raising, we involved the authorities and well-known media people, artists; there were marches, a hotline was created for reporting cases of sexual abuse and domestic violence, legal, medical and psychological counselling was offered free of charge, a petition was drawn up and signatures were collected, and consequently two shelters for domestic violence victims will be set up in the coming months, most of the funding coming from municipal resources and public and private subsidies. I served as one of the six people in the lobby group of the campaign but I also participated in the project *Together In Politics*, a Euroregional project supported by the Euroregional Centre for Democracy, (organized in conjunction with women's organisations in Vojvodina, but in the future the project is expected to expand so as to attract Hungarian partners as well) whose main goal is that of attracting women to politics, of encouraging them to become active and vocal in the public sphere, to take up equal citizenship with men in the process of decision-making.

The translation of feminist literature has remained a priority and we have so far contributed two translations published in the Gender Series coordinated by Mihaela Miroiu for Polirom: *The Revolution Within* by Gloria Steinem and *Letter from the War Zone* by Andrea Dworkin. At the moment we are preparing for publication the annotated Romanian version of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short stories and we are working hard on the first Romanian translation of the works of Christine de Pizan - a fascinating woman author and feminist of the late 14th century and early 15th century.

For most political institutions and ossified academic structures feminist knowledge is a dangerous terrain, because of its anti-foundational, anti-monodisciplinary character and its political implications. It is felt to be subversive since it provides students with the theoretical means and the practical tools that enable them to disclose and analyse the ideological dynamics of their lives, it stimulates them to become responsible and active citizens and participants in the processes of social, political and personal change and above all to become critical readers of socio-political reality.

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AFTER COMMUNISM: SEXIST IRONY VS FEMINIST IRONY (THE CASE OF THE *PLAI CU BOI* ROMANIAN MAGAZINE)

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(...) An acquired taste, perhaps. But then Mircea Dinescu, editor of *Plai cu Boi* and a well-known writer and critic, is no Hugh Hefner. (...). You wouldn't find this [the *Plai cu Boi* magazine] on a newsstand elsewhere in Europe. Not in Prague, much less Vienna. You wouldn't even find it in Warsaw. Romania is different.” (Tony Judt, ‘Romania: Bottom of the Heap’, *The New York Review of Books*, November 1, 2001)

“You wouldn't expect the publisher of *Plai cu Boi* - Romania's satirical *Playboy*-style monthly - to make a list of heroic Europeans, but Mircea Dinescu, 52, is not your average purveyor of the nude female form.” (*TIMEEurope Magazine / Heroes* 2003 - ‘Fighting Hate’)

In October 2000, around the time of the general election, Mircea Dinescu, one of the most well known Romanian poets and journalists, a dissident under Ceaușescu's totalitarian regime (under house arrest during 1989 as a consequence of his protests), launched a new magazine (self) ironically entitled *Plai cu Boi*. The name involves a pun that can be accurately grasped only in Romanian (it freely translates into English as “field with bulls”) and it evokes the pronunciation of *Playboy*, a magazine that had already been successfully launched in the Romania market. The sharp, witty irony and parody (targeted mainly – but not exclusively – at politicians) that best define the style of the new magazine was no surprise to a readership already familiar with the owner, Mircea Dinescu's, work as a journalist and as the editor-in-chief of *Academia Cațavencu*, the most famous Romanian satirical newspaper to emerge since the changes brought by the anti-communist revolution of December 1989. However, the new factor that *Plai cu Boi* brought to the landscape of Romanian printed media products of the time is the use of political satire, cultural articles and literary works, all linked to artistic female nudes pictured in a variety of poses. Moreover, the magazine was of the highest technical quality on the market (comparable to *Playboy* in terms of its technology, pictures, graphic concept and price) and had circulation figures of 80,000. The nudes, the obscene caricatures and captions are accompanied by

articles written by reputable authors, the highbrow of the Romanian intelligentsia: Andrei Pleșu, a writer, philosopher, and former minister of culture, H.-R. Patapievici, celebrated philosopher and political scientist, and Alexandru Paleologu, renowned writer, to mention just a few.

The question to be raised at a first encounter with the magazine is where we should locate it. To which genre does it pertain? Is it a cultural magazine (as the authors of the articles it published might suggest) or is it a magazine of political satire (given that the owner is a famous satirist) or is it a (soft) pornographic one (as the many pictures of naked women and the title seem to suggest)? Or maybe it is a little bit of all these? In this case who are the targeted audience? My analysis will try to analyse the specific profile of this new breed of magazine, paying particular attention to the gender dimension. Is the magazine a sexist one, or on the contrary, does it, by parodying the *Playboy* soft porn magazine, disclose sexism and fight against it?

There has been a lot of debate concerning the future fate of cultural and literary magazines in Romania. When they consider the financial problems these magazines face today in a liberalized market, people of culture wonder what needs to be done in order for these magazines to sell and survive. What should their profile look like? One of the strategies for the revival of the cultural magazine considers bringing the sensational into the cultural/literary magazine in order to make it attractive to the buyer/reader. ‘Sensational’ might mean incorporating nude pictures in such a magazine, or getting a famous writer talk about his/her love life, or any other strategy that would transform the “man of paper” into a “man of flesh”. Let me quote here the opinion of one of the editors of such a Romanian magazine in a round-table discussion:

I don't think that cultural magazines produce culture, I think that they have more of an intermediary role between libraries, books and public, between those who write and those who read. These magazines are the products of writers, yet they should address people in the streets. (...) Consequently, the magazines should delineate the world we live in. We live in the epoch of the spectacle, of the show, and unless we transform magazines into spectacle we are lost. We can ask for money everywhere, nothing happens. People need the spectacle. (...) If spectacle can be produced out of literature, magazines can become a support for the spectacle. By producing closed, hermetic, tiring things, that none reads (...) we are left alone. (Robert řtefan, <http://adevarul.kappa.ro/lit636-02.html>)

This struggle may at least partly explain the birth of the new breed of magazine containing cultural articles, political satire and pornographic representations: the “three-in-one package”. Consequently, such a magazine would target the audiences of three types of publications at once. This is what the editor-in-chief and the owner of the magazine declared:

In the end, *Plai cu Boi* is also a cultural magazine; it contains articles signed by Pleșu and Patapievici and young writers and journalists. Actually, they all attack the literary style in journalism. The photographs are art photographs. Even the most (libertine) wanton ones communicate a certain meaning. They are all well produced. A young woman director collaborates with us, as does an actor, and first rate journalists from the *Dilema* publication. Although, probably a lot of people consider it as simply a wanton magazine, it has a cultural weight. Its 80,000 circulation figure, which allows our magazine to compete with more “prestigious” ones, tells us something. Many of our collaborators, including both Pleșu and Patapievici have not previously published in magazines with a circulation of over 5,000. This is also a chance. Especially as cultural magazines are so lifeless. Even *România literară*, which has a certain weight, and publishes many important writers, is lamentable as far as its graphics are concerned. I would have done it in colour, I would have changed its graphics. I don't know, I would have got it out onto the streets one way or another. (Mircea Dinescu in an interview published in “*Adevărul*” newspaper, November 3, 2001)

Facing the communist heritage and a generalized feeling of impotence (after many hopes of a better new life which had been born with the 1989 revolution had died and the euphoric feelings of the first period of freedom had passed), Romanians have often turned to irony and parody to position themselves (self-deprecatingly) or to contest the political system. The pervasiveness of parody and irony in Romanian post-communist art and culture may be interpreted as a response to marginalization (often self-marginalization) and as a final strategy: to disturb the system by whatever means it takes. The question which needs to be raised is at whose expense irony functions in these specific contexts. What or who is at stake in this political struggle?

In a deeply patriarchal society such as Romania, the distribution of irony and humour is a highly gendered affair. My thesis sets out to investigate the effects, limits and

ideological limits of the models of “female liberation” and “female empowerment” that the magazine promotes.

Sexist and misogynist devices are used at all levels in the magazine. Are they just meant to disclose these types of attitudes in Romanian post-communist society, with their purpose being a possible strategy to fight against them? Is it possible to fight sexism using sexist devices? Or are the authors just the same old misogynists, now even better equipped to secure their privileges and defend themselves against potential feminist attacks? How do the twisted and lugubrious passageways of irony function in this context? Does irony cover sexism? And if so, is this sexism hidden behind irony's curtain more dangerous, more harmful, than the crudely stated kind? I would argue yes, as it is subliminal, it cannot be labelled as such and thereby it precludes criticism and blocks strategies of resistance.

Visual and verbal representations of women in the *Plai cu boi* magazine

The study will start in the manner of a classic feminist analysis of a written piece of mass media by answering the questions:

- Who are the women represented in the magazine?
- How are women represented in the magazine?
- Are there any women writing for the magazine?
- How do the women's voices of the magazine sound?

The analysis will target both the pictures representing women (usually in the nude) and the texts that accompany the pictures, with special focus on the relation of the two types of messages (encoded via the visual and the verbal). What effect does the exchange between the visual representations and the text produce? Does the text complete and reinforce the visual? Or is it a relation of subversion? Can the visual representations of women be regarded as objectifying and sexist? What about the language used? Is it gender conscious? Can the magazine be labeled as a classical sexist soft porn magazine or is it another type of sexism in a different medium?

The very first issue of the magazine strikes the reader as it introduces a whole series of pictures presenting female nude or semi-nude images:

1. on the front cover the picture of a well-known Romanian Jewish actress imitating the posture of Marianne, in a famous picture of the French Revolution, yet holding in one hand a vegetable; her dress has a hole right through to her pubic hair;

2. a well-known female politician in a series of pictures that appear to have been made by paparazzi (the pictures being shot in a papparazzi-style);
3. “other people’s nudes in Romania”, the picture of a naked girl from Pakistan, introduced to the reader by means of a short *resumé*;
4. pictures of naked women who were allegedly members of the most famous whore-house in Romania before the Second World War;
5. a series of pictures of the actress on the front cover accompanied by an interview with her; in several of them she is “riding” an old, lying down statue of Lenin;
6. the picture of a Romanian singer, more famous for her silicone implant surgery than her artistic talent; she is ostensibly answering readers’ erotic questions in the column entitled “erotic mail”;
7. “hunger does not keep us warm”- “what the hell are we going to eat this month?” - the picture of a naked girl, on her knees eating in bed from a tray, introducing a column of food recipes;
8. a series of artistic pictures of female nudes, accompanied by different quotations praising the beauty of the female body, collected under the title “our nudes are more naked than theirs”.

Each of these constitute categories (regular columns) that are to be found in the subsequent issues of the magazine. Some of them lasted for only four issues, others were present till the last issue of the magazine (The *Plai cu Boi* magazine lasted for only 15 issues. Mircea Dinescu abandoned the project and he is now the editor-in-chief of a weekly newspaper entitled *Aspirina Săracului* - *The Aspirin of the Poor*). These categories of visual female representations function as a system, each in relation to the others, as parts in the economy of the magazine. They form the structure used to build the magazine.

In the following discussion each of the afore-mentioned categories will be explored.

1.1. The Front Cover

With one notable exception (the third issue presenting a naked man covering his penis with a small traditional Romanian hat, all the issues of the magazine display on their front cover one or several female nudes. Only two of them present well-known public characters (Maia Morgenstern, a famous Romanian Jewish actress and Brianna Caradja, a descendant of Vlad Țepes - a Romanian ruler of the 15th century who was to become the legendary “Dracula” -, and these are not completely naked) all the others are completely

naked. Later issues carry front cover pictures presenting only female body parts. Chronologically speaking, from one issue to another the magazine - using the front cover - will try to shock its audience, by creating more and more disturbance. Whereas in the first issue there is only one hole in the dress the actress is wearing, the girl in the second issue is wearing only her shoes while riding a carriage and the twelfth issue presents a close-up of a woman's back with a corkscrew shoved between her buttocks. This development strongly suggests on the one hand a crescendoing desire to transgress the limits, on the other hand it brings us to the economy of the profit and a clearer "sex(ism) sells" marketing strategy. It is likely that the sexism skillfully concealed at the beginning will soon be exposed as the commercialized reality of the magazine. Another aspect to be taken into account in the chronological analysis of the front cover is the fact that later issues of the magazine present only pictures on their front cover, whilst the titles of the articles presented are no longer mentioned. The visual is given thus all credit, while the articles – be they of cultural or political satire – are no longer featured on the front cover to "sell" the magazine.

1.2. The *Papparazzi* Series

This series presents several shots of a few public female figures that are supposedly made by *papparazzi*; the text next to the photographs comments upon the strategy used by the photographer (*papparazzo*) and the adventures he had been through in order to provide the magazine with the shots.

In the first issue the series presents a few shots of Mona Muscă, a well-known woman liberal politician; she is not naked, she is coming out of her bathroom wearing a big towel, with bare feet and in the last picture she is on a sofa drinking beer from a bottle with a magazine on her lap. Her postures are completely natural. The second issue offers the readers pictures of another well-known woman: this time a young, successfully married, fashion designer pictured in the process of putting on and taking off some dresses and then applying her make-up. The pictures in the third issue are those of another well-known Romanian female beauty: a TV star (the presenter of one of the shows with the highest audience on television that will be criticized in a later issue of the magazine). The last in the series presents, again, a TV figure (speaker). This time the woman is naked (taking off her panties in the bathtub).

Except for the pictures in the first issue where the choice was for a common, agreeable woman (yet famous politician), the rest of the women presented are young, beautiful and famous, part of the entertainment industry. Their poses in the pictures are clearly studied, so that they look beautiful (in the case of pictures shot by paparazzi you would expect too see strange postures). In the case of this series the fact that they start with a woman in her fifties wrapped in a big towel and then soon come to a completely naked one, in her twenties, conveys the message that *the less prestigious and famous a woman you are the more naked you need to be in order to get an audience*. Age is another issue when it comes to women as *the younger you are the more likely to have a “presentable” body, the more naked the more we can afford to have you in the magazine*.

The idea of having such a column probably originated in the style of *Playboy*, that usually seeks to have pictures of women of achievement, which better gratifies its male readers. This is how Martha Nussbaum in her *Sex and Social Justice* comments on *Playboy's* agenda for such a move:

(...) It is sexier to have a woman of achievement and talent than an unmarked woman, in the way it is sexier to have a Mercedes than a Chevrolet, in the way that Agamemnon assures Achilles that the horses he is giving him are prize-winning race horses and the women both beautiful and skilled in weaving. But a sleek woman is even more sexy than a sleek car, which cannot really be dominated because it is nothing but a thing. For what *Playboy* repeatedly says to its reader is, whoever this woman is, and whatever she has achieved, for you she is cunt, all her pretensions vanish before your sexual power. (...) This is the great appeal of *Playboy* in fact, for it satisfies the desires of men to feel themselves special and powerful, by telling them that they too can possess the signs of exalted status that they think of as in real life reserved for such as Donald Trump. (Nussbaum, 1999:235)

The strategy of referring to these shots as having been made by papparazzi (which is evidently not the case) aims at placing the readers (mainly male) in a superior position next to the women presented in the pictures, as pictures shot by papparazzi are not made with the consent of the person, but are “stolen images” of those pictured. In this way it constructs for the reader a fantasy objectification of a class of real women. Notwithstanding, as this is always a double game, irony is targeted at the papparazzi as

well, through the text describing their strategies. Surprisingly enough, this series stops after only four issues.

1.3. “From Other People’s Nudes in Romania” proved to be the most resourceful column. It lasted through all the issues and the girls presented in the pictures are even numbered! After all there are many nations in the world. The first issue explains the series: across history, foreign people came to our country; some of them left something behind (buildings, words and expressions, etc.), yet none of them left us nudes. Therefore, the magazine will try and fill the deficiency by offering the readers each month a “representative nude pertaining to the people that live temporarily or permanently between our borders” (p. 22). The nudes are accompanied by a sort of a *résumé* of the girl in the picture; this usually gives details of her vital statistics, the story of her life up to present and her future plans and hopes.

The pictures present women of different sizes, from thin to fat, small breasts and big breasts, bodies definitely less disciplined than in the classical magazines presenting female nudes. On the one hand this approach functions as a feminist victory over the myth of beauty: different shapes, various colours. On the other hand, on taking a closer look, we realize that any deviation from the “beauty norm” - if evident - is almost always referred to in the text accompanying the picture. The picture of the girl in the first issue, for example, is (presumably) from Pakistan, “is 21, has black eyes *and what else can be seen*”, a clear reference to her black, abundant, unshaved pubic hair that obviously does not correspond to the pornographic standard of female beauty today. The nude from Turkey representing a rather fat woman is hinted at by claiming her “passion for mathematics and especially for the *Gauss curve*”(my emphasis added). The alleged liberalization of the beauty standard proves to be just a play. The fat women and weird postures brings us to the “female grotesque” which feminism itself uses as a liberating weapon, yet in this context it receives different connotations. Sexism (condemning the women for their bodily imperfections) becomes evident by means of interaction between the visual and the verbal realms of communication.

Furthermore, this series is an accurate illustration of the feminist statement that “The personal is not only political, but also international”, clearly reflecting the gendered nature of the international order. The interference of sexism and racism is at its peak in this case. As a particular nation is represented by means of a naked woman, the power exercised by the reader over the naked woman gets transposed over the nation she represents (in this

sense it could function as a rape of the other nation, or, at least, the nation becomes objectified through the objectification of the woman representing it). Furthermore, the bodily deviance of the woman presented becomes a telling feature for the country she represents. This sexist approach (an interpretation that could only be contested by the defense that the use is one of irony) conveys the message that sexism functions as one possible means of becoming “global” (sexism is the international politics).

1.4. The Pictorial is the name given to the main column of the magazine (it is usually announced by the picture on the front cover), located right in the middle of the publication. It is an article accompanied by several thematic pictures. *Pictorial* is the name used by pornographic magazines for their main column, spread across the middle pages of the magazine, in which a couple (or different other combinations) engages in a sexual act in different positions in a particular scenery. The first issue offers the readers an interview with the famous actress Maia Morgenstern and some pictures of her. Half of the pictures present Maia riding an old lying down statue of Lenin. She is naked, however none of her intimate parts can be seen as she has a red scarf around her body and she is covering her breasts with one hand. The text is a classic interview, where she is being asked about her childhood, her work and her family. However, one of the questions approaches the issue of feminism. I quote the passage:

- Have you ever been attracted to feminism? Do you have feminist outbursts?
- I am interested in feminism and I do not disown it. This is because I know there is a lot of misery and there are many prejudices; whilst the woman is the favourite victim.
- Do you think you could militate? Become a fighter?
- I think I am rather an implicit fighter. Would there be a necessity, would the motive be strong enough to correspond to my intimate requests, I am ready to fight. Yet I think that a cause can be more useful and wiser served by bringing the audience into a zone of performance, where I have something to say, when I have something to construct or demolish. That is why the thing I desire most is for people to need what I am doing.

As a Jew, brought up in Romania, Maia Morgenstern definitely knows what discrimination is and how its mechanisms function. Yet, the more important thing to be analysed in this exchange is the way in which the questions approaching the issue of feminism are put. What does the form of wording tell us about the interviewer's attitude

towards feminism? In the first question “Have you ever been attracted to feminism?” the use of Present Perfect Tense (in Romanian a past tense) implies that this may happen to women, it is rather normal if it happens, yet it is something you soon get over, a stage in the presupposed development of a woman with a successful career. Consequently, feminism is not considered to be something substantial, something permanent, a present reality. The second question gives the reader a clearer hint about the manner in which feminism is conceived by the interviewer. “Do you have feminist outbursts?” The choice of the word “outbursts” is typical of contemporary Romanian mass media when referring to feminism. Feminists are portrayed as an irrational, crazy bunch of women, who are either sexually frustrated or just unhappy with their lives. This also explains the actress’ cautious answer. She does not declare herself a feminist, yet chooses a non-negative statement in order to assert her adherence to feminism (“I do not disown it”). The media’s own portrayal of feminism is partly responsible for women’s alienation from feminism. This is as much the case in Romania as it is in Western societies:

Much early coverage of the women’s movement focused exclusively or disproportionately on “extremist” tactics and rhetoric. Such selective profiles are, of course, by no means unique to feminism. For obvious reasons, the radical fringes of social movements often receive undue attention; they play to the press’ perennial search for dramatic events. (...) However, the women’s movement has been particularly vulnerable to such adverse coverage because what gains attention for feminist issues often runs counter to what passes as appropriate feminine behavior. For much of the last century, the press has contributed to popular caricatures of “unsexed” harpies with deviant lifestyles and unfounded fantasies of male domination (Rhode, 1997: 13).

The second issue’s pictorial defines a big change in the landscape of the magazine (as already mentioned in relation to the front cover). A completely naked girl, named Luminița (‘little light’) is the main character of the pictorial this time entitled soap-opera. The text accompanying the pictures tells her story: she returns from Istanbul, where she presumably went three years ago to earn some money from prostitution. On her way back the train was attacked (in Bulgarian territory) and Luminița is left without any money or clothes. Therefore, she decides to stand in line for a Christian meal offered by the Greater Romania Party. The pictures show her getting down from the train, standing in line to receive a free meal, visiting an exhibition organized by the party, and how she decides to enroll in the

party in order to obtain “at least a pair of bikini”, and having dinner with other members of the party. She is surrounded by ordinary people, rather poorly dressed, with benign faces. At that time (November 2000) Romania was in a state of shock as Corneliu Vadim Tudor (the president of the Greater Romania Party, a fanatical nationalist) had just qualified for the second round of presidential elections. The first place was taken by Ion Iliescu (a former communist apparatchik and president between 1990 and 1996). This situation explains the title on the front cover: *Romania. Where to?* By associating a prostitute with Greater Romania Party and its leader, the magazine is taking a political stand. C.V. Tudor was Nicolae Ceaușescu’s best-known literary sycophant, writing odes to the leader’s glory during the communist regime. Moreover, he was involved in several scandals of possession and commercialization of pornographic materials (which were illegal during the Ceaușescu era). The title of the soap-opera, “Let Us Dress the Naked Ones” refers to C.V. Tudor’s propagandistic discourse.

The choice of the young naked woman (presumably a prostitute) functions here as a means to accomplish a more powerful political stand. However, starting with this issue, *Plai cu Boi* systematically presents in this column pictures of naked women engaged in different daily common activities.

Surprises are yet to come with the third issue of *Plai cu Boi*. The front cover presents the picture of a naked man. Past his forties, and covering his penis with a small traditional Romanian hat, the image of the man is rather hilarious and the title goes: “bă, ai noștri-s mai frumoși: CIPANDEII ROMÂNESTI!”, that translates into English “well, ours are more handsome: THE ROMANIAN CHIPPENDALES”. It might seem that this would become the theme for the pictorial, yet not so, the pictorial presents again naked women (this time working in a steelworks). The ‘Romanian Chippendales’ are just an “extra” offered to the readers by the magazine. The article accompanied by two pictures of five men (the other four are younger, yet these two pictures are hilarious as well) tells the story of these guys, who, annoyed at the success of the American strippers’ performance in Romania, are eager to start their own career as strippers. The ridiculous appearance of the males in the pictures functions to cover the real target of the irony in the article i.e. the female audience of the Chippendales. The success of the strippers “was materialized in weeping eyes, floppy panties of uncertain origin, (...), odd shoes, nervously bitten nails and confused clitoris”. Both the hypermasculine characteristics of musculature and penis size (defining features of the Chippendales, which are certainly not equally distributed among

all citizens of the world), and a positive response to such things are being ridiculed in an approach that at first sight functions as simply auto-ironic in the view of the common, naked hillarious male bodies of the “Romanian Chippendales”. Another aspect worth taking into account is the fact that these males cover their penises, while naked women (with the exception of the actress Maia Morgenstern in the first issue) do not cover anything, as they do not have something to cover. They lack the “thing”.

1.5. The Erotic Mail

The erotic mail is a means of mocking the widespread occurrence of this type of column in Romanian post-communist mass-media. The choice of the singer is relevant in this respect. Famous for her silicone implant surgery and her proud “coming out” in several TV talk-shows, she is chosen as the *authority* to answer reader’s obsessive questions related to sex, to offer them a piece of “expert” and friendly advice. The whole text is a parody of common popular erotic obsessions (such as for example premature ejaculation, priapism, sexual violence, etc) and of the popular remedies mentioned. The singer’s picture is reproduced each time the column appears (in the first four issues) and twice this is accompanied by a collage of pictures of her fragmented body (her face, breast, belly). In the first issue her picture is accompanied by a grotesque drawing representing multiplied pairs of breasts – another illustration of the pornographic obsession of our times. The choice of the woman may indeed be interpreted as a feminist stand of the magazine, as at a first level she is the one ridiculed because of her decision to undergo a “breast enhancement” surgery, transforming her into a “more efficient” sex object.

1.6. “Hunger Does Not Keep Us Warm” –

“what the hell are we going to eat this month?” – the picture of a naked girl, on her knees eating in bed from a tray. This column offers the readers new, inventive, highly politicized, parodied food recipes. The association of food with a naked (young) woman conveys the following messages: at one level the naked woman is herself eating, at another one she is in fact offered to the readers for consumption (similar to food). This association of women and food as consumer goods (for male subjects) is reinforced (yet also ridiculed, depending on the way you read irony here) by means of a caricature that presents two people (male and female) engaged in a sexual act. The woman is “positioned” on the kitchen table, while the bubble says: “Thank God we have something to lay on the table for holidays”.

1.7. “Our Nudes Are More Naked Than Theirs”

This last series of pictures presenting artistic female nudes is accompanied by an announcement addressed to women readers welcoming their possible contributions to the column. All they have to do is to send to the editorial office two of their “representative” pictures together with a few personal data for the heading “look at and pass on to another”. The participants in the series are even promised a model career: “Do you want the doors and the windows (sic!) of the greatest modelling agencies to open up to you?” To participate in this enterprise, guarantees the magazine, will constitute at least a one-in-a-lifetime opportunity to re-discover yourself and your hidden beauty: “Do you have the courage to look into your beauty’s face?”; “Do not miss the chance to display to an expert audience your eternal and fascinating nudity!” The fifth issue announces patronizingly the organizing of a contest.

The quotations accompanying the nudes reinforce the message that sexuality is for women “their best part” (as long as it is put at men’s disposal). Although the series is present in the magazine through all the issues, the texts (which in the last issue of their occurrence are called “aphorisms”) continued for only three issues. I quote the texts in the first issue: “how many women don’t stand up on their own feet from somebody else’s knees...”/ “I like claustrophobic women. All there’s left is for me to convince them their clothes are too small a house for them.”/ “The Catcher in the Rye” (the Romanian translation of Salinger’s novel)/ “And after God poured woman out of the cooking pot, He split her with a thread.” (reference is being made to the Romanian traditional custom of cutting cooled maize porridge using a thread).

Whereas the first “aphorism” refers to the many women of achievements, that have allegedly accomplished things not as a result of their work, struggle, qualities and skills, but as result of men supporting them, the second one names a “witty” strategy of manipulating women so as men (just like the author) may benefit from their sexuality. The last two lines accompany the same picture, presenting a naked female body positioned in a wheat field. The body is posed so that head, arms and legs cannot be seen (being hidden in the wheat). The focus is on her arched trunk. The photographer is associated with “The Catcher in the Rye”, and later with God himself (as he is also an author). Woman is associated here with maize (the traditional Romanian meal) which after being cooked gets split not with a knife but with a thread, much slimmer and more efficient for the job

concerned. This is depicted as being similar to the way in which God created the female sexual organ.

The women in the pictures are objects of male gaze, yet the difference between posing nude in *Playboy* and doing it for *Plai cu Boi* is suggested by the mentioning of the “expert audience”, i.e. the readers of *Plai cu Boi* magazine, i.e. the readers of great names of Romanian intelligentsia: Andrei Pleșu, Horia Patapievici, Alexandru Paleologu, inter alia. At this point what becomes evident is the mechanism in which the presence in the magazine of articles signed by such great names of contemporary Romanian culture justifies and legitimates the presence of female nudes, allegedly investing them with artistic and cultural qualities, while the female nudes will play their part and sell the magazine and its cultural articles and those of political satire.

When posing the question “how we distinguish between pornography and art when there is a match of content: nothing but sex in both”, Susanne Kappeler comments that “the definition or categorization of something as “literary” or artistic relies crucially, and in the end circularly, on the successful association of it with something else already classified as literary, and the identity of the author provides the easiest such association”. (Kappeler, 1994:22)

Furthermore she explains that: “The reason why everyone is waiting for this kind of pornography (with good, famous actors and directors) is that the quality actor will ratify the film as alright while the more cultured director (Fellini) ratifies the film as not only alright, but as art” (Kappeler, 1994: 256).

All the five pictures presented in the first issue of *Plai cu Boi* magazine show only bodies of women (no face can be seen), and especially fragmented bodies, typical of pornography. Women remain anonymous; their anonymity is a means of exposing them even more to consumerism; their bodies are presented in strange postures, unusual close-ups and angles, in a soft-focused luminosity.

I quote the aphorisms in the second issue: “The copy is, anyway, more faithful than the original.”/”Life, like any ugly woman is beautiful if you know how much of it to look at through the door’s keyhole.”/ “Definitely, just one woman in one hundred is beautiful, yet like those hundreds there are thousands”/”All women are alike. Yet, every one of them is always someone else”.

These second series of aphorisms addresses the segment in the female audience that is not “lucky enough” to correspond to the pornographic beauty standard of *Playboy* for

example. However, *Plai cu Boi* declares that their bodies can still become objects of public display and admiration as this magazine's (male) photographers are artists that will find a piece of beauty ("your hidden beauty") in every woman (no matter how difficult the job will be). Moreover, these photographs have the advantage of being real works of art and not simple pornographic nudes.

The strategy *Plai cu Boi* applies when approaching beauty is similar to the one used by women's magazine advertisements, that, starting in the 70s, redefined beauty as not a given that you either possess or lack, but as something achievable by any woman smart enough to apply the correct products. "The way in which advertising has done this, according to Winship (quoted in Lury, 1994:134) is through its representation of women as "the field of action for various products." She points to the way in which in advertisements "women's bodies are broken down into different areas as sites for the action of commodities".

I argue that the very same strategy is being used by *Plai cu Boi*, with the only difference being that what the photographer is credited with achieving out of a woman's body replaces what all the beauty products advertise and all the advice given by the beauty experts in women's magazine can do. By working on a woman's body, the photographer will find the piece, the angle, the luminosity, etc. that will ultimately reveal the "hidden" beauty. The female body is just the raw material out of which the photographer will produce artistic photography. He uses the female body in a way similar to a writer using words. After all, the column figures in the contents as "look at and pass on to another: nudes by Răzvan Voiculescu"

The column is again "advertised" in the sixth issue. The magazine "opens its pages for women" and declares that "in a men's world, *Plai cu Boi* is the only publication to believe that being a woman is not a profession, but a vocation. Therefore, our models are women with authentic personalities. No hypocrisies. No artifices. No preconceived ideas." These are the traits defining the portrait of the woman posing for *Plai cu Boi*. The announcement ends with an appeal "Be smart, as hidden beauty exists in every woman!" What does 'to be smart' mean here? Apparently to contact the magazine and pose nude for their photographer.

The consequences for women of this call to "free themselves" are similar to the ways in which the sexual revolution worked for women:

Some feminists were arguing that there were dangers for women in a sexual revolution within the structure of patriarchy; it could make them subject to even greater exploitation than the old sexual double standard; women were simply more available to be fucked by men, rather than assuming an active sexuality based on their own desires (Lewallen, 1994:21)

Women are invited, as they have always been, to put themselves, their bodies at men's disposal. It is just that *Plai cu Boi* is using a different strategy to provide women with a justification. This strategy is even more insidious and harmful than in the case of *Playboy* (which doesn't really talk much about women's emancipation, or of women being smart).

The last set of aphorisms brings us again to the woman – passive object / man – active subject binary opposition. “We all become flies in the spider’s web of wrinkles, it is just that women struggle more”/ “Men’s hands are even more skilful as they caress the more sophisticated shapes of the woman.”/ “How pathetic can the mirror look at 5 o’clock in the morning”/ “When a woman throws the glove at you do not rush to pick it up. It could be about a duel, yet usually it ends up with striptease.” Women are victims of the beauty myth, they lack agency (men caress, women are sophisticated in shape) and they usually don’t confront men.

The use of photographs representing female nude or semi-nude postures as “column headings” or means of introducing a column strongly suggests that sexism is a common and universal language that the reader will certainly understand. It functions as if the last thing Romanian people still have in common after 1989 is sexism and as if pictures of naked women will form the last community possible after all the illusions of “other communities” have vanished. The irony rests in the fact that women are, too, invited to be part of this community formed around sexism. Furthermore, it is called “female empowerment”.

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**THE CRITICAL POINTS OF THE HUNGARIAN PROSTITUTION LAW:
ORGANIZED CRIME, MORALITY AND THE INVISIBILITY OF THE
CLIENT**

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Unenforceable Prostitution Law?

In 1999 the issue of prostitution became a hot topic, widely discussed and debated in the Hungarian public discourse, as a new prostitution law was to be formulated that year. As one would expect, the new legislation on prostitution was supposed to achieve some kind of solution by allowing prostitution to be practiced in certain places under certain conditions. However, this is far from what actually happened to Hungarian prostitution. Since the re-regulation, a few years have passed that have proved beyond doubt that the law itself is quite impossible to implement since the local districts are still not willing to designate their own ‘tolerance zones’. The law states that the local districts have to designate certain areas as ‘tolerance zones’ where prostitutes are allowed to work legally. So far most of the local districts vehemently oppose creating a legal working place for prostitutes and thus, as stated by Ágnes Földi, the chairperson of the Association for the Protection of The Interest of Hungarian Prostitutes, those politicians still unwilling to bring the law into force can be accused of infringement of the law by delay (Trencsényi: Népszabadság, 2002.06.07, p.24). While city councils have been reluctant to fulfil the requirements of the law, another local agent also much involved in combating prostitution, the police, has on the contrary been eager to implement the law. Its eagerness has consisted in producing a high arrest rate by taking a lot of street prostitutes who were standing in

the wrong place - according to the police - into custody, although the right place had not been designated. So whether the street prostitute was working legally or was committing a misdemeanour was up to the police officer to decide and if he (rarely she) was indulgent, he did not pay any attention to the prostitute at the side of the road. Some cases were recorded when the police were overzealous in harassing women because they merely believed them to be prostitutes according to their looks. I would also like to mention another case that began to circulate as a sort of anecdote: a prostitute known to the police was arrested when she went to do her morning shopping. The cause of her arrest: she was on the street (Juhász & Wirth, 2002).

The question is whether the persistent problems mentioned above that arose following the introduction of the prostitution law in 1999 are a result of an inappropriate enforcement of the legislation, or whether the legislation itself needs to be reformulated in order to produce a prostitution law that the municipal and local authorities are able to implement correctly. In the following, I will address this issue by a close reading of the text of the law, examining the relationship between prostitution and organized crime as defined by the law, the hypocritical morality that still persists in the definition of prostitution and finally the paradigm of visibility and invisibility governing the hegemonic discourse of the prostitution law. By critical inquiry of the textual connotations of the above mentioned topics within the textual network of the law, I intend to demonstrate the necessity of a new prostitution law in Hungary that would not allow all kinds of misimplementations and would not lead to the harassment of prostitutes.

Prostitution and/as organized crime

The prostitution law formulated in 1999 is part of a package of laws against organized crime. Thus the meaning of prostitution becomes shaped by the manner in which the relation between prostitution and organized crime is established with the inclusion of the prostitution law in the sphere of the law against organized crime. According to the text of the law, there are two possible modalities to define this relationship.

Prostitution can be regarded as a mode, a manifestation, of organized crime or as a consequence of organized crime in the sense that organized crime lives parasitically on prostitution. The distinction between these two aspects mainly concerns the question of whether prostitution is a major criminal act, a felony, or a minor one, a misdemeanour. So actually, the relation between prostitution and organized crime becomes one of the

important issues because it has further important consequences concerning the legal position of the prostitute. The treatment of prostitution as an integral part of organized crime implies that prostitution can and should be considered a major criminal act. So every party involved in prostitution - client, pimp and prostitute - should be subjected to imprisonment accordingly. On the other hand, if organized crime rules over prostitution, then the prostitute can be regarded as a victim of organized crime and it is only the person who connects prostitution and organized crime, that is the pimp, who commits a major crime, a felony. From this perspective, however, it is difficult to assign a legal position to the third party involved in prostitution, the client. The client cannot be regarded a victim like the prostitute. Is he then also taking part in organized crime when he buys the sexual services of the prostitute? By paying for the sexual services, he actually indirectly subsidizes organized crime since the money he pays goes to the pimp who is a member of organized crime and the money might be used for financing other types of organized crime such as drug dealing, illegal gun trafficking, and human trafficking.

The whole package of laws against organized crime is entitled “The 1999 LXXV law about the steps to be taken against organized crime and related phenomena and about the modification of laws connected to it” (*Hungarian Official Gazette*, 1999/60, p.3967). So since it is included in this particular package of law, prostitution is considered to be one of the ‘phenomena related’ to organized crime. This kind of formulation of the relationship in the title leaves the definition of prostitution open, and it does not belong to any of the contradictory standpoints formulated in the previous paragraph. However, the definition of the phenomenon related to organized crime can be found in the section of definitions, where the meaning of the most important terms are explained, and it fixes the meaning of prostitution to one of the standpoints: prostitution as an integral part of organized crime. The law gives the definition of what are to be considered ‘phenomena related’ to organized crime in Chapter 1, Paragraph 4: “it is related to organized crime; the crime that it is committed as member of an organized group of criminals (Penal Code articles 137 & 8) or the formation of an organized group of criminals (Penal Code 263/C)” (*Hungarian Official Gazette*, 1999/60, p.3968). So, according to this definition, since prostitution is a phenomenon related to organized crime, it is a crime committed as a member of an organized group of criminals. It can also be connected to the formation of an organized group of criminals. Thus prostitution becomes not only an integral part of organized crime but at the same time it is an organized crime.

One of the major contradictions within the law is between defining prostitution as a form of organized crime and then, when specifically concentrating on prostitution only, referring to it ‘only’ as an incident disturbing public peace. The third chapter of the prostitution law describes the rules under which prostitution is legalised. Any offence breaking any of these rules is punished with a penalty, usually a fine or short term imprisonment. Thus the law treats prostitution, according to the penalty, that is, as a misdemeanour, a minor offence for which the law provides a lesser punishment than for a felony. A penalty for felony is given in case of major crimes, and organized crime is such a type. This discrepancy between defining prostitution first as a form of organized crime and then assigning a penalty that considers it a minor crime after all, contradicts the meaning assigned to prostitution as a form of organized crime in the definition given by the law. Actually it raises the question why the prostitution law is included in the package of laws against organized crime at all, since it is difficult to make the connection between the following propositions formulated on the basis of the text of the law: Prostitution is a form of organized crime. Prostitution is a minor crime. In this case organized crime is regarded a minor crime in Hungary. And furthermore, if prostitution is legalised while being a form of organized crime, where does this leave the other forms of organized crime? The completely vague connection that can be made between prostitution and organized crime, relying only on the text of law, is also problematic when we consider that the law on prostitution is formulated with the aim of forming a mode to legalise prostitution, as opposed to the whole package of laws aiming at combating organized crime. Is legalising then a mode of combating?

The connection between prostitution and organized crime may be viewed as consideration of the necessity to liberate prostitution from the power of organized crime. In this case, the law should focus on pimping and human trafficking as the phenomena that tie prostitution to organized crime. This requires that the law, when naming the offender, should point to the pimp as the one who commits the major crime. However, the prostitution law aims to incriminate the prostitute and the client instead of concentrating on the ones who take advantage of prostitution and make it a part of organized crime. If the aim of the law is combating organized crime, why is the focus only on the offences committed by the prostitute and the client? In this sense, abolitionism provides a more appropriate legislative structure than this regulation since it is preoccupied with the offence of pimping and as it considers the prostitute a victim is it also in accordance with the New

York agreement signed by Hungary. However, the ideal solution would be total abolition since in this framework the prostitute is no longer an outcast of society and most importantly it contributes to the disruption of prostitution from organized crime since it aims to break prostitutes' dependence on pimps. This disruption can be enforced by formation of organisations fighting for the civil rights of prostitutes.

As a detour, I would like to draw attention to the semantic shifts in the naming of the law against organized crime in some newspaper articles which appeared in the year of its promulgation since they illustrate very well the slippage of the focus from organized crime to prostitution. The law against organized crime appears in the context of newspapers articles under two denominations. It is either referred to as mafia law or prostitution law (or in a shortened version prostitute-law *prostitörvény*). In the case of the denomination 'mafia law', a shift in the meaning of the word appears, since it comes to refer to the prostitution law and not to the whole package of the law against organized crime. This shift is due to formulations such as "The mafia law used against prostitutes" (HVG, 1999.38:09.25, p.117). Prostitution comes to be viewed as the only target for the law against organized crime. So the meaning of organized crime is reduced to prostitution and in this way the relation between the two concepts is established in such a way as prostitution is seen to be organized crime.

The other denomination of the law, prostitute-law (*prostitörvény*) (Magyar Nemzet, 1999.09.28, p.6), also reflects a shift in the meaning of 'prostitution law'. Since in Hungarian the word *prosti* is the shortened form of the word 'prostitute', this formulation of the name of the law illustrates on the semantic level the way the prostitution law actually concentrates solely on the prostitute and it also foretells the mode of its implementation. The shortening of the prostitution law to *prosti* law means that the target is the prostitute. As a consequence, the mafia law is used against prostitutes by the police since they regard the prostituted women to be mafia members.

Prostitution - the old morality?

Generally, law refers to rules of conduct established and enforced by the authority, legislation or custom of a given community, state or group. This implies that law is rules of conduct that define what behaviour is regarded to be proper and improper. Law assigns moral quality to actions that are considered on the basis of law to be right or wrong. Furthermore, wrong conduct is differentiated by the legal system through the classification

of criminal acts into major and minor ones. According to the Hungarian prostitution law, prostitution is regarded a minor crime that disturbs the public peace.

In the text of the law against organized crime, when dealing with the issue of prostitution, (in Chapter I it defines those sexual activities that are to be considered prostitution and in Chapter III it formulates the rules for handling prostitution as a public offence), the word ‘prostitution’ is used all along. This becomes important from the perspective that prostitution is a foreign word in Hungarian and it does not have as pejorative a meaning as the other Hungarian words for prostitution like ‘pleasure for trade’ (*üzletszer kéjelgés*) or ‘soliciting (carnal pleasures)’ (*tiltott kéjelgés*). Thus the use of the word ‘prostitution’ as a more or less sterile word because of its Latin origin in Hungarian blurs the issue of morality and pretends that the regulation of prostitution is not subjected to sexual ethics. However, the other two terms that designate prostitution in the text of the law, namely ‘pleasure for trade’ and ‘soliciting (carnal pleasures)’, appear only in Chapter II that deals with the conditions under which ‘institutions of entertainment’ can be closed down. The expressions of prostitution as ‘pleasure for trade’ and ‘soliciting (carnal pleasures)’ appear in the law against organized crime as a reference to another law that regulates sexual behaviour. These terms are used in the part of the Penal Code that enlists all forms of crime pertaining to sexuality (Chapter IV, Title II) formulated in 1968 and modified in 1993 (Fehér:1999, p.128). This part of the Penal Code called *Offences Against Sexual Ethics*, enforces a compulsory moral system on citizens that stigmatises all sexual play and activity other than heterosexual intercourse as perversion. According to the definition found in this law, someone who commits ‘pleasure for trade’ is one who, for material gain, has sexual intercourse or fornicates. The law sets up a moral distinction between different forms of sexual behaviour. Everything that is not heterosexual intercourse is a crime committed against sexual ethics since fornication is defined as “[...] every action other than sexual intercourse is a commitment of an act of gross indecency” (The Prevailing Law of Sexual Offences, Penal Code, XIV Chapter, II Title-*Offences Against Sexual Ethics*.2002. at <http://hc.Netsudio.hu/hc/jogok/btk/hatalyos>)

The text of the prostitution law that is part of the law against organized crime does not use these terms any longer; instead, it applies the term ‘sexual service’. A term that defines prostitution as an activity subject to economic laws of supply and demand. However, it has to be recognised that these terms persist alongside the more neutral words ‘prostitution’ and ‘sexual service’ since on the textual level they are still used in references

in the prostitution law formulated in 1999. The penal code that already suggests sexual discrimination in its title - *Offences against Sexual Ethics*, since it formulates the existence of a sexual norm to which all citizens have to conform, is still valid. Thus the names ‘pleasure for trade’ and ‘soliciting (carnal pleasures)’ shape the understanding of sexual ethics since they refer to sexual practices that are regarded as wrong. However, these sexual ethics are one-sided since they only refer to female sexuality. It forms a certain understanding of female sexuality that implies that those women who find sex pleasurable and indulge in its practice are ‘whores’. Not only does this degrade female sexuality, but at the same time it regards prostitution as something that gives pleasure to the prostituted woman.

In addition to forbidding citizens from making free choices regarding their sexuality, the law applies definitions that imply sex discrimination. The words prostitution, ‘pleasure for trade’ and ‘soliciting (carnal pleasures)’ in their usage come to make visible the prostitute only as an agentive subject who carries out these acts by herself. Thus the formulation of moral values comes to be gendered when formulating the question “Who commits sexual offences?”, “Who is the offender?” Seemingly, on the surface level, the offender can be either male or female but when it is connected with prostitution, the only offender identified is the prostitute. This becomes evident through a closer interpretation of the definition given to ‘pleasure for trade’ in Chapter XIV, Title II of the Penal Code *Offences against Sexual Ethics*, and the definition of ‘sexual service’ in the prostitution law. The person who commits the crime of ‘pleasure for trade’ is the one who regularly has sexual intercourse or commits acts of gross indecency for material gain. The subject of the definition is clearly the prostitute since she is the one who does it in order to get some money in return for her ‘service’. The client could be included if the definition were extended in the following way: Not only the person who has sexual intercourse or commits the act of gross indecency for material gains has ‘pleasure for trade’ but also the one who requires this service and is willing to offer material gains for it. Or, rather, we could define the two participants who have their hope to *gain* in common between the two of them. But what makes them different is the nature of the particular gain: money vs. sex, money at the expense of female sexual pleasure vs. sex at the expense of male income. However, the phrase itself ‘pleasure for trade’ implies that the prostitute has the pleasure in this exchange. If she has the pleasure, then she is the one who is morally condemnable since

she is the one who commits fornication while the sexual satisfaction of the client remains silenced.

The definition of sexual service given by the prostitution law is as follows: “that act of the prostitute involving body contact with the one who demands this service which serves to arouse and to gratify the desire of the client” (*Hungarian Official Gazette*, 1999/nr.60, p.3967). In this definition the client is not completely invisible as in the other definition, nevertheless the formulation ‘the one who demands this service’ is not on an equal level semantically with the denomination ‘prostitute’ since then instead of ‘prostitute’, in order to be equal, the definition should rather apply the formulation ‘the one who offers the service’ and not ‘prostitute’. Further on, the sexual service includes not only the satisfaction of sexual desire but also the arousal of this desire which implies that the prostitute is the one responsible for the desire of the client since she is the one who arouses this sexual desire. Morally, the prostitute commits the offence and the one demanding this service is not even responsible for his own ‘dirty’ desire.

To illustrate more effectively the double standard of sexuality, I will refer to two newspaper articles that enlarge the spectrum of the meaning of prostitution by connecting it to marriage for convenience. While citizens view prostitution as immoral, at the same time they accept such phenomena which are close to prostitution: “It is interesting and makes you wonder that the members of society, the citizens, accept some phenomena that are close to prostitution - young women marry old men to ensure a good living - but the general view does not consider them prostitutes, it tolerates and justifies it” (Halász: *Magyar Nemzet*, 1999.07.13, p.5).

The law defines the prostitute as that person who offers sexual services for material compensation (*Hungarian Official Gazette*, 1999.07.13, p.3967). Thus the basis on which a sexual relation can be regarded prostitution is the material compensation involved in that relation. In this sense the meaning of prostitution is enlarged as it does not only refer to women who work as prostitutes but also it can be connected to all sexual relations on the basis of the material relationship between the partners. The question raised in one of the articles in brackets - as if a side issue - hints that actually it is very difficult to draw the line, to say at which point sexual relations become prostitution. The question itself hints at the instability of the meaning of prostitution: “What makes a sexual relation a business?” (Pelle: *Magyar Nemzet* 1999.02.10, p.2).

According to this definition, the woman who marries for material reasons prostitutes herself in that relationship and such marriages become an institutionalised form of prostitution. The article draws our attention to the hypocrisy of society that regards prostitution as immoral and more immoral the part of the one who is despised for engaging in it - the prostituted women, but at the same time overlooks those relations in which prostitution is implied solely because such relations take place within the frame of marriage. Moreover, marriage is connected to prostitution from another angle. An interviewer asks whether it can be stated that prostitution rescues bad marriages (Halász: Magyar Nemzet, 1999.07.13, p.5). The answer given by Dr. Kálmán Merényi, a lawyer specialised in prostitution cases and offences against sexual ethics, is 'No'. Still, the fact that the question arises is telling since it reflects the fact that a moral double standard persists. There are men who cannot find sexual satisfaction in marriage, which explains the demand on their part for women who can offer 'special services'. Thus the existence of prostitution is legitimised for men; in fact, it might be good for wives since it keeps their marriages intact. Prostitution as the glue of marriage? The double standard is also reflected in the assertion that prostitutes have 'special services'. This operates a division of female sexuality. Wives are women who are sexually incapable of satisfying their husbands and prostitutes are women who are sexually talented by having 'special services'. However, if I bring the two points together - that marriage that is based on material recompense for the wife, prostitutes the wife, and that the prostitute is a woman that is sexually more compatible than the wife - this makes the concept of wife incompatible with that of prostitute.

Who is to be punished? - the invisibility of the client

Interviewer: But again only the visible girls are punished.

Béla Csécsei: That is only a fantasy that someone will catch the pimps standing behind the girls.

Intr.: However, the law would like to do that

Cs. B: But we cannot see them (Mancs, 1999. 37:09.16, p.11)

The visibility and invisibility paradigm is applied differently in the cases of prostitutes, clients and pimps. On the one hand prostitutes are made visible by and for the law in order to be accused of an offence but their coercion – economic or physical - to prostitution is made invisible, an invisibility that works in the favour of the pimp and also the client. So the visibility of the prostitute is allowed insofar as it incriminates her. The

moment that the visibility endangers the position of the pimp and the client, it disappears. Catherine MacKinnon argues that in the game of visibility and invisibility, the conspiracy is most effective of all in the case of the invisibility of the client:

[...] prostituted women could allege that they have been subjected to conspiracy to deprive them of civil rights as women. The conspiracy is the easy part - pimps never do this alone. In a supply-side conspiracy, they prostitute women through organized crime, gangs, associations, cults, families, hotel owners, and police. There is also a demand-side conspiracy, more difficult to argue but certainly there, between pimps and tricks.

(MacKinnon, 1993:13)

On the textual level in the formulation of the text of the Hungarian prostitution law, this conspiracy is due to the invisibility of the client or the pimp in the text itself, whereas the prostitute is in the foreground of the formulation since everything that is mentioned under the heading of prostitution comes to be shifted to the word of prostitute. First of all, this shift is very well exemplified if we take into consideration the definitions given to the most important terms that are used in the law against organized crime in Chapter I. Out of the nineteen definitions enumerated more than a half are connected to prostitution. Furthermore, what the law understands as ‘prostitute’ is defined but there is no need to clarify what is meant by client and pimp. The prostitute is clearly made visible while the client is referred to as ‘the one who demands this service’ and the pimp is even more deeply hidden in the textual network since we can just suspect that he is the one who is behind the term of the ‘owner of entertainment places’. However, this connection is farfetched and the text itself does not itself explicitly make this connection. This prostitution law completely neglects the issue of pimping which is most surprising of all as the law should target prostitution from the side of organized crime.

Going one step further, the visibility of the prostitute is accentuated by the way the prostitution law narrows down the definition of prostitution to street prostitution. Barbara Gwinnett points out that prostitution manifests itself in a variety of forms and is a very versatile social practice:

Prostitution is not a static activity [...] it operates in a variety of locations: on the streets, in house/brothels, through escort agencies, sauna and massage parlours, hotels, through telephone call cards and so on. Prostitutes work alone

or through pimps. Both women and men work as prostitutes, usually for men, but also for women. Clients come from all classes, occupational groups and

social and ethnic backgrounds. The point is that it is a complex activity [...]
(Gwinnett, 1998:97)

The Hungarian law on prostitution does not in any way take into account the complex network of prostitution, since when discussing it, the law actually reduces the understanding of prostitution to street prostitution that, within the general public discourse, becomes sexual services provided by women only for men only. This focus on the heterosexual side of prostitution is also due to the game of visibility and invisibility since the other form of prostitution, the homosexual one, is less visible than the heterosexual one, at least in Hungary. So the more visible side of prostitution takes over the meaning of street prostitution.

The law is most concerned with the introduction of ‘tolerance zones’, that is a designated area where prostitution is allowed. Prostitutes can make themselves visible in this area, standing on the street, waiting for clients. The question is then why the law targets this particular area and it is not really concerned with the other modes of prostitution. One of the main arguments to implement this law is that in this way it is under the control of the state. To be able to control something requires visibility of the thing one wants to control, but besides this it is also implied that in this way prostitution, ‘the necessary evil’ becomes illegal in ‘decent’ districts. Through this law, the state adopts a policy that aims primarily not to resolve or to find some kind of solution to prostitution but rather it focuses on regulating public decency. While it is concerned with the public at the same time it ignores private morality. Very simply put: If we do not see it, we do not bother about it.

By focusing on street prostitution, the law emphasizes the distinction between public and private. The public/private distinction is articulated along the lines of visibility/invisibility but does not actually equate completely the public with visibility and the private with invisibility. Invisibility is still connected with the private and the state does not want to involve itself in the private sphere. However, it does exactly that at the moment when the state has the power to define what is private and what is not. It is the state which says when prostitution is a private business. And prostitution becomes private when it is invisible. The equation becomes problematic when it comes to define the public

in case of prostitution since it makes a distinction as to what concerns the public. The public is divided into areas where visibility for prostitution is allowed: the ‘tolerance zones’ and, on the other hand, public areas where prostitution has to be made invisible. So the law on prostitution, besides making the distinction between public/visible and private/invisible, also divides the public area into visible and invisible.

These distinctions, public/visible-invisible and private/invisible, are gendered by the law since the visibility, when referring to prostitutes on the streets, concerns most of all women and invisibility, and when referring to clients, is applied to men. Through this gendered distinction, the law applicable in order to protect private decency, incriminates women who work as prostitutes since they are the visible part of this social practice that threaten (our) public decency. The clients, mostly men, remain invisible to the law. This gendered difference implied in legislation becomes visible when it is put into practice. For the police it is much easier to arrest women working on the street than their male clients, thus women become the target of police operations. Actually, the law protects the male client since the law persecutes the visible part of prostitution, that is the street prostitute, while the male client is the one who can safely remain in the shadow.

The fact that police actions are targeted only against street prostitutes, can also be criticised from the perspective of the gender representation in prostitution. It never actually occurs to anyone that “(...) more men are involved in prostitution - in variety of ways - as clients, pimps, landlords, and so on than women” (Gwinnett:1998:99). Thus the law not only neglects all the other different forms of prostitution, since it is only concerned with street prostitution, but is also gender-biased when it comes to the gender of those who are implicated in prostitution. The law and also the discussions around prostitution generated by the introduction of this law focus on the prostitute and do not take into account the whole network of men who support this sexual practice.

The ‘material recompense’ mentioned in the definition given by the law to prostitution, and the identification of sexual intercourse as a sexual service, show that the law regards prostitution a service. It works according to the rules of economic laws of demand and supply like any other service. According to the rule of the market, service depends on the demand. If there is no demand, the service disappears. So actually prostitution is financed by the clientele who in this whole discussion on prostitution becomes completely invisible. The client is the invisible part that is hidden by all the other issues that are in the foreground of the debate about the legalisation of prostitution.

The invisibility of the client is the point where the complicity or habitual affinity between state and men can be pinpointed (a proposition discussed at Mária Adamik's seminar: *Gendering the Welfare State*). Even though men are the ones who finance prostitution (since they form the largest part of society that demands this kind of service), when the state wants to interfere with and regulate prostitution, the state completely forgets about this side of the issue. The Hungarian law focusing on street prostitution actually reinforces gender inequality. It criminalizes street prostitutes as the target group of police intervention and protects men, the clients. Arresting street prostitutes is an easy option for the police since with a lot of successful prosecutions, they can argue that they are 'visibly' successfully combating prostitution. To go even further, the state can also on this basis legitimise the success of this law to its citizens, since the law helps to keep clean certain public spheres, to keep invisible certain public spaces. This is the most the state can do.

Besides the introduction of the 'tolerance zone', the law introduces another regulation on the basis of which prostitutes can also be arrested: the medical certificate. The medical discourse of the 19th century that created the image of woman's sexuality as dangerous and pathological contributed to the involvement of medical institutions in the control of prostitution and they became an important regulatory mechanism for prostitution in addition to the police. The state designated these two institutions to carry out the implementation of the regulatory measures against prostitution. Prostitution was seen by the authorities as the main source of venereal diseases that could achieve epidemic proportions and consequently the control lay in strict health regulations for the female body in order to protect the 'healthy' society.

The introduction of the compulsory medical certificate is also another regulation of the state that reinforces gender inequality since it victimizes the prostitute as she is the one who can be prosecuted by the police if she does not have the proper medical certificate. Legally, the client can not be held accountable at all from this point of view. Moreover I consider that this introduction of a medical certificate is in the favour of the client since it is particularly introduced to protect the health of the client for which the prostitute literally has to pay since she is the one who has to cover the expenses of these medical check-ups. The compulsory medical check-up is presented as a necessary regulation in order to overcome the spreading of venereal diseases in society. Then the question becomes to whom we are referring when we talk about 'society'. Society in this case is reduced to the prostitutes and the clients and then those other women with whom the clients have

relationships, wives and life partners. In this connection what I would like to point out is that the client is the one who is actually going to spread the disease since he is the one caught in the middle. However, whenever the metaphor of prostitution as disease is used, the prostitute is considered to be the agent for spreading the disease and the client becomes the suffering object. In the case of handling the medical aspect of prostitution, both the discourse on prostitution that speaks of prostitution as an epidemic disease that threatens the health of society and also the practice, the legal consequences of this discourse - the requirement for a medical certificate - focuses on the prostitute. She is the one who is incriminated and the one to blame for the disease.

The Hungarian law on prostitution implemented in 1999 introduced two main measures in order to legalise and to control prostitution. One was the establishment of 'tolerance zones' and the other one is the obligatory medical certificate. In the previous paragraphs, my main argument is that both these regulations actually protect the client most of all because they always focus on the prostitute and never on the client. They also imply gender inequality since the person who can be incriminated in both cases is the prostitute and only with difficulty can the client be cited before the law. Thus the state through both the formulation and the implementation of this law hides the client, establishing a complicity between man and state.

Conclusions

The current Hungarian law has three major faults. It considers prostitution a phenomenon of organized crime which, in the case of human trafficking, it is, but the law does not make the connection in this sense. On the contrary, the law against organized crime has come to be used against prostitutes rather than to protect them. This 'mistake' can also be the consequence of the lack of differentiation between all kinds of prostitution, the major one being the difference between being coerced into prostitution or freely choosing this profession. Furthermore the *Offences against Sexual Ethics* of the Penal Code is based upon a "compulsory Victorian moral system" that "[...] it is incompatible with a citizen's right to ideological freedom" (Hungarian Civil Liberties Union and other civic associations. "Statement". 2002. at <http://hc.netsudio.hu/hc/jogok/btk/statement>). Plus, the definition of 'sexual service' rests only on the sexual involvement of the prostitute. This already hints at the third problem: the visibility of the prostitute and the

invisibility of the client that has as consequence in practice the arrest of many prostitutes and no clients.

Currently there are three modes of legal regime regarding prostitution: Criminalization, Regulation and Abolitionism. All three regimes share two main policy considerations. One is the protection of prostitutes from exploitation of a third party and the other one is the protection of the public from the effects of and exposure to prostitution. The difference between them is due to the position assigned by law to the prostitute that ranges from total criminalization to complete exemption from regulation (for a detailed explanation of the different modes of regulation of prostitution see Davis: 2002). The present Hungarian prostitution law falls into the category of regulation that "... does not accord prostitutes any rights beyond the right not to be criminally charged in certain circumstances" (*ibid.*).

In the last few years, many non-governmental, civic associations have tried to reopen the problems of regulating prostitution by issuing statements in which they argue for the necessity of a new legislation: "[...] the creation of legal regulations that guarantee the freedom, dignity and human rights of the prostitute" ("Statement", 2002 at <http://hc.netsudio.hu/hc/jogok/btk/statement.htm>). The Movement for a Hungary Free of Prostitution has sent a petition to every MP asking for a new legislation that focuses on the regulation of the clientele ("Open Letter to the MPs and Members of the Government": 2003 at <http://prostitucio.hu/level.kepviseloknek.2003.09.17.htm>). The Association for the Protection of The Interest of Hungarian Prostitutes lobbies for a legislation that would improve the working conditions of prostitutes (Trencsényi: Népszabadság, 2002.06.07, p.24). Certainly, there is an expressed need for a new law that should not be solely a battleground for politics as the one in force is, but should come into being through negotiation between all the parties involved, including associations of prostitutes and other non-governmental groups fighting for civic rights.

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Gender, Difference and Trauma

SOME APPROACHES OF THE BODY AND ITS GENDERED DIFFERENCE

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Bodies have been classified by modern theories of sexual and racial difference according to anatomical, biological and phenotypic characteristics. Today much mainstream and commonsense thinking still assumes that the body is the obvious and transparent sign of a person's gender and race, guaranteeing the meanings and values attributed to them. Bodies are seen as the source of the sexually and racially specific characteristics of the individual.

The body can be taken as an image - the image of a person. Roland Barthes described a passive model of our relationship to self image: "You are the only one who can never see yourself except as an image; you never see your eyes unless they are dulled by the gaze they rest upon the mirror or the lens ... even and especially for your own body, you are condemned to the repertoire of its images" (Barthes, 1996:11). In Barthes's vision, the body can only be grasped through the mirror of the reflected gaze. Bodies are discerned according to the two sexes, but according to the Freudian concepts of voyeurism and fetishism Laura Mulvey has grouped bodies into: "women as passive objects of the look, and men as the active subjects of their own desires" (Betterton, 1996:11). This statement entirely corresponds to Freud's characterization of women as passive elements, while treating men as the moving engines of the world. And it is also the perfect embodiment of the so-called classic formulation: "men looked and women appeared".

Many women were carried along by this theory of "the male gaze", but as might have been expected, revolutionary feminists did not long tolerate having to march onto this stage in front of a masculine audience. They wanted to become part of the audience too. After reclaiming and acquiring the weak sex of lesbians, transvestites or masquerade participants, women assumed the part of spectatorship they had been longing for.

The French psychoanalyst and philosopher Luce Irigaray is among the first of the radical feminists who strives hard to give women more than just a perfect, seamless image and, to achieve this she advances the idea of the speculum: "We cannot remain pure reflections, nor two dimensional flesh/bodies. Privileging the flat mirror, a technical object exterior to us, and the images which it gives back to us, can only generate for us, give us a

false body, a surplus two dimensional body” (Irigaray, 1996:11). Irigaray rejects the metaphor of the mirror in which woman merely re-duplicates the male gaze, and replaces it with the speculum whose curved surface reflects the female interior. In her book *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray contends that the model of the “mirror” through which our bodies are re-presented to us from without in idealized form, is one seen as through men’s eyes. Being flat, the mirror lacks the volume necessary to the representation of the rounded and curved female body. She agrees that for a woman it is better to re-create herself in images that give her volume, because they properly represent her material body. If woman denies her body of volume, she might be in danger of losing herself in a labyrinth because she allows herself to become what man has already given form to. Irigaray’s metaphor could also be interpreted as a security measure against male intolerance accorded to women; it is part of her feminist manifesto.

In an article entitled *The Other: Woman*, Irigaray explains the title of her book and the significance she wanted people to get from the book: “Thus, *speculum* denotes a gynaecological instrument, though at an earlier period in our culture this term was used to denote the most faithful expression of reality possible. *Speculum mundi*, for example, was not an uncommon title and was what I had in mind. It signifies mirror of the world – not so much the reflection of the world in a mirror as the thought of the reality or objectivity of the world through a discourse. Unfortunately, this second meaning, the most important in terms of what I intended, is less well-known” (Irigaray, 1997:309). The switch from the gynaecological instrument to an objective discourse passes unexpectedly through the universe of a speculum, a mirror. Irigaray plays upon words and meanings in her endeavour to figure out the same feminist approach.

In Foucault’s approach the body is perceived other than biologically in a way related to pleasure: “Foucault, like Nietzsche, seems to require the meeting of (at least) two antagonistic forces in order for his ‘analytics of power’ to function: on the one hand, the particular procedures and techniques of social institutions (prison, hospital, asylum, factory, school); on the other hand, the resisting and resistant bodies and pleasures of individuals” (Grosz, 1994:155). In a sense, Foucault seems to imply that body and pleasure pre-exist power, that they are or may be the raw materials on which power works and the sites for possible resistance to the particular form power takes. A key word in Foucault’s model is power, which he can find in all types of relationships and to which he attributes positive values. His analytics of power has both strengths and limitations. He speaks of the

productive dimensions of power relations, including relations of power that are patriarchal but none the less offer women forms of subjectivity and pleasure that are experienced as pleasurable: “Power is not something that is acquired, seized or shared, it is a relationship. Relations of power inhere in all types of relationship (economic relations, sexual relations, knowledge relations). Power is not only restrictive and repressive, it is also productive. There is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives. 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” (Weedon, 1999:119). Foucault does not assume uniformity in the ways in which patriarchal power relations work and his discussion suggests broader strategies of power which manifest themselves in institutions. Foucault contests the notion that there is any such thing as sex outside the range of discourses that constitute sexuality; there cannot be sex without sexuality, without gender. He suggests rather enigmatically that the deployment of sexuality may be vulnerable to a counterattack from the point of view of bodies and pleasures. Elizabeth Grosz wonders why bodies and pleasures should be a source of subversion in a way that sex and desire are not. The answer she finds is a rephrasing of Foucault’s overview of development, corresponding to his theory of feminine bodies. He only rarely discusses female bodies and pleasures, and it seems obvious that to him the neutral body can only be unambiguously filled in by the male body and men’s pleasures.

Foucault’s work deals with the masculine or neutral body, leaving aside the female body. When he mentions women, he outlines only one specific programme of sexualization directed toward women: “the hystericalization of women’s bodies. In treating hysteria as an effect of power’s saturation of women’s body, he ignores the possibility of women’s strategic occupation of hysteria as a form of resistance to the demands and requirements of heterosexual monogamy and the social and sexual role culturally assigned to women. Like homosexual or any other sexual practices, the hystericalization of women’s bodies is a procedure that, depending on its particular context, its particular location, and the particular subjects, may function as a form of complicity with or refusal of patriarchal sexual relations” (Grosz, 1994:157-158). According to Grosz, this form of feminine neurosis can have helpful connotations. It is not just a form of protest, but it might be rendered through feminist lenses as a shield women build around themselves to cope with heterosexual coupling. Maybe Grosz’s intention was to make us aware of the fact that she shares Chodorow and Rich’s belief, which is that women have a natural lesbian penchant.

Grosz agrees that women are not innately heterosexual and they should try to break down the barriers and face their real choices. The hystericalization of women's bodies is a form of complicity with or against heterosexual relationships.

Foucault believed that bodies and pleasures pre-existed the socio-political deployments of power or resisted them; for Nietzsche, it is the "instincts", pre-given, "pre-natural" - forces and impulses that require to be tamed and given representation and memory by social inscriptions - and he sees the body as a surface of social incision; Lingis is also committed to a sexual, experiencing body, but a body that is rendered neuter.

Lingis has a particular vision of the body. He distinguishes a pure body, the body before its social incision, which he sees as form of pure plenitude, a series of undifferentiated processes and functions that become erotic and sexually specific only by social marks. It is this presumption of a sexually neutral or indeterminate, universal body that enables him to render circumcision as equivalent to clitoridectomy: "...circumcision castrates the male of the labia about his penis, as clitoridectomy castrates the female of her penis. It is through *castration of the natural bisexual* that the social animal is produced" (Lingis, 1994:157). Lingis sees the body as naturally bisexual, and it is a form of social, inscriptive "castration" that creates the division between the sexes. Both clitoridectomy and circumcision function as support for the phallus. Lingis establishes circumcision and clitoridectomy as the two types of social castration, and even more, he inscribes differently sexed bodies through a rooting out of a sexual organ. Removal of the male labia, circumcision, is known in many cultures to be enhancing sexual pleasure in a way that clitoridectomy does not. The latter implies the annihilation of the bodily sources of women's genital pleasure in the interests of men. We cannot equal the two medical interventions here, and there cannot be symmetry in this way between the two sexes. Clitoridectomy should be equated not with circumcision, but with the removal of the penis (with the preservation of testicles). Lingis sketched sexually differentiated bodies through some medical process as he wanted to find the body in its pure form, before its social opening onto life. In order to accomplish circumcision or clitoridectomy, he starts from the premise that the body is neutral, just as Foucault does. Knowing the impact of circumcision by comparison with clitoridectomy, he probably agrees with Foucault on the supremacy of the male body and on the body of the neutral becoming filled with male substance.

A revolutionary and much studied philosophy concerning the body comes from the avant-garde theorists Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Their complex work, *A Thousand Plateaus*, treats the issue of the body from a different point of view. They use a number of concepts that overlap with the concerns of feminist theories of the body: the rhizome, assemblage, machine, desire, multiplicity, becoming and the Body without Organs (BwO). All the elements mentioned so far seem helpful in understanding the BwO. Deleuze and Guattari see the body as fragments of a desiring machine and themselves as composed of a series of desiring machines. According to this definition, the body is made up of fragments of reality that can be social, individual or collective. When this body constituting reality is amenable to the flows and intensities of the desiring machines that constitute it, Deleuze and Guattari called it The Body without Organs. The BwO is the body in the fullness of its biological, psychical organization and organs: “The body without organs is not a dead body but a living body all the more alive and teeming once it has blown apart the organism and its organization...The full body without organs is a body populated by multiplicities” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994:168). The BwO invokes a conception of the body that is disinvested of phantasy, images, projections, representations, and a body without a psychical or secret interior. Deleuze and Guattari speak of it as a surface of speeds and intensities before it is stratified, unified, organized, hierarchized. The BwO is not described as a body evacuated of all psychical interiority; on the contrary it is a tendency to which all bodies aspire. The BwO is best compared to an egg, which instead of being composed of three kinds of substance is fluid throughout:

The BwO is made in such a way that it can be occupied, populated only by intensities. Only intensities pass and circulate. Still, the BwO is a scene, a place, or even support upon which something comes to pass. It has nothing to do with fantasy, there is nothing to interpret. The BwO causes intensities to pass: it produces and distributes them in a *spatium* that is itself intensive, lacking extension. It is not a space nor is it in space; it is matter that occupies space to a given degree – to the degree corresponding to the intensities produced. It is non-stratified, unformed, intense matter. The matrix of intensity, intensity = o... That is why we treat the BwO as the full egg before the extension of the organism and the organization of the organs, before the formation of the strata” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994:169).

The two theorists state that the BwO does not oppose or reject organs but it is opposed to the structure or organization of bodies, to the organism. The BwO refuses all propriety, never being “yours or mine. It is always *a* body.” If the BwO never belongs to a subject, if it is never “yours” or “mine” but simply a BwO in its particular configurations and connections, it is always becoming something. Becomings are always a multiplicity, the movement or transformation from one “thing” to another that in no way resembles it. Deleuze and Guattari suggest that a great number of becomings are becoming-animal, and they involve a third term, neither human nor animal.

The most privileged way of becoming in their writings is becoming-woman, which according to them is the crucial moment of any other becoming. It is the law to all the other becomings. In order to develop their theory, they take the little girl as the cornerstone of their philosophical approach. They chose the little girl as the site of a culture’s most intensified disinvestments and recastings of the body. The little girl serves as the departure point in becoming-woman:

The question is fundamentally that of the body - the body they steal from us in order to fabricate opposable organisms. The body is stolen first from the girl: Stop behaving like that, you’re not a little girl anymore, you’re not a tomboy, etc. The girl’s becoming is stolen first, in order to impose a history, or prehistory, upon her. The boy’s turn comes next, but it is using the girl as an example, by pointing to the girl as the object of his desire, that an opposed organism, a dominant history is fabricated for him too. The girl is the first victim, but she must also serve as an example and a trap. That is why, conversely, the reconstruction of the body as a Body without Organs, the organism of the body, is inseparable from a becoming-woman or the production of a molecular woman (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994:175).

Freud had made similar attempts with the boy’s Oedipalization, and the little girl becoming woman was the very embodiment of lack. Deleuze and Guattari define girls by relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness, or even by a combination of atoms. Girls do not belong somewhere in particular, to an age, group, sex or order, they slip in everywhere. The conclusion about becomings can still appear a little shocking: “It is not the girl who becomes woman; it is becoming-woman that produces the universal girl [...] The child does not become an adult any more than the girl becomes a woman; the girl is

the becoming-woman of each sex, just as the child is the becoming young of every age” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994:175-176). Not only men must become-woman, but so too must women. The little girl is the intermediary stage in the becoming (man or woman), which has given rise to many controversies about Deleuze and his feminist approach. Feminist struggles around the question of “women’s identities”, “women’s rights” are only a part of a stage setting for the processes of becoming-woman; and becoming-woman is in turn the condition of human-becomings.

In accordance with feminine and masculine becomings, bodies and sexualities, philosophers and feminists have made another distinction. They have distinguished between male and female corporeal flows and body fluids.

Donna Haraway has invented a new type of body, *the cyborg*, which responds to both technological and societal progress and to the feminist hypotheses.

In her influential essay, *A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s*, Donna Haraway outlines some key features of a possible postmodern feminist politics. The essay uses the image of the cyborg in many ways which relate to a broad range of feminist projects encompassing the need to tackle the nuclear and environmental threats, to utilize new technologies in progressive ways and to transform the inequalities of class, gender, race and sexuality. Haraway confers on cyborgs a wide range of definitions:

A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. [...] The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women’s experience in the late twentieth century. [...] The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence. No longer structured by the polarity of public and private, the cyborg defines a technological polis based partly on a revolution of social relations in the oikos, the household (Haraway, 1997:474-475).

She envisages the cyborg as a mixture between human and machine, blurring the distinction between reality and simulation, self and other. Cyborgs appear as a natural reaction to erase the bordered relation between organism and machine. Just as cyborgs loom over this world of ours to soften the boundaries between man and technology, they bring with themselves a new opinion about gender. Cyborgs want to direct people towards

the utopian tradition of imagining a world without gender, which is perhaps a world without genesis, but also without end. They may be paralleled with the primary myth of humans without gender, the androgyne, who had no gender assigned, the one who after having travelled the world, discovered his half; thus together they became one, half man, half woman. The end of the 20th century saw a revival of the myth of the androgyne by the creation of these half-human, half technological beings. This world without gender can have a different rendering, too. It might be the neutral man shaped by Foucault, a neutral body whose content can be unambiguously filled only by the male body. In her work analysing aspects of cyborgs and cyberpunk, Jenny Wolmark defines cyberpunk by linking it to masculine elements. Cyberpunk and cyborgs belong to the same universe of imagination and material reality, the former being the sum between “computer technology and oppositional ethos of punk and rock music” (Wolmark, 1997:111). Cyberpunk, like science fiction is inscribed with the masculine. The prototypes of the cyberpunk world are the hackers and street-wise rock’n’roll heroes who populate the streets, which explains why cyberpunk is an inhospitable place for women.

The cyborg belongs to a “postgender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-Oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity” (Haraway, 1997: 475). The technical side of this cyborg appears to be related with Deleuze and Guattari’s body without organs, as that too expressed its lack of interiority, being roamed by intensities and deprived of any type of secret, fantasy, images or projections. The cyborg has no relation with Freudian elements, and also denies sexual types.

Haraway states that the main trouble about cyborgs is “that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism” (Haraway, 1997:476). The feminist rebellious spirit makes way in the cyborgs’ roots. We are cyborgs, and Haraway finds it difficult to admit that our present and future are stamped by patriarchal rules and subordination. Even if she does not state so clearly, the cyberworld is a masculine one especially because technology is masculine gendered in the dictionary of humanity. Leading will be *their* trump in the future.

The traditional dichotomy between mind and body was much enlarged by Haraway. Most of us will have to change our meaning of “traditional” or “normal”; the “integrity” or “sincerity” as the Western self gives way to decision procedures and expert systems, all

the objects that can be known scientifically must be formulated as problems in communications engineering, etc.

The cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self. The cyborg's universe seems to reveal a deep anxiety about the disintegration of the unitary self. Bruce Sterling precisely indicated which these themes are: "Certain central themes spring up repeatedly in cyberpunk. The theme of the body invasion: prosthetic limbs, implanted circuitry, cosmetic surgery, genetic alteration. The even more powerful theme of mind invasion: brain-computer interfaces, artificial intelligence, neurochemistry - techniques radically redefining the nature of humanity, the nature of the self" (Sterling, 1995:114). Our tools consist mainly of communications and biotechnologies that are able to recraft our bodies. Communications sciences and biologies are constructed by a common move - they have to translate the world in terms of a coding problem in molecular genetics, ecology, sociobiological evolutionary theory or immunobiology. In such a technological universe, the greatest threat would be the interruption of communication - of system breakdown.

Cyborgs see relations in terms of technology, power and gender. They are technical on the one side, and also lay stress on questions of interest to feminists. Although a number of theorists oppose cyborgs and cyberpunk because of their fears of human disintegration, Donna Haraway pleads in favour of this world restructured through "the social relations of science and technology, to indicate that we are not dealing with a technological determinism, but with a historical system depending upon structured relations among people" (Haraway, 1997:481-482). It means that humanity has fought for itself the direction of cyborgs, but it should also indicate that science and technology provide fresh sources of power. Cyborg imagery can suggest, according to Haraway, a way out of the maze of dualisms by which we have explained our bodies and tools to ourselves.

Even if it might appear that the human body is unchanged and cannot be changed, the scientific approach concludes differently. The body is in permanent evolution; it progresses or changes in order to conform to actual society. The body offers the first visual impact, but we can learn its interiority. It has organs, leaks, seeps, is feminist porte-parole, and is patriarchally inscribed. The body bears sex and fingerprints of sexuality, which though not recently discovered, surprise by their discourses about queerness, bisexuality or transgender.

Sexuality involves a marked tension between sameness and difference, presenting great challenges to anyone studying not only the fast expansion of sexual identities today but also the non-traditional directions taken by the discussion. Even if we inhabit a world of postmodern uncertainty, one thing remains for sure. There is a desperate need for a common language that respects various expressions of eroticism.

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MOTHER – DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP IN BRITISH FEMINIST DRAMA FROM A PSYCHOANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVE.

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To put mother-daughter on stage by themselves was new. We'd seen father-son on stage for centuries. (Marsha Norman, interviewed by Esther Harriott in December 1986).

In the quotation above Marsha Norman refers to the situation in American theatre, but her statement can also be applied to Great Britain. In this study we are concerned with the mother-daughter relationship in British drama, which has become an important theme in the dramatic work of feminist playwrights such as Shelagh Delaney, Ann Jellicoe, Jill Fleming, Sarah Daniels, Louise Page and Sharman Macdonald, among others. In the last forty years, feminist consciousness has been developing and women have “conquered” the stage. Undoubtedly, the stage is an ideal place of experimentation to present feminine subjectivity and examine the roles assigned throughout history to women, whose work has been hidden or marginalized. Modern women's theatre has developed a feminist discourse of representation as opposed to “the oppressive discourse of engendered representation which constructs and positions “*woman*” as “*the other-from-man*” (De Lauretis, 1984:5). This idea has dominated French feminist theory set forth by Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. They have studied Jacques Lacan's re-framing of Freudian psychoanalytic theory oriented towards the ways in which the human subject is constructed. Lacan has defined the acquisition of language, and with it the values of society, as entry into the Symbolic Order, metaphorically represented as the “mirror stage”, which constructs the child's identity. He termed the pre-Oedipal phase the Imaginary; it is the entry into an external order which represents the Law of the Father, and the loss of the mother. Feminism and psychoanalysis have been principally concerned with exposing how the arbitrarily imposed Symbolic (phallic) Order in which all subjects as members of a communicating social order are required to participate and privileges the male at the expense of the female (see Aston, 1995:36).

Cixous critiques women as the object of male exchange and desire. Her whole theoretical project can be summed up as the effort to undo the logocentric ideology: to

proclaim woman as the source of life, and to hail the advent of a new, feminine language that subverts the patriarchal binary schemes of Woman as “Other” than Man (Moi, 1985:105), which requires a bursting, a violent breaking up of the symbolic order, that has silenced women and has denied their identity. Irigaray critiques the Western traditions of philosophy and psychoanalysis for the ways in which they have systematically relegated woman to a negative, non-subject, non-speaking position. She defends the necessity of “speaking the body”, which constitutes an attractive proposal for women’s writing and performance in theatre by using a non-linear feminine discourse (Aston, 1995:49). Kristeva is resistant to the idea of a female language (see Moi, 1985: Ch. 8). She invites the readings of texts as semiotic or symbolic – terms that replace Lacan’s Imaginary and Symbolic Order. Generally, feminist criticism and feminist playwrights have refused to accept linear time because it does not encompass women’s experience and is alienating to the female subject, as in dramatic forms such as realism.

Psychoanalysis is now recognised as crucial in the discussion of femininity and sexuality. Freud has stressed the importance of childhood development of gender personality and gender identity, which is the origin of male and female sexual differentiation. In the pre-Oedipal period the sexual development of boys and girls is hardly differentiated, but becomes explicit in the Oedipal period after about age three to five. Freud maintains that during the Oedipal crisis the boy rejects his mother, internally denying and repressing his deep attachment to her and the strong dependence upon her, while identifying with his father. His early attachment to his mother takes on phallic-sexual overtones, so that his father enters the picture as a rival. In the boy’s fantasy, the father, loved and admired, is also seen as potentially punitive, and with the power to kill or castrate him. The development of a girl’s gender identity contrasts with that of a boy. She identifies with femininity and female role activities, represented by her mother or other females. According to Freud and other early psychoanalysts, the girl’s sense of gender identity suffers a major discontinuity when she must transfer, at one moment of her development, her primary sexual object choice from her mother to her father and other males, if she is to attain heterosexual adulthood. The triangle formed by the father, the mother and the child determines its sexual development. In Freud’s theory, the father is given a fundamental role in the constitution of personality, while a distortion and degradation is produced in the function of the mother. His definition of feminine sexuality is clearly phalocentric.

Freud's theory has been criticised by the women's movement, in general, and specifically by feminists such as, among others, Nancy J. Chodorow, Melanie Klein, and Karen Horney. Their criticism concerns Freud's misogyny and his assumptions that males possess physiological superiority and that a woman's personality is determined by her lack of a penis. Clara M. Thompson (1943) has rightly pointed out that *penis envy* is a symbolic expression of women's culturally devalued and underprivileged position in our patriarchal society: possession of a penis symbolizes the possession of power and privilege. Bruno Bettelheim (1954) suggests that members of each sex envy the sexual functions of the other. Melanie Klein (1932) follows Bettelheim in substituting the notion of *penis envy* for *womb envy*: the boy develops a kind of complex when he discovers the absence of a womb, the organ of creation, which may provoke his hatred towards the feminine.

Nevertheless, feminist psychoanalysts agree that Freud's psychoanalytic account of the female Oedipus complex reveals important features of female development, especially of motherhood and the mother-daughter relationship. They emphasize that the female Oedipal crisis is not resolved in the same absolute way as in males, since a girl cannot completely reject her mother in favour of men, but continues her relationship of dependence upon and attachment to her mother (Chodorow, 1989:53). As a result, separation from and attachment to her mother remain important issues throughout a woman's life (Deutsch, 1973). Feminist psychoanalysts have studied the relationship between mother and daughter from a psychological point of view, as separate identities, though linked by nature. Their theory has exerted a powerful influence on feminist criticism as regards the interpretation of literary texts. In the seventies it started to be used to study and analyse sexual differences in society, male supremacy and domination. There were also signs of a reorientation in feminist thinking regarding motherhood. For radical feminists, reproduction is the primary cause of women's oppression. Adrienne Rich (1977) frames motherhood as a question for women alone, while materialist feminists, though accepting the primacy of women's oppression, insist that men as well as women must change. Mary O'Brien argues that "the integration of women on equal terms in the productive realm" must be balanced by "the integration of men into the relations of reproduction and into the active care of the next generation" (O'Brien in Keohane, Rosaldo and Gelpi, 1982:111, quoted in Stoneman 1987:17). This view is shared by Dorothy Dinnerstein (1976) who argues that a pernicious political system based on class war and international aggression can be dismantled only by the involvement of men in primary

child-care. Chodorow (1978) gives an exhaustive and radical psychoanalytic justification for this claim, challenging the inevitability of Freud's Oedipal triangle in which the primary mother-child dyad is interrupted by the culture-bearing father. In her search for a positive role for the mother, Chodorow, like Dinnerstein, argues that infants cared for from birth by both men and women would experience no discontinuity between the nurturing relationships of childhood and adult life.

E. Ann Kaplan (1992:45) explains how analysts in North America following Freud constructed representations of "good" and "bad" mothers whose purpose was "to manipulate women in, or out of, the work-force, in accordance with capitalism's needs". In this sense "motherhood" is used as a social function constructed by patriarchy where the mother, as a human being, is absent and is not taken into account. Luce Irigaray, in her study "Women-mothers, the silent substratum", has tried to find an answer to the question of motherhood or the image presented of mothers raised by society, as a whole, and specifically by their daughters:

But how, as daughters, can we have a personal relationship with or construct a personal identity in relation to someone who is no more than a function? In a sense we need to say goodbye to maternal omnipotence (the last refuge) and establish a woman-to-woman relationship of reciprocity with our mothers, in which they might possibly also feel themselves to be our daughters. In a word, liberate ourselves along with our mothers. That is an indispensable precondition for our emancipation from the authority of fathers. In our societies, the mother/daughter, daughter/mother relationship constitutes a highly explosive nucleus. Thinking it, and changing it, is equivalent to shaking the foundations of the patriarchal order (Luce Irigaray, in Margaret Whitford, 1993: 50).

I have chosen two British feminist plays that deal with mother-daughter relationships: *A Taste of Honey*, by Shelagh Delaney, performed in 1958, and *Real Estate*, by Louise Page, performed in 1984. Though written in different periods by different authors and each with a different social context, both plays present women and daughters as main figures on the stage. Both plays raise questions about motherhood, and dramatize the link, which is often conflictive and full of tension between a mother and a daughter. In my opinion, their relationship can be read from a psychoanalytical perspective following feminist psychoanalytic theories as outlined above.

The play *A Taste of Honey* (1959/1993) was written by an unknown nineteen-year-old girl from Salford. It was first produced in London in 1958 by Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop, who advocated innovative stagecraft and socially conscious drama, which was influenced by Bertolt Brecht and Samuel Beckett. The play, as Lib Taylor (1993:19) has pointed out, is "often cited as an early example of a feminist text, and could be called feminine/reflectionist in its conscious focus upon women characters and the female condition". The two women characters of the play are Helen, described in the stage directions as "a semi-whore", and Jo, her adolescent daughter. They are moving into a "comfortless flat" in a working-class district in Manchester, which Jo deeply dislikes. She reproaches her mother for her "immoral earnings" which she spends on whisky rather than the rent of a more decent flat. Jo complains about having to share the bed with her mother. Her exclamation "what I wouldn't give for a room of my own" (1993:8) brings to mind Virginia Woolf's claim for women needing a private space. Jo yearns to be independent and reiterates being "sick" of her selfish mother, feelings which are reciprocated by Helen. We sense a kind of love-hate relationship between mother and daughter who both conceal their mutual affection.

The conflict increases with the appearance of Peter, "a brash car salesman" (16), who turns out to be Helen's latest heavy-drinking lover. Though much younger than Helen, he proposes to marry her, because of, or in spite of, their apparent "mother and son relationship" (18). Peter has money and Helen accepts his offer to escape the squalor of her life. Her decision arouses Jo's jealousy; she accuses her mother of continuous neglect, of deserting her. Her ambivalent feelings, claiming independence *from* her mother, while showing the necessity for dependence *on* her, can be explained as characteristic of the pre-Oedipal phase when the process of differentiation, or separation-individuation, in relation to the mother occurs. According to Chodorow (1989:102), during this process a demarcation between the self and the object world occurs, "coming to perceive the subject/self as distinct, or separate from, the object/other). Helen, as the subject, experiments with the necessity for differentiation between herself and her daughter, and from the perspective of the theory of object relations, adequate differentiation involves perceiving the person's subjectivity and selfhood. The girl, on the other hand, has to learn that the mother is a separate being with separate interests and this requires an emotional shift and a form of emotional growth (see Chodorow, 1989:105).

Jo has grown up without a father. To my mind, the adversary relationship between her and her mother can be explained through Dinnerstein's theory (1976) who argues that this is the result of exclusive maternal parenting. When Helen was pregnant, her puritanical husband divorced her, because, so Jo insinuates, she was another's child. Jo enquires about her father, but Helen gives evasive answers, such as that "he was a nice feller, a bit - retarded", but that she loved him (43). Helen resents her motherhood. This fact has induced her to deny responsibility for her daughter, blaming Jo for the divorce. Peter objects to taking Helen's "snotty-nosed daughter" (34) with them. Helen, nevertheless, decides to go off with him, leaving Jo crying behind. In her loneliness, Jo invites a black sailor to spend Christmas with her, who makes a declaration of love and marriage. Like Helen, Jo tries to take advantage of a few moments of pleasure in their drab lives, as she explains: "I may as well be naughty while I've got the chance" (38). Unfortunately, her "naughtiness" leads to pregnancy. Helen, who pops in for a quick visit, reproaches Jo for committing her own mistakes. In fact, there will be a repetition of Helen's story: to raise a child without a father. Jo knows that the black sailor boy who has embarked on his next sea journey will never return. In my opinion, this explains Jo's insistent questions about her own father, wanting to know "what he was like" (42-43) to understand women's relationships with men. Helen, in her uneasiness about Jo's questioning, finally tells her that her father is dead. In British Feminist Drama we often witness a disintegrating family structure with absent, invisible or dead fathers, where women cope on their own, where children grow up in the isolation of the mother-child dyad. In *A Taste of Honey*, Delaney raises questions about motherhood and single mothers in an unsentimental way. She also discusses the issue of abortion, though both Helen and Jo have decided against it.

Jo has a natural gift for drawing which, unfortunately, is not developed. Helen, amazed at her daughter's concealed talent, and in one of her affectionate impulses, talks about sending her to a "proper art school" to get "a proper training" (15). Unluckily, because of lack of incentive and their erratic economic situation, Jo's talent is wasted. Interestingly, she meets an art student, Geoffrey, who moves into her flat when she feels abandoned and lonely. To pay for the flat, Jo works all day in a shoe shop and all night in a bar. Her pregnancy is now quite obvious, so that their conversation centres on motherhood. At this stage, Jo lacks maternal instinct; she even tells Geof that she hates motherhood (56) and the idea of having a baby, which will probably be *black*. In his concern for Jo's

impending maternity, Geof buys her a doll on which to practise. However, in an angry outburst, she hurls the *white* doll to the floor exclaiming:

I'll bash its brains out. I'll kill it. I don't want his baby, Geof. I don't want to be a mother. I don't want to be a woman (75).

Geof's puzzled observation: "Motherhood is supposed to come natural to women" (55) echoes one of the myths maintained by patriarchy which has led to women's cultural oppression. In this sense Adrienne Rich has observed:

Institutionalised motherhood demands of women maternal "instinct" rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than the creation of the self ... Motherhood as institution has ghettoised and degraded female potentialities (1984: 42).

This myth has also fomented the idealization of the mother figure, establishing the idea of a "perfect mother", self-sacrificing and giving (see Friday, 1977). Chodorow and Contratto (in Chodorow, 1989:96) oppose Friday's conception of motherhood by affirming that "to begin to transform the relations of parenting and the relations of gender, [...] we must move beyond the myths and misconceptions embodied in the fantasy of a perfect mother". As regards her relationship with her daughter, Helen has no pretensions of being a "perfect mother", calling herself "a cruel, wicked woman" (15). This self-criticism can be seen as a consequence of her unwished for maternity. Jo, who is very much her mother's image, is in danger of repeating Helen's unmaternal behaviour which leads to frustration and a feeling of "mother-blame" induced by the socially imposed idea of being a "bad" mother.

Contrary to the two women, Geof, effeminate, is presented as a mother figure who assumes the role of a "perfect mother" to Jo, making up for Helen's negligence. There is a very moving scene between them when Jo asks Geof insistently to hold her hands. She ponders on her mother's lack of love for her, telling Geof:

You know I used to try and hold my mother's hand, but she always used to pull them away from me. ... She had so much love for everyone else, but none for me (71-2).

According to the psychoanalytical theory of object relations, hands can be seen as a boundary or barrier. Through our hands we communicate and we establish a relationship with the exterior, or we trace a distance between the other and oneself. Roberta Rubinstein has studied the meaning of hands in contemporary fiction within the framework of Chodorow's theory. She explains that hands are emblems "for both tangible contact and genuine emotional connection between people" (1987:110). Helen's refusal to hold her daughter's hands can be interpreted as her wish to establish a barrier between herself and her daughter. Chodorow (1989:59) affirms that when a mother has grown up without establishing adequate ego boundaries or a firm sense of self, "she tends to experience boundary confusion with her daughter, and does not provide experiences of differentiating ego development for her daughter or encourage the breaking of her daughter's dependence". This theory also explains the contradictory tensions and ambivalent wishes of mothers and daughters to stay together, or to separate. Jo is extremely aggressive towards her mother when she turns up at her place to enquire after her, insisting repeatedly that she leave her alone. However, she cannot help missing her, above all during her emotional crisis due to her pregnancy. Helen, in turn, decides to abandon her impudent husband to be at her daughter's side "at a time like this" (labour (80)), although Jo chooses to think that Peter has thrown her mother out.

Before Helen's return, it is Geof who nurses Jo through pregnancy and does the housework, a task Jo neglects and dislikes. Geof loves Jo because of her pungent wit and biting humour. He wishes to marry her, but she is incapable of loving this "funny little man" (76) who is a kind of male eunuch. She feels there is no "marrying love" between them, though she likes Geof as the "safe" and caring friend he is, feeling as if they were a couple. Geof, in fact, would like to take on the father's role once the baby is born. Interestingly, Geof's desire for fatherhood contrasts with the women's rejection of motherhood. Delaney presents a character who longs to be a father, but who, ironically, is gay. His homosexuality or sexual neutrality acts as "catalyst for the emotional (heterosexual) dilemmas of the other characters", as Wandor (1986:144) has rightly observed. She has compared Geof's role in *A Taste of Honey* with Cliff's in *Look Back in Anger*, although his sexuality is left unexplored in Osborne's play. Cliff maintains a loving relationship with both Jimmy and Alison, as friend and lodger. Though he is statedly heterosexual, he has no sexual relationship throughout the play, and the spectator senses a kind of shadowy homo-eroticism between the two friends (Wandor, 1986:143). Sexually

neuter figures, or male eunuchs, are “safe representations of maleness” and can be seen as an oblique symbol of the crisis of mid-twentieth century virility, as Wandor (143, 144) points out. In this sense, we can speak of a certain *womb envy*, as men feel threatened by women’s potential motherhood.

Delaney’s play, though mainly about a mother-daughter relationship, raises questions about social prejudices, such as gender and race. Helen is not only shocked at the idea of a black grandchild, but she finds Geof disgusting when doing the housekeeping tasks, and so does Peter. Geof does not respond to their conventional image of men. The play shows the inadequacies of their viewpoint; they relate being gay to weakness, while Geof has shown his persistent humanity and caring unselfishness in his relationship with Jo. When Helen decides to stay, she kicks Geof out against Jo’s wishes, asking the audience the loaded question “What would you do?” (87). Thus Helen shifts her responsibility to the audience so that her *personal* decision is converted into a *political* question. In order for the audience to feel the effect of this question and to share the characters’ alienation, the play has to be presented in a non-conventional way. Littlewood’s Theatre Workshop production undermined the naturalistic inclination of the dialogue, setting and plot by rendering an interplay between words and music achieved through the intermittent playing of a live jazz trio during the play (see Keyssar, 1994:41).

Following a circle structure, the play ends as it began, with the two women living together again, quarrelling as before, and as before unwilling to show their mutual affection. Both Helen and Jo “enjoyed” a transitory relationship with a man – they have had “a taste of honey” as the title of the play indicates. Now they have to proceed with their drab daily struggle for survival with a baby at their charge. At this moment, there exists a kind of identification between them, though Jo cannot help resenting Helen’s selfish attitude when she left her for Peter:

So we’re back where we started. And all those months you stayed away from me because of him! Just like when I was small (81).

There is a recognition of a mutual necessity and dependence when Jo observes that there won’t be any trouble for them to live together again, because they are wonderful. And she affirms:

I feel as though I could take care of the whole world. I even feel as though I could

take care of you, too! (81)

At this point, Jo seems to have surpassed the ambivalent sentiments of dependence/independence, maybe as a consequence of her impending maternity. She may have developed, in spite of herself, a maternal capacity towards her mother, having established the process of differentiation between their subjectivities, mother and daughter.

If in *A Taste of Honey* there is a mother who returns to her daughter when she knows she is near childbirth, in Louise Page's play *Real Estate* (1984) it is a pregnant daughter, Jenny, who wants to be reunited with her mother, Gwen. Jenny escaped from home twenty years ago, when she was eighteen, and has not given a single sign of life all the years since. She has returned to her mother's home because she wants her to answer "some questions". She needs to know whether she has ever had German measles (1984:141-142). With maternal intuition, her mother senses that being pregnant is the reason for her daughter's return. Gwen objects to Jenny's staying for supper, afraid of becoming too emotionally involved, only to lose her once again. Her step-father, Dick, however, insists on her staying. Even Gwen warms towards the idea and we see her preparing Jenny's bed in her old room. Jenny extends her visit to the whole weekend, "kindly" including in the invitation her divorced friend Eric, the father of the baby she is expecting.

In several conversations between Dick and Jenny or Gwen and Jenny we hear about the acute pain she caused her mother, who waited year after year for her return: "Twenty years. Twenty Christmases and twenty birthdays" (176). When they were burgled Gwen did not allow Dick to change the lock, because Jenny had a key (176). Gwen did not want Dick to know how much she missed her daughter, and how she kept her treasures - photos, baby teeth, teddy, bunnies. Dick tells Eric that Gwen lost the baby she was expecting, because, "when Jenny went, her womb let go" (167) and the bleeding would never stop. Undoubtedly, the bleeding womb symbolises the mother's bleeding heart.

Jenny left because she was jealous of Dick and resented her mother's wish to remake her life. In a similar way to Jo, Jenny felt deceived when she knew that there was another person in her mother's life. However, unlike Jo, Jenny was not abandoned, but was spoilt and looked after by her mother and a substitute father, whom she hated. Because of the girl's pre-Oedipal tie to her mother, she cannot accept her having an independent life, claiming her for herself. Therefore, Jenny clashes with Dick because she sees him as a rival in their relationship. In her process of separation from her mother, which is

symbolized firstly by leaving home, and secondly by throwing the key to her home into the river, Jenny takes on a different identity, even changing her name.

Like many feminist writers, Louise Page raises the question of the “ideal mother”, the sacrificing mother. Gwen was divorced, and her American ex-husband accused her “of being a bad mother”, *blaming* her for Jenny’s disappearance. She married Dick because she was lonely and was fond of him, though she does not love him. To justify her action, Gwen tells Jenny that she thought Jenny no longer had any need for her, at least not a real need (181). It is obvious that Gwen lacks the typical mother instinct, rejecting the myth established by patriarchy. She admits to Jenny that “getting pregnant with [her] was a cheap trick to pull on him [her first husband]” (148), to force him to stay in England after the war, fearful of losing him. He had died six or seven years ago as a result of being drunk and driving into a canal (148). Gwen became pregnant a second time only to satisfy Dick’s fervent wish to have a child (which she miscarried). In a conversation with Dick she confesses that she is “not keen on small babies”, she was not keen on Jenny when she was a baby and she often loathed her.

Jenny, on the other hand, has developed a desire to be a mother late in life, at thirty-eight. She insists very much on wanting the baby, but in a possessive way: “It’s mine. In me. There. Mine” (155). She has made clear to Eric that though he is the father of her baby, he has no rights over it or over her, the baby being hers only. She does not want to marry Eric, who loves her, while she is *only* fond of him. She loves somebody else who is now “a million miles apart” (177). Absurdly, though Jenny rejects the idea of living with Eric, she selfishly insists on *needing* him. She wants him to stay with her, and tries to hinder him from fulfilling his fatherly duty. Eric is very concerned about his six-year-old daughter Lottie by his first marriage, whom he deeply cherishes. She is jealous of Jenny and Eric knows that she *needs* him as a father and that he has to be at her side. Interestingly, this idea of “needing” and “being needed” runs through the whole play.

We can observe a kind of parallelism between Jenny and her mother; both lost a man they loved, both stay with someone they are *only* fond of. Jenny has decided to have her child as a single mother. Gwen, who has had a similar experience, tells her what this implies, not having a life of her own any more. Gwen is a working woman, owner of a successful Real Estate Company, hence the title of the play. Dick tells Jenny that, when she left home, Gwen “stopped being her mother and went into business” (145). After a period of devotion to her family, Gwen has finally found her personal fulfilment and

financial freedom. In a similar way to Jenny, who adopted a different identity after her escape from home, Gwen too has undergone an important change of identity and personality. She has completed her painful separation from her daughter through her independence, both personal and economic.

As in *A Taste of Honey*, in Page's play we also have a reversal of gender roles. As Dick has already retired, and Gwen is away all day, he does the housework, and is joined in this task by Eric when he stays with them. Both men long to have children to love, like Geof in Delaney's play, so that, in psychoanalytic terms, we can again detect a kind of *womb envy*. This fact explains Dick's eagerness for Jenny to stay with them, because he wants to hold a baby in his arms. After an initial reluctance as regards Jenny and her baby, Gwen manages to stifle the old pain and joins in with the others' joy of the coming birth. Yet when she realises that her daughter has come home only because she wants her mother to help her in the nursing of her future child, she undergoes an important change in her relationship towards Jenny. In her selfishness, Jenny takes it for granted that her mother will be a dedicated grandmother. Gwen, however, does not want to give up her own successfully organized life. Jenny conquers her mother's domestic sphere, exploiting Dick's eagerness for her and Eric to stay. Not satisfied with conquering the domestic domain, Jenny barges her way into her mother's Real Estate. She first talks about their working together, taking turns looking after her daughter, Jessica, after she is born. She then proposes becoming Gwen's business partner, investing in the business the proceeds from the sale of her London flat. Ironically, she turns the tables on her mother by insisting that her mother *needs* her in the office, while it is really the daughter who needs her mother. Their relationship becomes untenable when Jenny resorts to dirty business, selling a property Gwen had already sold, and criticising her mother for not making a greater profit. Gwen becomes more and more apprehensive of Jenny's stubbornness and wilfulness. She wants Dick to realize that "Jenny is worming herself in". Gwen was deeply concerned about keeping her daughter after her return, but now she insists: "I don't want the responsibility for her life. Not any more" (195). She does not want her to stay any longer, telling her "you've gone once. You can go again" (208). Significantly Dick, the once hated stepfather, has been taken in by Jenny and wishes her to live with them, because he wants to hold the baby.

The end of the play runs counter to the expected outlet; it is not Jenny who leaves the house, but her mother. The past will not be repeated. Gwen's ultimatum is "her or me" ,

facing a husband pleading for her not to send Jenny away. Earlier in the play, Eric had tried to persuade Dick not to allow Jenny to live with them, because he sees through her. However, it took Dick twenty years to make friends with Jenny, and he does not want to live without her, and the baby, any more. So, in the end, we see Gwen leaving Dick, a step paralleled by Eric, who decides to leave Jenny before the baby is born, thus avoiding involvement in yet another emotional disappointment. It is Jenny's turn now to plead, blackmailing him with the baby she is expecting, even accepting his marriage offer, but Eric is determined to leave her. In the end, Dick is left alone with his egotistical and heartless stepdaughter to fulfil his wish of paternity belatedly. Jenny takes advantage of her stepfather's longing because he will look after her baby, while she can pursue her career. In her selfishness, she does not care about depriving her mother of her loving companion.

In both plays, we witness a conflictive mother-daughter relationship, but the pattern is different. In *A Taste of Honey*, the play begins with mother and daughter living together, followed by separation, only to be reunited again at the end to resume their struggling lives. In *Real Estate*, the pattern is reversed: separation - union - separation; a mother leaves, driven away by a possessive daughter, who tries to deprive her of her hard-won personal and economic independence. The ending runs counter to the established myth of possessive, dominating mothers, who try to direct their children's lives. Here it is the daughter who is possessive and interfering. The play's strength lies in the striking dissection of a mother-daughter relationship, where a mother rejects the idea of sacrificing herself once more after having achieved freedom, a mother who is not willing to share the fate of the many older women whose daughters dump their children on them, as Page said in an interview with Barney Bardsley (1985:13-15). *Real Estate*, like *A Taste of Honey*, is a play about mothers and daughters, female independence and free motherhood, which is one of the issues of Feminist Drama. As so many other women playwrights, Delaney and Page question the role of women in society and the painful choices they have to make: to be a "good" mother, or to be a successful professional woman. They seem to imply, as do Caryl Churchill and Pam Gems, for instance, that a fulfilment of both roles is still incompatible in our society, a view open to question.

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DETECTION AND PALIMPSEST IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *SURFACING*

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In the following essay, I intend to read Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* within the generic framework of the anti-detective story and trace how the anti-detective plot can be co-ordinated with an interrelated psychoanalytic approach to the novel. William V. Spanos coined the term "anti-detective story" to refer to narratives that "evoke the impulse to 'detect' ... in order to violently frustrate it by refusing to solve the crime" (quoted in Merivale and Sweeney, 1999:2-3). Anti-detective stories can generally be defined as texts investigating (and subverting) the well-known paraphernalia of traditional detective plots: "these stories apply the detective process to that genre's own assumptions about detection" (Merivale and Sweeney, 1999:3) and undermine certain generic characteristics and clichés -such as the infallible and omnipotent detective or the possibility of reaching a narrative closure - taken for granted by and in conventional detective stories.

The present paper will concentrate on the first 17 chapters of Atwood's novel, which set the scene for a detective plot: this gradually unfolds the unnamed female narrator's return to her childhood home to track down the whereabouts of her father, who has mysteriously gone missing. The narrator is not a professional but a self-appointed detective, who initially shows a considerable amount of reluctance to get down to the "job": "I want to turn around and go back to the city and never find out what happened to him" (Atwood, 1987:12), she claims. Yet, as her narrative progresses, it is more and more markedly circumscribed by the *topos* of detection and soon it comes to operate with a number of formal and thematic properties typical of the (anti-)detective genre.

The narrator's attempt to master the missing paternal story (that is, to solve the mystery of the father's disappearance) inevitably falls victim to the inherently paradoxical logic of anti-detective stories: on the one hand, the perfect (re)construction of a coherent, linear and teleological narrative can only be born out of repression, but on the other hand, this repression creates textual fissures, where the possibility of capturing the presupposed ultimate meaning of the narrative gets destabilized. In *Surfacing*, the paternal line of the narrative, coded by the storyteller's desire for totality, always already inscribes its own

repressed, marginalized, maternal Other: the traumatic story of the narrator's coerced abortion. Consequently, the text becomes the palimpsest of two distinct narratives: one of them relates the quest for the father and is located in the Symbolic realm, the other is concerned with the trauma of the abortion and belongs to the Semiotic realm of resurfacing pre-Oedipal traces.

In his essay on detective fiction, Slavoj Žižek (1994:116) writes that "what we have at the beginning is a void, a blank of the unexplained, more properly, of the *unnarrated* [...]. The story encircles this blank, it is set in motion by the detective's attempt to reconstruct the missing narrative by interpreting the clues." *Surfacing* follows exactly the same pattern. After her initial reluctance, the narrator assumes the role of the detective and "set[s the detective plot] in motion": on arriving at her father's house she asserts that "whatever I find inside will be a clue" (Atwood, 1987:34) and having "scan[ned] the room cautiously" she firmly states that "nothing is out of place" (Atwood, 1987:35). As a result of her meticulous search she finds her father's odd drawings marked by numbers. "The numbers were a system, a game; I would play it with him" (Atwood, 1987:104), she decides. This implies that the reading of the various traces can take place only according to the logic her father set up for the game – the father whom the narrator describes as a man who explained everything and "admired what he called the eighteenth century rationalists" (Atwood, 1987:38).

The scene of the father's disappearance is set off-stage and generates a lack upon which the heroine's discursive position is established. This position, though, is alien to the narrator, who comments on her involvement in the act of narration as follows: "My throat constricts, as it learned to do when I discovered people could say words that would go into my ears meaning nothing. To be deaf and dumb would be easier" (11). As a woman, she is deprived of a voice of her own in which to articulate her father's story and she is obliged to identify with a pre-constructed, essentially male discursive position, which Julia Kristeva (quoted in Collins, 1996:67) calls "a phallic and manly pose that imitates a father or an authoritarian male figure".

The narrator's articulation of the wish to know linguistics (Atwood, 1987:41) expresses her endeavour to conform to the Law of the Father and to preserve her mastery over the narrative. Besides having to narrate the detection process from an inherently alien *locus* of speech she makes up her mind to enter into her father's game of numbers and strictly observe the rules set up by him. Thus not only is the discursive situation based on

the imitation of the rational-minded scientist-father, but the strategy of the detection is also dictated by him. Furthermore, she takes up the “phallic and manly pose” of the omnipotent and infallible detective when she assumes that the police and the searchers “must have missed something, I feel it will be different if I look myself” (24). Hence, her voice comes to be a pastiche constituted of various authorised and phalocentric discourses, which all designate the father’s mysterious absence as the central structuring element in the text and himself (that is, finding him, wherever he is) as the only possible point of closure to the narrative. In this sense, the father becomes the embodiment of the Lacanian concept of the phallus: the needed “anchorage of meaning” (Ellmann, 1994:22), the element which is supposed to terminate the “incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier” (Lacan quoted in Ellmann, 1994:26).

“It was there but it wasn’t a painting, it wasn’t on the rock. It was below me, drifting towards me from the furthest level where there was no life, a dark oval, trailing limbs” (Atwood, 1987:142). These sentences, probably the most important ones in the whole novel from the point of view of this paper, are delivered when the narrator, having concluded that her father’s drawings are copies of underwater Indian rock paintings, dives into the lake to prove the existence of the paintings. The significance of this section lies in the fact that even though it hints at the heroine’s discovery of her father’s drifting corpse, the text never clarifies directly whether what she describes as the “dark oval, trailing limbs” is indeed the father’s drowned body. Therefore, the figure of the father (the postulated point of closure to the narrative) becomes a trope to which neither a fixed presence nor an ultimate referent can be attached. Instead, it can be furnished with further conceptual referents, which results in the constant deferral of meaning and renders the possibility of a textual closure phantasmagoric. The section quoted above continues as follows:

It formed again in my head: at first I thought it was my drowned brother, hair floating around the face [...] but it couldn’t be him, he had not drowned after all, he was elsewhere. Then I recognized it: it wasn’t even my brother I’d been remembering, that had been a disguise. [...] It was there [...] and I thought, whatever it is, part of myself or a separate creature, I killed it. It wasn’t a child but it could have been one, I didn’t allow it (143).

At this most revealing point of the text the image of the dark oval trailing limbs becomes metaphorically invested and, after being momentarily associated with the narrator's brother, it comes to designate the narrator's aborted child instead of her father's corpse.

This figurative substitution is of utmost importance because it establishes several associative links between the textual logic of *Surfacing* and the subversive dynamic of anti-detective stories. The key to these parallels is to detect by what means the text frustrates the expectations of its readers, who base their assumptions on their "familiarity" with the rules and narrative structures of conventional detective stories. *Surfacing* does open with the promise of a traditional detective plot: it presents the reader with a mystery (somebody disappears), it appoints a detective, who starts the investigation and thus it tricks the readers into believing that a proper solution to the mystery is also automatically guaranteed. The desired solution, however, fails to materialize; it is suspended, exactly because of the above mentioned figurative substitution: instead of the father's body, the readers are confronted with the fact of the narrator's abortion.

At this point a side remark needs to be made in connection with how strongly presupposition may influence even critics' approach to various literary texts. As I have already mentioned, the novel never clarifies whether the narrator actually sees her father's body in the lake or not. Still, several critics of the novel, affected by their own and by their readers' desire for the discovery of a corpse, cannot do without the father's drowned body and read it into the diving scene.

The diving scene in *Surfacing* displays another typical characteristic of anti-detective stories, which frequently conflate the role of the detective with that of the criminal to outflank readerly expectations. Merivale (1999:107) claims that in anti-detective stories "the triadic multiplicity of detective, criminal and victim is [often] reduced to a solipsistic unity." When uncovering the fact of her abortion, the narrator labels her deed as "slaughter" and as "murder" (Atwood, 1987:145), by way of which she contextualises it as a crime and herself as a criminal, a murderer. This subversion, however, is more than frustrating: the text presents a "murderess", whose deed is in no palpable way connected to the original mystery (the father's disappearance), even more so because the very existence of the father's corpse with which the "criminal" should be paired off has already been textually destabilized. As Tani (quoted in Merivale, 1999:103) observes, the frequent intermingling of the role of the detective with that of the criminal is due to the fact that in

anti-detective stories “the confrontation [...] is no longer between the detective and the ‘murderer’ but between [...] the detective’s mind and his sense of identity, which is falling apart, between the detective and the ‘murderer’ in his own self”.

The narrator’s coming to terms with the trauma of her abortion and the consequent displacement of the father by the aborted foetus require the revision of the paternal story line and the retrospective uncovering of all the textual anomalies that have been disregarded or cast aside in favour of certain pre-constructed reading patterns. When they get to the diving scene, the readers have to realize that the text, by means of drawing on their generic anticipations, has entrapped them: as soon as the narrator takes up the role of the detective, her reliability, based on the readers’ presuppositions about the all-knowing and infallible detective of classical detective stories, is taken for granted. This, however, leads to the passing over of seemingly insignificant textual incongruities a few of which the rest of the paper will aim to shed light on.

One of them is the unexpected shift of tenses from present to past in Chapter 9 and from past back to present in Chapter 20, whereby after Chapter 9 the narrator applies a past tense storytelling to relate her recollected childhood memories as well as the most immediate events of the ongoing detection. Seen retrospectively, the diving scene makes it clear that the first nine chapters (narrated in the present tense) do not merely communicate a linear flow of present events related to the heroine’s investigation but always already inscribe significant elements of the heroine’s past. The presence of this counter-dynamism in the text is due to the fact that the heroine’s referential framework is primarily structured by the trauma of her abortion. This single event of the past becomes the central organising element of the narrative whereby most of what takes place in the present becomes inevitably associated with it (and with the past). The use of the past tense from Chapter 9 onwards also conveys the major thematic concern of the text (that is, the eventual facing of the trauma) in rhetorical terms.

Resulting from the more and more intensive surfacing of disguised traumatic memories, the referentiality of the narrator’s language becomes multiplied and destabilized. According to Suli Barzilai’s argument (2000:58), such lapses of referentiality are exemplified most revealingly by the lack of specified antecedents for the masculine pronoun. As the argument goes, “the text gradually discloses a split between ‘he’ who is unnamed yet accessible to consciousness, ‘my father’, and ‘he’ who is unnameable. [...] The unnameable one is also divided between a married lover and an unborn child. ‘He’,

without antecedent, might evoke any of the following absentees: father, lover, child” (Barzilai, 2000:59-60). One of the very first gaps in the appropriate referentiality of “he” occurs in the following section:

Nothing is the same, I don't know the way any more. I slide my tongue around the ice-cream, trying to concentrate on it, they put seaweed in it now, but I'm starting to shake, why is the road different, he shouldn't have allowed them to do it, I want to turn around and go back to the city and never find out what happened to him. [...] I bite down into the cone and I can't feel anything for a minute but the knife-hard pain up the side of my face. Anaesthesia, that's one technique: if it hurts invent a different pain (Atwood, 1987:12-13).

In Barzilai's interpretation, “he” stands not merely for the father, whom the heroine selfishly blames for road conditions only to relieve herself of responsibility, but also for the lover and the child, who come into the picture by means of the extravagant metaphoric turn of the phrase “knife-hard pain”, which evokes the notion of pain caused by surgical intervention. Through this phrase and the additional reference to “anaesthesia”, the text acquires a figurative register, which eventually discloses that the speaker, without being conscious of it, is also talking about her abortion that the ex-lover “shouldn't have allowed” (Barzilai, 2000:61-62).

Later she tells the story of her brother almost drowning, which she claims she witnessed from within her mother's stomach: “my brother was under water, face upturned, eyes open and unconscious, sinking gently; air was coming out of his mouth. It was before I was born but I can remember it as clearly as if I saw it, and perhaps I did see it: I believe that an unborn baby has its eye open and can look through the walls of the mother's stomach, like a frog in a jar” (Atwood, 1987:32). At the moment of her confrontation with the traumatic reality of her abortion, the same image of the bottled creature appears: “it was in a bottle curled up, staring out at me [...]; it had huge jelly eyes and fins instead of hands, [...] I couldn't let it out, it was dead already, it had drowned in air” (Atwood, 1987:143). The image of the frog, central to the stories she tells, reveals that both the “memory” about her brother with eyes open under water and the one about herself as a foetus function as figurative substitutes for her own aborted child.

Analogously, her memory about the hide-and-seek she and her brother used to play with the father in the semi-darkness of the forest serves as a metaphoric displacement of

her trauma: “the space to hide in was endless; even when we knew which tree he had gone behind there was the fear that what would come out when we called you would be someone else” (Atwood, 1987:50). The referent of the essentially geographically meant term “endless space” gets multiplied and becomes a psychic and a linguistic site in which he (the father) can transform into the aborted foetus. As a consequence of the constant oscillation of meaning, a palimpsest of two distinct narratives comes about: the narrator’s story about the search for her missing father compulsively repeats her traumatic memories of the absent, aborted child in a coded form.

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**Violation of Gender Order. Readings of the Female
Alterity and Grotesque**

FEMININE “ROLES” IN *DRACULA* BY BRAM STOKER

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The feminine presences in the novel *Dracula* appear in connection with the representation of desire

under the mask of monstrosity.

A polyphonic novel, *Dracula* can be read from a number of perspectives, bringing together a multiplicity of discursive fields - ethnography, imperialist ideologies, medicine, criminality, discourses of degeneration, physiognomy, feminism, occultism and so on. The productive nature of this novel may lie in the easy cohabitation of various discursive fields, in the fact that it seems to generate readings rather than closing them down.

The figures of feminine monstrosity refer to the female body as a site of abject liminality - the representation of irrepressible sexuality, lust, uncontrollable fecundity. The theme of feminine monstrosity is to be found from the Medusa of ancient mythology to Freud's uncanny, from Aristotle's association between the female and the monstrous to Frankenstein and Dracula and to contemporary writers.

The feminine characters in *Dracula* who are for a certain period of time she-vampires (according to the degree in which they “resist” patriarchal order) prove their status as essentially objects of exchange in what can be described as a “homosocial economy”, in which men use women to cement the relations between themselves and women have no active part in the process (Weedon, 1999:85- 86).

Each cultural epoch needs to clearly define those characteristics regarded as essential to its humanity, and only by diagnosing filthy phenomena, perceived as impure or dangerous, monstrous or abject, can a culture shed light and delineate more firmly the taxonomies that anomaly violates. In the same way in which, given the illusion of corporeal beauty as well as the dangerous femininity of monstrous sirens, medieval Christian representations of sin often resorted to them as symbols of lechery and concupiscence, conjoining their morphology with that of the harpies - a shift from beautiful maid above the navel, bird below the waist to hideous clawed monsters -, the she-vampires in *Dracula* represent, in Victorian terms, cases of physical or mental disorder. Lucy and Mina are afflicted by a “disease” (Stoker, 1994:140), are “infected” (380), they

have “poison” (383) in their veins. If Mina is the least “altered” and she is “rescued” by the brave men when still alive, poor Lucy, who acts entirely on her desires and impulses is, for safety’s sake, run through the heart by her fiancé on what, going by the calendar, should have been their wedding night. Lucy is a woman who chooses her own husband without mentioning it to her mother. She also sighs with frustration that she cannot marry all her three suitors. She represents a stage in between Mina, the devoted accomplice of the patriarchal law, and the women vampires who approach Harker in Dracula’s castle. Voluptuousness and sexuality is something that men cannot accept - with Cranny-Francis’s words: “Lucy’s sexual aggressiveness … will be seen as the greatest crime and will provoke a combined male assault and assertion of dominance” (Cranny-Francis, 1988:64-79). Stoker’s novel conforms to the timeless Christian crusade against indulgence in physical pleasure. Yet the vocation of Dracula’s principle assailants lends a new dimension to the sexual theme. On the surface, vampirism is portrayed as supernaturally induced, to be countered by supernatural procedures: demonic possession requires spiritual as well as practical antidotes.

The degree in which each of the three categories of Gothic feminine presences obeys the patriarchal pattern sets them accordingly in the male-oriented Victorian frame. Dracula represents a danger to the purity of womanhood on which happiness and harmony in marriage depends. Standing for unmastered desire, he enlists Lucy’s unconscious desire before she is able to marry Arthur Holmwood and he threatens to lure Mina away from her husband she loves, Jonathan Harker. Actually, the extraordinary scene in which Dracula compels Mina to take blood from his breast occurs in her bed, while Jonathan sleeps beside her. As she reflected afterwards, while Dracula held her she did not want to hinder him. Mina survives because she dedicates her talents to the male social agenda epitomised in the person of van Helsing. Her secretarial skills include all the necessary paper work (collecting, collating, and arranging data in chronological order), but Van Helsing excludes her from the real task, the pursuit of Dracula. Unlike Lucy who was never concerned about her fallen state, Mina, who is “one of God’s women” may be “saved”. Her actions following her “baptism of blood” testify to her desire to regain her proper place in the patriarchal order of things. Van Helsing’s concise description of Mina may serve as a representative example: “She is one of God’s women fashioned by His own hand to show us men and other women that there is a heaven we can enter, and that its light can be here on earth” (226) - she is conceived as a stable element in the masculine sign system. She

signifies both a masculine artistic intention (“fashioned by His own hand”) and a definite didactic purpose (“to show us men and other women”), therefore she seems to be constructed as a dual-faceted creature. She adopts certain modern trappings associated with the New Woman, while remaining at heart a devoutly traditional female. Mina knows woman’s proper place: she refers to the taste of the original apple that remains in all women’s mouths. Her repression is typically Victorian: she even feels it improper for Jonathan to take her arm in public. Whereas Lucy offers no obstacle to Dracula’s advances, Mina resists with all the mental powers she can muster. Lucy, the privileged but sexually liberated (fallen) woman is constantly portrayed as being inferior to Mina. Van Helsing will turn her body into a moral battlefield. She has stepped out of line. For her manifest sexuality, for stepping beyond the bounds of chastity and showing desire, she must be destroyed. Domesticity was assumed to constitute the Victorian woman’s sole desire and Stoker suggests that traditional family structure can survive the threat of New Women/vampirism (Leatherdale, 1993:148). He shows this by contrasting Lucy’s and Mina’s acquiescence to the prospect of motherhood. Lucy’s callousness towards infants, this reversal of the feminine function, is meant to appal the reader.

Being narrated from the point of view of Dracula’s Western, middle-class, heterosexual opponents, Bram Stoker’s story views vampires as being unequivocally evil. They are threatening, however seductive they may also be, not least because they evoke an unbridled and voracious eroticism, especially in women, whose feelings ought to be moral, not sexual. Vampires release unconscious desire, they threaten the Law. Professor Van Helsing, the doctor-lawyer-philosopher, who represents Enlightenment knowledge and values, selflessly saves lives and puts his vast scholarship to work in defence of the weak: the immediate project is above all to rescue women from themselves. When Dracula moves to London, Van Helsing recognizes that he must be kept at bay, destroyed. The very Western civilization is now at stake. With the extermination of Dracula the uncanny is finally excluded, but not before its place has been delineated in considerable detail in the text.

Indeed, the end of the novel is, on the surface, practically a male-reading, homosocial reading, that is, it imposes a structure that occludes the contradictions and disorder, fulfilling the need for wholeness and controlling the feminine in order to provide a single, solid univalent meaning firmly fixed in a hierarchical moral structure. Dracula, the mascufeminine foreign villain, is no longer Undead, but really dead and Jonathan tells

that “Every trace of all that had been was blotted out” (419). Furthermore, with the exception of Quincey, the homosocial heroes not only live, but produce life in the form of a male baby who is the ideal site of homosocial triumph. The baby represents the culmination of the victory of the male heterosexual community. This places Mina at the bottom of the list of the feminine presences were we to conceive their place according to the degree of freedom they are ascribed - she is the best example of the victory of Victorian anxiety over the potential fluidity of gender roles. Although her bond with Jonathan is fundamental to the novel, no aspect of their physical relationship is touched upon. She appears totally sexless until the Count awakens her submerged instincts. As Harker observes, the Count’s mistresses are not common whores but “ladies by their dress and manner”. Lucy conforms to this pattern - as does the mysterious beautiful girl wearing a fashionable cart-wheel hat that Dracula sets eyes upon in London. Mina, however, does not conform, because the Count’s interest in her is less erotic than strategic. The awakening of female sexuality on the threshold of marriage makes them more vulnerable. Aside from Mina’s account of the “visit” Dracula paid to her, the rest of the scenes in the novel that could be interpreted as bearing sexual connotation are portrayed from the male perspective.

The slaughter of the women vampires highlights the evil of sex. Erotic women will annihilate honourable men if they are not destroyed. Victorian culture assumed that men bore sexual responsibility; that of women was to submit in order to reproduce. Male dominance was “confirmed” by Victorian science. Biologists claimed female births were the product of a passive, dormant energy cell, leaving responsibility for sexual potency with the male (Leatherdale, 1993:168). In spite of this institutionalised male superiority Harker’s reaction at the advances of the women vampire is a little surprising. It is obvious that they didn’t want only blood from Jonathan. They represent the “upper”/ “ultimate” stage on the scale - they are women making advances to a man: something unheard of according to the Victorian code, though probably the ultimate male fantasy. Harker, well anchored in his time’s moral pattern describes his desire as “wicked” yet he cannot fight with the too strong temptation.

To the Victorian mind, Harker’s anguish mirrors the suffocating repression that consumed his society. Throughout the book it is the female vampires who are sexually alive and endowed with greater potency, reversing the idea that men possessed insatiable sexual appetites, while the female function was to passively appease it. Whatever the

source of Harker's vision, the episode with the women vampires is a simple role-reversal of heterosexual sex. Therefore, they - although seeming to be liberated from the bonds of marriage and free to choose their man - are circumscribed to the patriarchal mind: they are what a male-mind could conceive as not conforming to the so called normality, nevertheless, through their heterosexual attraction belonging to men. Through this insistent ideology of heterosexual mediation and its corollary anxiety about independent feminine sexuality, desire, however mobile, is fixed in *Dracula* within a heterosexual mask, where women - differing in mobility and accordingly, in the degree of obedience to the male code - are represented as monstrous usurpers of masculine function. Stoker's vampirism imagines mobile desire as monstrosity and then devises a violent correction to that desire.

The nineteenth century, as the work of Mario Praz has long established, was the great age of demon lovers. Romantic agony, the recognition of an intimate relationship between pleasure and pain, desire and horror, love and hate, constituted a form of resistance to the clear and distinct ideas that the Enlightenment required in philosophy, as well as to the intense Victorian regulation and moralization of private and public life. Demonic women, sexually knowing, powerful and dangerous became widespread enough in fiction to constitute a recognizable stereotype.

In her survey of Gothic monstrosity across the 19th and the 20th centuries, J. Halberstam argues that Gothic strikes a markedly "modern preoccupation with boundaries and their collapse" (Bujdei, 2002:189), constituting a versatile narrative technology of producing the "monster as a remarkably mobile, permeable, and infinitely interpretable body"(189). Modern monsters become "meaning machines", characterized by their increasing proximity to humans and configuring otherness no longer as a single negative identity, but as a complex of race, nationality, gender, sexuality and class – any kind of alterity being able to be inscribed across the monstrous body. The monstrous feminine presences in *Dracula* imply the idea that the threat of vampirism is embedded in the body of the female, and that threat can be overcome only if the sinful female expels the legacy of Eve from her nature. After Mina does so, the text rewards her with the ultimate blessings of the Victorian woman: a loving husband and a child. Gender order is restored at the end with the image of Mina and her child whose "bundle of names links all our little band of men together" (389). The necessity of ridding the world of the monster is resolved: Van Helsing has won and the monster has been destroyed. But it lives on in myth and in

metaphor because the issues of so-called monstrosity that they address are still relevant at the beginning of the twenty first century.

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**THE INNSMOUTH “THING”:
MONSTROUS ANDROGYNY IN H. P. LOVECRAFT’S
“THE THING ON THE DOORSTEP”**

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Criticism on Howard Phillips Lovecraft, the inventor of the modern American horror tale, has “now reached titanic proportions,” as S. T. Joshi points out (1982:288). Yet some issues raised by Lovecraftian fiction are quite off the beaten track of most critics. Gender is one neglected area, although in some Lovecraft stories the reader is confronted with heavily gendered characters in shocking and often repellent relationships, the examination of which is very likely to unearth further knowledge pertaining to Lovecraft’s work, his “cosmic” philosophy, and his rendition of epistemology. The Providence legacy of “The Fall of the House of Usher” and “The Yellow Wallpaper,” in Lovecraft’s case, should not be underestimated, I believe.

In “The Thing on the Doorstep,” written in 1933 but unpublished until 1937, the narrator is witness to the marriage of his friend Edward Derby and a young woman, Asenath Waite. The couple get on very well, since Derby is from his childhood given to “writing verse of a sombre, fantastic, almost morbid cast” (Lovecraft, 1994:303), and Asenath herself - “taking a special course in mediaeval metaphysics at Miskatonic [University]“ (306) and being the only child of a long-dead sorcerer, Ephraim Waite - also has an “odd reputation” (306). Quite unsurprisingly, Edward and Asenath delve into occult practices together and he is “progressing fast in esoteric lore now that he [has] Asenath’s guidance” (310).

Their marriage, unfortunately, soon turns into a morbid relationship of dominator and dominated, since Asenath is able to project her consciousness into her husband’s body and thus oust his mind and force it into her own, temporarily forsaken, body. This mind-exchange is continued over the years up to the point where it bears a tragic seed: not long before Edward, “who [goes] to pieces rapidly” (327), is confined to the Arkham Sanatorium, he murders Asenath and hides her body in “the farther cellar storeroom under some old boxes” (333). Her body is hidden in the basement, but her mind escapes the carcass and changes places with Edward’s in the asylum. In one final heroic effort,

Edward's consciousness somehow manages to animate the corpse and personally deliver a written message to Daniel in which he insists on killing his former body taken by Asenath's mind.

The mind-exchange motif suggests that Asenath and Edward's marriage is of the body and the mind, but it is far from being harmonious. Asenath's body, in its major expression, is chaotic. Kelly Hurley in *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the fin de siècle* maintains: "The human body, at least potentially, is utterly chaotic, unable to maintain its distinctions from a whole world of animal possibilities" (1996:94). Thus the body is disorderly in an evolutionary sense; it is a "palimpsest," a "compendium, on and within which the whole history of species is inscribed" (91). The "palimpsestic" Asenath is a descendant of the Innsmouth Waites, a family of the atavistic Innsmouth community that is the product of interbreeding with "a race of fish-frog-like beings," the Deep Ones (Burleson, 1990:134). Consequently, Asenath's body bears the marks of bestial ancestry - such as protuberant eyes and other features of the Innsmouth people that remain less emphasized in the tale, such as scaly skin, and a smell of fish. Asenath's figure, her overflowing and diffuse body is counterbalanced in "Doorstep" by Daniel Upton's spouse, a constrained, somewhat restricted, genuine angel of the house, about whose purity no doubt is raised. When the putrid and horrific body collapses on the doorstep, Daniel remarks: "The odour of this singular messenger was really appalling, and I hoped (not in vain, thank God!) that my wife would not wake and confront it" (Lovecraft, 1994:332). The fact that she does not see Asenath's decomposing body - Daniel's wife is always shunned, evanescent, and ethereal (she never appears in body throughout the story) - offers an instance of the gendered version of the Lovecraftian "cosmicist" thesis, that is, witnessing the horror equals knowing it, knowledge is always harmful, and both knowledge and harm are closely tied to gender.

Hurley describes the monstrous, chaotic body as a "Thing": "To be a Thing is to inhabit a body having no recognizable or definite form" (1996:31). Asenath's whole character development is encapsulated within the condition of "Thing-ness" (28). She starts off as a grisly creature of the "Innsmouth blood," inhabiting a "female shell that wasn't even quite human" (Lovecraft, 1994:317), and ends as a dead body, a "thing on the doorstep":

I fainted [...] when I saw and smelled what cluttered up the threshold where the warm air had struck it. The messenger could not move or have consciousness any more [...]. What they finally found inside Edward's oddly-assorted clothes was the most liquefied horror. There were bones, too - and a crushed-in skull. Some dental work positively identified the skull as Asenath's (334).

Edward gets incarcerated within that monstrous, decaying body, the feminine body which in Elizabeth Grosz's sense is "entrapping, secreting, [...] a formlessness that engulfs all form, a disorder that threatens all order" (quoted in Purkiss, 1997:120). There looms a unique reversal of the traditional Gothic plot in this incident. Mark Edmundson in *Nightmare on Main Street: Angels, Sadomasochism, and the Culture of Gothic* epitomizes the Gothic as depicting "a maiden in distress [...] usually trapped in a horrible ruin (a castle, an abbey, a catacomb). And of course there is the pursuing villain [...]" (1999:4). In "Doorstep", roles interchange: we do not see a young woman pursued by a man and incarcerated in a ruin, but a young man, pursued by and incarcerated within the body of a woman, or, more precisely, the ruins of a female body.

In Edward and Asenath's relationship, disorder, identity crisis, and gender trouble reign. Their lives are interconnected through the node of a Faustian bargain that diminishes their personalities, bodies, and minds. As Timo Airaksinen asserts in *The Philosophy of H. P. Lovecraft: The Route to Horror*, "[...] the ultimate horror is connected to the loss of self. This happens to Lovecraft and his heroes" (1999:31). Edward manages to retain his subjectivity and will only partially (when, for instance, he temporarily succeeds in driving Asenath out of his skull, or when he takes the letter to Daniel). Asenath, similarly, is herself and not her-self; she is a non-self, established along a continuum of abjection, of abhuman-ness, since, as Hurley contends, "[t]he abhuman subject is a not-quite-human subject, characterized by its morphic variability, continually in danger of becoming not-itself, becoming other" (1996:3). All characters in the story are vulnerable to the loss of subjectivity and the malignant, unnatural fusion with other subjects. As Daniel muses in a rather cosmic passage, "There are horrors beyond life's edge [...] - that devil called them in, and they engulfed Edward as they are engulfing me" (Lovecraft, 1994:331). Even if Dan does not fail in the struggle for subjectivity, Edward certainly does in the end; "the gothicity of matter" devours him (Hurley, 1996:33).

Asenath, the wreck and the wrecker, however, is not monstrous primarily because she is a gothic, chaotic body. She is a monster because she does not have a mind at all, even if she projects one. Having read half of the story, the reader realizes that Asenath's

domineering mind is not Asenath's at all, but her father's, Ephraim's. Therefore, all the magic that was attributed to Asenath, was really Ephraim's, and the aggressive mind that ousted other minds from their bodies was also Ephraim's own. Asenath's non-autonomy is exacerbated by the fact that in her head there dwells his long-dead father's consciousness; she is only an empty shell. As Edward reveals the secret, "He changed forms with her when he felt death coming - she was the only one he could find with the right kind of brain and a weak enough will - he got her body permanently [...] and poisoned the old body he'd put her into" (Lovecraft, 1994:324).

The mind of Ephraim is out of balance with his feminine Asenath body. As Edward explains, Ephraim's "crowning rage [...] was that [he] was not a man; since he believed a male brain had certain unique and far-reaching cosmic powers" (308). It seems from the rhetoric that "unique and far-reaching cosmic powers" are an attribute only of the masculine brain. Indeed, traditional narratives on masculinity depict man as the creator of the paternal law, of patriarchal order, as the major transmuter of his environment. Ephraim himself is a representative of a distinct Lovecraftian villain, the sorcerer or alchemist. S. T. Joshi attributes to these "old men" the mythical "Faustian quest for unholy knowledge," and Ephraim, too, strives to "defy Nature" through his occult practices of "prolonging his life" (1982:262). As Dan cries out in an almost ecstatic moment: "On, on, on, on - body to body to body - he means never to die" (Lovecraft, 1994:318).

Ephraim is a gothic spectre from the past, the Symbolic Father who terrorizes the future. As Fred Botting reminds us, "the gothic theme that the sins of the father are visited on the offspring is manifested in the representations of the illegitimacy and brutality of paternal authority, the repetition of events, and the doubling of figures and names in successive generations" (1996:129). While other Lovecraft tales (such as "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward") provide a grotesque theatre for the *doppelgänger* theme, in "Doorstep" the brutality and terror of the father is more dominant. Ephraim's sin is an overwhelming curse, tormenting Ephraim-Asenath, Edward, and Daniel alike, and the scene to it is the gothic mansion: "[...] what devilish exchange was perpetrated in the house of horror where that blasphemous monster had his trusting, weak-willed half-human child at his mercy?" Edward exclaims (Lovecraft, 1994:318). As Botting points out, "In later fiction, the castle gradually gave way to the old house: as both building and family line, it became the site where fears and anxieties returned in the present" (1996:3). Not only Ephraim's consciousness, but also the Waite house lives on, since it is transferred

with all its belongings to Arkham and is made home for the newly married couple there. The house, as Ephraim's external, material manifestation, finally "gobbles up" Edward's mind - he is trapped in the cellar, encapsulated by a decomposing body.

Ephraim's magic for eternal life comes from the *Necronomicon*, Lovecraft's famous, fictional *grimoire*. In it Ephraim's magic language plays a central role, since the *Necronomicon*, in keeping with the occult tradition, is a compendium of means of control over the natural world by linguistic formulas, spells. Language and writing, as the bases of the paternal law, are the attributes to and the epistemological tools of Ephraim. One of the clues by which Edward reveals the truth about Asenath and Ephraim is Ephraim's handwriting, which Asenath accidentally gives away while jotting down a quick note. Communication by writing is particularly characteristic of the male figures in "Doorstep", so much so that other forms of communication seem totally inadequate. Daniel, for instance, gives an account of the decomposing Derby's fruitless effort to call him on the phone:

No one seemed to be on the wire, and I was about to hang up and go to bed when my ear caught a very faint suspicion of sound at the other end. Was someone trying under great difficulties to talk? As I listened I thought I heard a sort of half-liquid bubbling noise – "glub ... glub ... glub" [...] (Lovecraft, 1994:330).

Derby fails because the female body - identified here with the decomposing carcass, a chaotic realm - is, supposedly, incapable of the same kind of language production that the masculine mind exhibits. Daniel hangs up this time, but later, when trying his (the Asenath body's) decaying hand at writing, Edward succeeds:

[...] the figure made a semi-liquid sound like that I had heard over the telephone— "glub ... glub ..." - and thrust at me a large, closely written paper impaled on the end of a long pencil. Still reeling from the morbid and unaccountable fetor, I seized the paper and tried to read it in the light from the doorway (332).

Peter Cannon observes in connection with Lovecraft's work, "The spoken word may fail, but not the written word. Civilised man reduced to his essentials is a creature that writes" (1991:155). In the Lovecraftian text, language is control over the world and one's writing is the analogy of one's identity and gender.

Not entirely independent from Ephraim's power over death and his death-language ("Necronomicon" loosely translates as "the book of dead names") is his "gaze". Ephraim is the ultimate "gazer". In the text references abound to the interconnectedness of the monster's miraculously powerful will and vision. Edward admits that it has "she-devil's eyes" (Lovecraft, 1994:324), and Daniel mentions that "[s]he was dark, smallish, and very good-looking, except for over-protuberant eyes [...]" (306) and that "[s]he eyed [Derby] continually with an almost predatory air" (309). Lovecraft actually uses the verb "to gaze" when discussing Asenath's magical prowess: "By gazing peculiarly at a fellow-student she would often give the latter a distinct feeling of exchanged personality [...]" (308). In fact, the Asenath body's protuberant eyes are anatomically weird, since they are a feature of the Deep Ones. As Daniel puts it, its "eyes blazed and protruded with an alien expression" (308). The Asenath body's gaze is the medusa's: it petrifies and takes over. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that behind the Asenath body's physical eye there is the Ephraim mind's gaze; behind the "over-protuberant" Innsmouth eye there is an over-protuberant "I".

Hurley's assertion, that abhuman creatures confound traditional sexual identities (1996:150), is exemplified in "Doorstep": in the shadows of the mind-exchange and gender-fusion motifs, the mythical figure of the androgyne takes shape. Francette Pacteau remarks that the androgyne "can only exist in the shadow area of the image" (1986:78), meaning perhaps that the androgynous person is not a "being," a real entity in itself, but only an "appearance", a construction (62). The androgyne is a non-identity and a non-being (62); it is "monstrous" (70). The monster of "Doorstep" lurks in the shadows of human relationships and takes different shapes according to the ever-changing conditions underlying those relationships - the male characters define Asenath for themselves first as a young woman, then as an old man (naming him Ephraim). Ephraim-Asenath is a subtle Lovecraftian mixture of the female vamp and the male vampire, since Asenath is a parasite of the body - she is contagious in her disintegrating state - while Ephraim trains his abnormally strong will by preying on the consciousness of others - he is a twentieth-century American version of Bram Stoker's undead.

Susan Wolstenholme argues that the Gothic plot "often revolves around the issue of seeing and hiding" (1993:12). There is indeed a certain degree of "hide-and-seek" in the relationship of the half-figures of Ephraim and Asenath. In this particular instance of Lovecraftian "Gothic," there is a monstrous human hiding inside a monster, a man

dwelling within the “hide” of a female monster. Together they are an “it”, an indefinable androgyne, an “impossible referent” (Pacteau, 1986:62). Balzac describes one of his androgynous-looking heroines as “‘amphibious’” (quoted in Pacteau, 1986:62), and the idea is rather strongly reflected in Asenath’s figure, a Darwinian, “palimpsestic body,” a direct descendant of the amphibious Deep Ones.

But the androgyne is only monstrous to the 20th century author and reader. The original Platonic spherical being suggests the blurring of boundaries, thus the dissolution of opposites, the “*coincidentia oppositorum*” (Eliade, 1965:108). The formula of the androgyne is, therefore, a major symbol of unity and totality, of the original state of being and the return to wholeness at the end of history. As Mircea Eliade observes, “Saint Paul and the Gospel of John already counted androgyny as one of the characteristics of spiritual perfection” (107). The Asenath-Ephraim androgyne’s marriage to Edward Derby should be enough to complete the Platonic full circle, since Edward may also be seen as androgynous, having over the years “retained a deceptive aspect of boyishness” (Lovecraft, 1994:304), which, set against the story’s context, may also be read as “girlishness.” Daniel makes mention of Edward’s “habits of childish dependence” (304), resulting from his mother’s early death - Lovecraft’s mother dies when he is thirty-one - whereby for months the feminine Derby is “incapacitated by some odd psychological malady” (306). Edward, first and foremost, projects his pathological love for the missing mother onto Asenath. Asenath-Ephraim’s figure, however, is potentially perilous (the name Asenath actually draws upon the same etymology), for it is plainly patriarchal. As Daniel remarks, “This time it was not a question of Edward’s weak will but of the woman’s strong will [...]. The perennial child had transferred his dependence [...] to a new and stronger image, and nothing could be done about it” (309).

The marriage of two androgynous characters, the womanly Edward and the manly Aasenath-Ephraim, should entail perfect unity, as Carolyn G. Heilburn demonstrates through the analysis of early modern literary texts in *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* (1973:28-41). But the Ephraim mind is a patriarchal spectre that rules over the Asenath body, never once accepting its maternal qualities but aspiring for Edward’s or Daniel’s body. The Asenath body, the empty feminine shell is an animated monster in its own right, too. The monstrous mind and the monstrous body are incapable of total unification, since within the self’s boundaries their heavily gendered identities, instead of exulting in each other’s presence, thrust each other towards total disintegration. As Heilburn demonstrates,

in the 20th century the theme of androgyny reappeared in literature, but, as opposed to the harmonious ancient Greek, medieval, and Renaissance representations, it exhibited a certain grotesque and monstrous strain (1973:43–44). Lovecraft's tale is one such horrific representation, where the androgynous figure's disruption, both physiological and psychic, fits perfectly well his early-twentieth-century view of cosmic indifference and belief in the ultimate failure of any harmony, totality, and unity of being.

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Gender, Culture, Society

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM: THE CULTURAL ANOMALY OF THE ELIZABETHAN SEX/GENDER SYSTEM

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The return of history in literary criticism over the last years accounts for a revival of interest in Renaissance study. But why Renaissance? As critics and historians sense the modern era slipping away and a new episteme inchoately emerging, the Renaissance is being appropriated as neither modern, nor medieval, but as a boundary or liminal space between two more monolithic periods where one can see acted out a clash of paradigms and ideologies, a playfulness with signifying systems, and a self-consciousness about the tenuous solidity of human identity which resonate with some of the dominant elements of postmodern culture.

The Renaissance, seen as the last refuge of preindustrial man, is of such interest to scholars of the postindustrial era because they construe the period in terms reflecting their own sense of fearfulness of living inside a gap in history, when the paradigms that structured the past seem facile and new paradigms uncertain. The new historical critics so often make the period intelligible by narratives of rupture, tension and contradictions as, for example, when Greenblatt talks about the gap between the Renaissance ideology of human freedom and the actuality of Renaissance man as the subject of determining power relations (1980:194).

The nature of man, the creature whose works, thought and culture have been the focus of most historical enquiry, constitutes the core of a truly new historical criticism. One of the most striking developments of contemporary thought is the widespread attack on the notion that man possesses a transhistorical core of being. Michel Foucault argues that everything from maternal instinct to conceptions of the self are now seen to be the products of specific discourses and social processes (1970). The new historicist critics are drawn to Renaissance literature because there, the modern era of an essential man was initially constituted, as Jonathan Dollimore shows. He is particularly interested in the way in which what he calls essentialist humanism has both dominated the study of English literature in the twentieth century and also has prevented recognition of the fact that man is not so much possessed by an essential nature as constructed by social

and historical forces. For Dollimore, the late Renaissance was the age of scepticism in which, in the drama in particular, one finds recorded a recognition of the discontinuous nature of human identity and its social construction (1994:181-194).

If the human subject is historically produced, the crucial question for New Historicism is the part played by cultural forms in this production. It has long been recognized that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has affinities with Elizabethan courtly entertainments. It seems likely that Queen Elizabeth was present when the "Dream" was first acted. However, whether the queen was present or not, her pervasive cultural presence was a condition of the play's imaginative possibility. This is not to imply that the comedy is an inert product of Elizabethan culture, but rather a production enlarging the dimensions of the cultural field and altering the lines of force within it. Thus, in the sense that the royal presence was itself represented within the play, it may be said that the play thenceforth conditioned the imaginative possibility of the queen.

Shakespeare's comedy figures the social relationship of the sexes in courtship, marriage and parenthood; it imaginatively embodies what Gayle Rubin has called a *sex/gender system*: a sociohistorical construction of sexual identity, difference and relationship; an appropriation of human features by an ideological discourse; a culture-specific fantasia upon Nature's universal theme (quoted in Montrose, 1994:114). My concern is with how "A Midsummer Night's Dream" figures the Elizabethan sex/gender system and the queen's place within it.

The beginning of the play coincides with the end of a struggle in which Theseus has been victorious over the Amazon warriors. Representations of the Amazons are ubiquitous in Elizabethan texts. Thus we learn that the empress of all these Amazons is a witch and a cannibal who daily feeds on the flesh of boys. She ever remains unmarried, but she has intercourse with a great number of men by whom she begets offspring. The kingdom, however, remains hereditary to the daughters, not to the sons. This cultural fantasy assimilates Amazonian myth, witchcraft and cannibalism into an anticulture that precisely inverts European norms of political authority, sexual license, marriage practices and inheritance rules. Amazonian mythology seems symbolically to embody and to control a collective anxiety about the power of the female, not only to dominate or reject the male, but to create and destroy him. It is an ironic acknowledgment by an androcentric culture of the degree in which men are in fact

dependent upon women: upon mothers and nurses, for their birth and nurture; upon mistresses and wives, for the validation of their manhood.

Shakespeare engages his wedding play in a dialectic with this mythological formation. The Amazons have been defeated before the play begins; and nuptial rites are to be celebrated when it ends. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* focuses upon different crucial transitions in the male and female life cycle: the fairy plot, upon taking a little boy from childhood into youth, from the world of the mother into the world of the father; The Athenian plot, upon taking a maiden from youth into maturity, from the world of the father into the world of the husband. The pairing of the Athenian lovers is made possible by the magical powers of Oberon and made lawful by the political authority of Theseus. Each of these rulers is preoccupied with the fulfilment of his own desires in the possession or repossession of a wife.

The diachronic structure of the play eventually restores the inverted Amazonian system of gender and nurture to a patriarchal norm. Egeus wishes to confront his daughter Hermia with two alternatives: absolute obedience to the paternal will or death. Theseus intervenes with a third alternative: if she refuses to marry whom her father chooses, Hermia must submit "Either to die the death or to abjure/ Forever the society of men" (I. i. 65-6). He has characteristically Protestant notions about the virtue of virginity: maidenhood is a phase in the life cycle of a woman who is destined for married chastity and motherhood. As regarding sexuality and marriage in Renaissance England, the role of female desire was widely held to be small, even non-existent. Lawrence Stone says that the qualities most valued in a woman were weakness, submissiveness, charity and modesty: "the theological and legal doctrines of the time were insistent upon the subordination of women to men in general, and their husbands in particular" (1971:199). Ruth Kelso defines wedding as the only possible career: "Only one vocation, marriage, was proposed for the lady" (quoted in Dash, 1997:36) and the choice of her husband should be given unto the girl's parents.

Each of the men who surround the maid - father, lover, lord - claims a kind of property in her. Yet Hermia dares to suggest that she has a claim to property in herself: she refuses to "yield [her] virgin patent up/Unto his lordship whose unwished yoke/[Her] soul consents not to give sovereignty" (I. i. 80-2). She wishes the limited privilege of giving herself. Theseus usurps the power of virginity by imposing upon Hermia his own power to deny her the use of her body. The female body is a supreme

form of property and a locus for the contestation of authority. In the opening scene, Egeus claims that he may do with Hermia as he chooses because she is his property: "As she is mine, I may dispose of her" (I. i. 42). This claim is based upon a simple thesis: she is his because he has made her. Theseus, in his turn, represents paternity as a cultural act, an art: the father is a demiurge or *homo faber*, who composes, in-forms, imprints himself upon, what is merely inchoate matter:

To you your father should be as god:
One that compos'd your beauties, yea, and one
To whom you are but as a form in wax
By him imprinted, and within his power
To leave the figure or disfigure it. (I. i. 47-51)

Conspicuously excluded from Theseus's account and from the whole play is the relationship between mother and daughter - the kinship bond through which Amazonian society reproduces itself. The central female characters of Shakespeare's comedies are not mothers but mothers-to-be, maidens who are passing from fathers to husbands in a world made and governed by men. Hermia and Helena have no mothers; they have only fathers. Titania's votaress is the only biological mother. But she is absent because she has died giving birth to a son. Titania's attachment to the changeling boy embodies her attachment to the memory of his mother. What Oberon accomplishes by substituting Bottom for the boy is to break Titania's solemn vow. As in the case of the Amazons, or that of Hermia and Helena, the play again enacts a male disruption of an intimate bond between women: first by the boy, and then by the man. It is as if, in order to be freed from the prison of the womb, the male child must kill his mother: "She, being mortal, of that boy did die" (II. i. 35). Therefore, mother and son appear to be potentially mortal to each other: the matricidal infant complements the infanticidal Amazon.

The notion of maternity implied in Titania's speech counterpoints the notion of paternity formulated by Theseus. Like an infant of the Elizabethan upper classes the child is nurtured by a surrogate. By emphasizing her role as a foster mother, Titania links the biological and social aspects of parenthood together within a wholly maternal world, a world in which the relationship between women has displaced the relationship between wife and husband. Nevertheless, despite the exclusion of a paternal role from Titania's speech, Shakespeare's embryological notions remain distinctly Aristotelian

and phalocentric: the mother is represented as a *vessel*, as a container for her son; she is not his *maker*. Thus, these two speeches formulate, in poetic discourse, a proposition about the genesis of gender and power: men make women, and they make themselves through the medium of women. Such a proposition reverses the Amazonian practice, in which women use men merely for their own reproduction. But much more importantly, as Louis Montrose points, “it seems an overcompensation for the natural fact that men do indeed come from women; an overcompensation for the cultural facts that consanguineal and affinal ties between men are established through mothers, wives and daughters” (Montrose, 2000:119).

The festive conclusion of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, its celebration of romantic and generative heterosexual union, depends upon the success of a process whereby the female pride and power manifested in misanthropic warriors, possessive mothers, unruly wives and wilful daughters are brought under the control of husbands and lords. But while the dramatic structure articulates a patriarchal ideology, it also intermittently undermines its own comic propositions. The human struggle between the fairy king and queen provides an ironic prognosis for the new marriages. Another generational cycle is about to begin - the cycle of sexual and familial violence, fear and betrayal. Shakespeare's romantic comedy is contaminated by a kind of intertextual irony: the text discloses that patriarchal norms are compensatory for the vulnerability of men to the powers of women.

Such textual disclosures also illuminate the interplay between sexual politics in the Elizabethan family and sexual politics in the Elizabethan monarchy, for the woman to whom all Elizabethan men were vulnerable was Queen Elizabeth herself. Her personality and personal symbolism helped to mould English culture and the consciousness of Englishmen for several generations. “If Elizabeth did not exist, we would have to invent her”, Peter Erickson said (1991:24). Although the Amazonian metaphor might seem suited for praising a woman ruler, it was never popular among Elizabethan encomiasts. Its associations must have been too sinister to suit the personal tastes and political interests of the queen. Instead she transformed it to suit her purposes, representing herself as an androgynous marital maiden. Such was her appearance at Tilbury in 1588, when she had come to review the troops prepared for a Spanish invasion. On that occasion, she rode a white horse and dressed in white velvet; she wore a silver cuirass on her breast and carried a silver truncheon in her hand. The

theme of her speech was by then familiar to her listeners: she dwelt upon the womanly frailty of her body natural and the masculine strength of her body politic - a strength deriving from the love of her people, the virtue of her lineage, and the will of her God.

As the female ruler of what was, at least in theory, a patriarchal society, Elizabeth incarnated a contradiction at the very centre of the Elizabethan sex/gender system. She was a cultural anomaly; and this anomalousness made her powerful and dangerous. By fashioning herself into a singular combination of Maiden, Matron and Mother, the queen transformed the normal domestic life cycle of an Elizabethan female into what was at once a social paradox and religious mystery. Her emblem was the phoenix, her motto *simper eadem, simper una*. As she was always uniquely herself, Elizabeth's rule was not intended to undermine the male hegemony of her culture. Indeed, the emphasis upon her difference from all other women may have helped to reinforce it.

A Midsummer Night's Dream is permeated by images and devices that suggest these characteristic forms of Elizabethan court culture. However, the play is "neither focused upon the queen nor structurally dependent upon her presence in the action". On the contrary, Louis Montrose argues, "it might be said to depend upon her absence, her exclusion" (Montrose, 2000:69). In the third scene of the play, after Titania has remembered her Indian votaress (II. i. 123-37), Oberon remembers his imperial votaress (II. i. 156-68).

The evocative monologues of Titania and Oberon are carefully matched and contrasted: the fairy queen speaks of a mortal mother from the east, the fairy king speaks of an invulnerable virgin from the west. Their memories express two myths of origin: Titania provides a genealogy for the changeling and an explanation of why she will not part with him, Oberon provides an aetiology of the metamorphosed flower that he will use to make her part with him. The floral symbolism of female sexuality begun in this passage is completed when Oberon names "Dian's bud" (IV. i. 72) as the antidote to "love-in-idleness". With Cupid's flower, Oberon can make the fairy queen "full of hateful fantasies" (II. i. 258); and with "Dian's bud", he can win her back to his will. The vestal's invulnerability to fancy is instrumental to Oberon in his reaffirmation of romantic, marital and paternal norms that have been inverted in the play. Thus, Shakespeare's royal compliment re-mythologizes the cult of the Virgin Queen in such a way as to sanction a relationship of gender and power that is personally and politically inimical to Elizabeth.

Shakespeare's comic heroines are in transition between the statuses of maiden and wife, daughter and mother. These transitions are mediated by the wedding rite and the act of defloration, by which the husband takes physical and symbolic possession of his bride. The sexual act in which the man draws blood from the woman is evoked at the beginning of the play, in Theseus's boast and is immanent in Oberon's description of the origin of desire: "the bolt of Cupid fell/...Upon a little western flower,/ Before milk-white, now purple with love's wound" (II. i. 165-67). Oberon's purple passion flower is procreated in a displaced and liberalised defloration.

Unlike the female characters, Oberon's vestal virgin is not subject to Cupid's shaft, to the frailties of the flesh and the fancy. Nor is she subject to the mastery of men. Thus, ironically, the vestal's very freedom from fancy guarantees the subjection of others. Within the play, the public and domestic domains of Elizabethan culture intersect in the figure of the imperial votaress. Shakespeare splits the triune Elizabethan cult image between the fairy vestal, an unattainable virgin, and the fairy queen, an intractable wife and a dominating mother. Oberon uses one against the other in order to reassert male prerogatives. The comedy symbolically neutralises the royal power to which it ostensibly pays homage.

It must be added that Queen Elizabeth was as much the creature of her image as she was its creator, and that her power to shape her own strategies was itself shaped by her society and constrained within the horizon of its cultural assumption. When Elizabethan subjects employed the themes of masculine procreative power, autogeny, and mastery of women in their own speech and writing, the familiar tropes of misogyny and patriarchy could acquire a seditious resonance, a resonance that was specific to the gendered discourse of Elizabethan state power. In this sense, the ruler and the ruled, the queen and the playwright, are construable as subjects differentially shaped within a shared conjuncture of language and social relations, who jointly reshape that conjuncture in the very process of performing it.

Shakespeare's play bodies forth the theatre poet's contest, not only with the generativity of Elizabethan mothers, but with the non-generativity of the royal virgin: it contests the princely claim to cultural authorship and social authority. To the extent that the cult of Elizabeth informs the play, it is itself transformed within the play. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is, then, in a double sense a creation of Elizabethan culture,

for “it also creates the culture by which it is created, shapes the fantasies by which it is shaped, begets that by which it is begotten” (Montrose, 1994:130).

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**THE WOMAN ARTIST AS VIEWED BY THE WOMAN
NOVELIST:
GEORGE ELIOT, VIRGINIA WOOLF, DORIS LESSING**

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I find it relevant to begin my paper with a famous quotation: “A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.” As you know, in her famous essay *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) Virginia Woolf emphasizes the connection between art and economics. When she accounts for the scarcity of literary masterpieces by women novelists she says that such books are “not spun in midair by incorporeal creatures, but are the work of suffering human beings, and are attached to grossly material things, like health and money and the houses we live in” (43-44). Woolf argues that the position of the artist has been gendered in Western culture because it is only men who have had “the power and the money and the security” necessary for the production of art.

Not only women-authored masterpieces were scarce. Scarce too were portrayals of women artists in fiction, particularly in 19th and early 20th-century fiction. Apart from economic obstacles, this can be further attributed to the firm Victorian belief in the intellectual inferiority of women to men. As Elaine Showalter points out, Victorian physicians and anthropologists argued that “women's inferiority could be demonstrated in almost every analysis of the brain and its functions. They maintained that, like the ‘lower races’, women had smaller and less efficient brains, less complex nerve development, and more susceptibility to certain diseases, than did men” (1995:77). Showalter quotes the Victorian scientist James Allan who stated that “in intellectual labour, man has surpassed, does surpass now and always will surpass woman, for the obvious reason that nature does not periodically interrupt his thought and application” (1995:78). Though John Stuart Mill refuted the brain-weight argument in *The Subjection of Women*, even advanced thinkers were influenced by these ideas and the portrayal of a woman artist was an extravagant rarity in Victorian fiction.

Even Victorian women writers seldom depicted creative female characters in their works. For instance such a prolific author as George Eliot portrayed only one truly

dedicated woman artist in her writings – this is the Alcharisi, the eminent opera singer, in her last novel *Daniel Deronda* (1880). It is significant that Eliot's only creative heroine is a performer, not, say, a novelist, and her art highly depended on the male judgement of her physical charms. According to the strong Victorian belief the powers of performing, of imitation were characteristic of “the lower races”, and respectively were more strongly marked in women than men. As for musical powers in women, Darwin quite ironically observes in *The Descent of Man* that “women are generally thought to possess sweeter voices than men, and...we may infer that they first acquired musical powers in order to attract the other sex”. Historically the theatrical profession was open more to beauty than to talent and was seen as another market for physical charms. Though George Eliot was one of the most renowned intellectuals of her age, she must have been influenced by these ideas in creating her artistic heroine. Or she must have wanted to cover her own tracks and conceal biographical elements in the portrayal of a successful professional woman.

And yet the Alcharisi is an unforgettable character, a monumental great Princess of the opera. The famous diva combines artistic gifts and will to power. She is also a woman with physical charm and a strong personal power and presence. As Eliot says, “the voice and the genius matched the face”. When Deronda, the son whom she deserted shortly after giving birth to him, meets her for the first time in his twenties, he exclaims:

She was a remarkable-looking being... Her worn beauty had a strangeness in it as if she were not quite a human mother, but a Melusina, who had ties with some world which is independent of ours. (Eliot, 1964:Chap.51)

The Alcharisi is endowed with “uncanny” power evoked by the image of Melusina, half woman, half snake. She is the woman artist seen as sibyl and prophetess. In her conversation with Deronda she gives a clear expression of her strong sense of freedom and her “natural right” to escape from the constriction of the Jewish ghetto in which she was brought up and to resist the law of fathers and husbands:

I cared for the wide world, and all I could represent in it. I hated living under the shadow of my father's strictness – “this you must be”, “this you must not be” – pressed on me like a frame that got tighter and tighter as I grew. I wanted to live a large life, with freedom to do what every one else did, and be carried along in a

great current...I did not want to marry. I was forced into marrying your father – forced – forced, I mean, by my father's wishes... I had a right to be free. I had a right to seek my freedom from a bondage that I hated. (Eliot, 1964:Chap.51)

The Alcharisi is the only woman in all George Eliot's fiction who finds a vocation and sticks to it.

I was a great singer, and I acted as well as I sang. All the rest were poor beside me. I was living a myriad lives in one. (Chap. 51)

She expresses her contempt for the ordinary world, for “tame life”, as she calls it, in which people go to work, marry, and raise families. She feels contempt for the philistine, the rule-follower, who tries to force the artist into conformity. She rejects a society that punishes anything beyond conformity and denies all individuality. In short, she stands out as a rebel against social norms. With her resistance to patriarchy, to silence and obscurity the Alcharisi reminds us of an archetypal rebellious artist in modernist fiction, Joyce's Stephan Dedalus who “flies the nets of nationality, religion, language,” defiantly abandoning country, church, and family in an effort to attain the godlike freedom he thinks is the artist's right.

According to the critic Lee T. Lemon, such rebels fall into the Byronic mould. As Lemon argues, each Byronic artist

is larger than life; each has drives that lesser mortals cannot fathom and dare not imitate; each sees himself tragically alone, a Gulliver among pygmies, a magnificent soul tormented by a society that refuses not only reverence and awe but sometimes even food and shelter. (1985: Preface)

Undoubtedly the characteristics of the Byronic artist in the description above are inherent to the Alcharisi.

As her personality is obviously complex, it is essential to examine George Eliot's attitude to her creative heroine. It can be immediately described as rather ambivalent. On the one hand the novelist admires the successful opera singer for her courage and audacity to defy patriarchal norms, for her ardour and remarkable talent and, above all, for the utmost dedication to her art.

And yet Eliot is well aware that the Alcharisi has sinned against human nature, has committed a transgression against Victorian ethos by her incapability to love and feel affection. “Lack of heart” was viewed as the worst violation of the Victorian moral code and the famous diva can be viewed as an anti-heroine. Accordingly, the novelist explicitly pronounces her judgement on her by the protagonist’s immediate response to his mother’s callousness and selfishness. When the Alcharisi says:

I did not want affection. I had been stifled with it. I wanted to live out the life that was in me, and not to be hampered with other lives... I did not want a child.

Deronda “was shaken by a mixed anger against this mother who it seemed had borne him unwillingly, had willingly made herself a stranger to him, and – perhaps – was now making herself known unwillingly” (Chap.51). Eliot’s severe judgement on the Alcharisi is further expressed by the way the singer is punished at the end of the novel – she loses her voice and retires from the stage into a loveless marriage. Lonely, isolated, she ends her days entombed in fame and wealth.

And yet there is more to it than that. The tragic fate of the successful professional woman should not be seen only as a harsh punishment for her egoism and coldness. It suggests a message that is essential to Eliot’s fiction, the idea that family and vocation, emotional and professional self-fulfilment can seldom be reconciled in woman’s life. As the critic Dorothea Barrett puts it, lesser women are not given the choice, and the most exceptional women have to choose one or the other.

No matter how severely Eliot punishes her exceptional heroine - perhaps in this treatment the novelist displays a degree of conformity to the Victorian conception of morality - a number of critics point out the autobiographical elements in the delineation of the Alcharisi. They argue that her portrayal expresses the same feelings as can be found in George Eliot’s letters – “her resistance to restrictions, her sense of destiny, her defiant yet pained awareness of what she lost in cutting herself off from her family and her background and in deciding not to have children, and her fear that her gift would vanish, never to return. But what the Alcharisi lacked – and what George Eliot so joyfully seized and possessed – was the capacity to love, and the knowledge that she was loved in return” (Uglow, 1987:237). In other words, George Eliot never allowed any of her heroines to achieve the emotional as well as intellectual self-fulfilment she herself

attained. Or as Virginia Woolf observed, Eliot's heroines present "the incomplete version of the story of George Eliot herself".

However, most of Woolf's heroines, particularly her creative ones, are rather incomplete too. And yet there are more women artists in Woolf's fiction than in Eliot's – these are the painter Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse*, the poet Orlando in the novel *Orlando* and the poet Isa and Miss La Trobe, a playwright as well as a producer, in her last novel *Between the Acts*.

It is easy to account for this difference between the two great women of letters. As Woolf lived and worked in a later age, she had a new outlook on female creativity and could imagine a wider scope for female talent. However, if her artistic heroines are still incomplete to some extent, it is because through their self-assertion they rejected the natural and distinct sphere of womanhood that Woolf as a modernist feminist continued to believe in.

The least complete of Woolf's women artists is Miss La Trobe and I will focus on her not only because she shares the Alcharisi's frustration and isolation but because she is a performer too. However, unlike Eliot's opera singer, Miss La Trobe combines the powers of performance and the powers of literary creation as she has also written the script for the village pageant she directs. The script is rather ambitious and aspires to present the sweep of English history as well as all changes in style and content in English literature throughout the centuries. It is done by means of songs, tableaux, parody, pastiche, etc. At the end of the pageant all actors appear on stage holding mirrors in their hands thereby presenting the audience its own mirror image in the present. It is clear that Miss La Trobe's aesthetic sphere, unlike the Alcharisi's, does not stand outside or in opposition to the process and actuality of life. By her pageant she wants to comprehend both history and the present moment, the audience and its social and cultural context, that is, life in its wholeness. In this way art functions as an activity of human living. The artist is in life, merged in the process, not standing outside and above it (Moody, 1970). On the whole Miss La Trobe appears to be more creative than the Alcharisi. However, unlike the opera singer, she is not aware of her artistic powers and stands out as an embodiment of the ever-dissatisfied artist. Whereas the Alcharisi exclaims: "I was a great singer... All the rest were poor beside me", after the pageant Miss La Trobe is stricken with a sense of frustration: "...It was a failure, another damned failure! As usual."

Nevertheless, Miss La Trobe also falls in the Byronic mould of artists. To a large extent she is an embodiment of the modernist alienated artist as she feels tragically alone and vulnerable, set against a ruthless society that makes it difficult for the artist to keep her/his integrity. She tries to preserve her spiritual sensitivity only by becoming outwardly callous. The philistine is once again her greatest enemy because he creates the conditions that keep the artist enchain and block her work. As a typical Byronic artist she knows there is a vision within herself she must express not for her own sake exclusively but for the sake of shaking people into awareness of their own blunders. In one respect, however, Miss La Trobe departs from the concept of the Byronic artist. Unlike the Alcharisi, she does not attempt to isolate the aesthetic from larger issues but to incorporate it in the actuality of life. That is why she comes closer to another conception of the artist, the so-called Wordsworthian conception that will be discussed later.

Despite this basic difference there are numerous similarities between the two creative heroines. Alison Booth draws attention to their foreign names with the definite article and points out that semantically both names imply the recurring patterns of history which the critic interprets as a reference to “the ancient consciousness of woman”. What is more, their foreign names suggest the heroines’ essential difference from the common woman. Woolf emphasizes this difference in the very appearance of Miss La Trobe: “Nature somehow set her apart from her kind”, she observes.

Furthermore, for both of them performing is a livelihood which guarantees their independence from male domination. Besides, performing gives them an opportunity to live “a myriad lives in one”, so to say, a diversity of experiences and roles which they miss in life. The most essential parallel between the two, however, is that though they both yearn to triumph in art, their glory is ephemeral. They suffer deeply because their life is loveless. Their self-assertion involves a rejection of the natural sphere of womanhood and motherhood. They are both more artists than women – for instance Miss La Trobe lives in lonely poverty deserted by her actress lover. A conclusion can be drawn that all women artists in Eliot’s and Woolf’s work are doomed to a degree of failure despite the magnificence of their demand for art and knowledge beyond a woman’s reach. As Alison Booth comments, if a happy artist is an oxymoron, then a happy woman artist is a monstrous contradiction in terms, an absurdity.

And yet the question is if they can be seen as failures and martyrs or as manly leaders. There are enough clues in the novels for the latter approach to these creative heroines. As Booth argues, they storm the gender code with the rage of real fighters. They have the will to power of genuine warriors. Thus Miss La Trobe is said to be like “an Admiral on his quarter-deck” and the Alcharisi declares, like a queen, “Men have been subject to me”. Undoubtedly they are both rare women refusing to become part of the herd. They both achieve greatness, though temporary, through their resistance to patriarchy, to silence and obscurity.

Most of the differences between them are quite superficial. For instance, Miss La Trobe has none of the Alcharisi’s magical fame and success. She despises the honours paid to genius and at the end of the pageant she hides in the bushes to avoid the applause. Unlike the great Princes, she lacks all the signs of feminine brilliance and grandeur: she is “swarthy”, “sturdy” and “thick set”. As Booth remarks, she bears resemblance to a strong-minded “blue stocking”.

Critics often dwell on the autobiographical elements in the portrayal of Miss La Trobe. They claim that “Miss La Trobe bespeaks Woolf’s dedicated struggle with her medium and her audience, her sense of isolation as well as her lesbianism” (Booth, 1992:284). And yet the village bohemian can hardly be mistaken for the lady of Bloomsbury. If Virginia Woolf came somewhat closer than George Eliot to an autobiographical portrait of the artist, it might be attributed to the modern fashion for fictional autobiographies of women writers such as Dorothy Richardson’s *Pilgrimage*, for example, which exerted a strong influence on her.

However, Doris Lessing’s *The Golden Notebook* is overtly autobiographical – her heroine Anna Wulf is a novelist like her creator, involved in a desperate struggle with her medium in an attempt to create a novel whose form reflects the chaos in the world. It is significant that Lessing produced her masterpiece long after the end of the Second World War (1962) when there were numerous vocational options for women. Thus the traditional female question “What can I do with my life?” that bothered George Eliot’s and even Woolf’s heroines is no longer relevant. What is more, in *The Golden Notebook* the need to write is pandemic. As Anna exclaims, “Everyone is going to be a great writer, but everyone!” Consequently there is no need for the woman novelist to cover her tracks by depicting opera singers or producers instead of a professional woman writer. In Lessing’s opinion the urge to write is prompted by the need to give form to a formless

experience, to impose order on a disordered world. Thus the major characteristic of her novel is fragmentation. It is precisely the “cracking-up” or fragmentation of female subjectivity that Lessing’s novel powerfully dramatises, through a series of four notebooks. As is well known, each notebook takes a different aspect of Anna’s experience. Thus the “black notebook” explores her experience in Africa and her life as a writer; the “red”, politics; the “yellow” fictionalises Anna’s experiences; whilst the “blue” is a type of diary. Each book divides Anna’s life in order to reconcile it into a new whole, reflected in the “golden” notebook. Thus finally from fragmentation wholeness is attained.

It is noteworthy that Lessing’s creative heroine departs considerably from the concept of the Byronic artist. As we have seen, in the delineation of both the Alcharisi and Miss La Trobe their intrinsic difference from others is emphasized: e.g. “[the Alcharisi] was not quite a human mother, but a Melusina, *who had ties with some world which is independent of ours*” and “Nature has somehow set [Miss la Trobe] *apart from her kind*”. Overwhelmed with contempt for the “tame” philistine world, they glory in their difference from others. Unlike them, Anna Wulf is aware of likeness to others rather than of difference. “I know no one”, she says, “who isn’t incomplete and tormented and fighting, the best one can say of anyone is that they fight.” “I want to be ordinary and normal”, she continues, “simple, responsible, affectionate...” What she wants most is to feel “an oneness with everything” and everybody. She never claims she knows one ultimate truth as typical Byronic artists do but makes efforts to come as close to truth as possible or is willing to offer her own version of truth.

Lessing’s heroine never sees herself as a demigod, a Gulliver among pygmies or a majestic Cleopatra but as a suffering, vulnerable individual not much different from the common run of humanity. Rather than being obsessed with a sense of mission, she is full of doubts about the place her work can occupy in the chaotic world about herself. Her mission appears to be caring about the other. In other words, as Lee T. Lemon argues (1985:55), if Joyce seems to divide the world into those with genius and those without genius, Lessing divides the world into the committed and the uncommitted. It is significant that her idea of the only commitment worth having is a commitment to humanity. In her essay “The Small Personal Voice” she defines the responsibilities of writers as sharing

in the deep anxieties, terrors, and hopes of human beings everywhere. What is the choice before us? It is not merely a question of preventing evil, but of strengthening a vision of a good which may defeat the evil.....

Once a writer has a feeling of responsibility, as a human being, for the other human beings he influences, it seems to me he must become a humanist, and must feel himself as an instrument of change for good or for bad. The image of the pretty singer in the ivory tower has always seemed to me a dishonest one. Logically he should be content to sing to his image in the mirror. The act of getting a story or a novel published is an act of communication, an attempt to impose one's personality and beliefs on other people...(Shlueter, 1972)

As it is clear from the passage above, Lessing dismisses pretty singers in the ivory tower. She does not wish to isolate the aesthetic as Byronic artists do but to integrate it in a larger view, placing it in a social, ethical and philosophical context. For her as well as for her heroine Anna Wulf art is “an act of communication”, a means of influencing people. It is merged in the process and actuality of life. In this respect Miss La Trobe is much closer to Anna than the Alcharisi is.

In *The Golden Notebook* Anna dwells at length on the responsibility of artists in the modern world. She employs the “boulder pushing” metaphor to convey her notion. Her idea is that there are very few great individuals who are in advance of their times. The efforts of most honest, dedicated persons are devoted to pushing a boulder three inches up a mountain and watching it roll back two inches. At the beginning Anna suffers from a writer’s block because she lacks the peculiar kind of humility and courage required of the boulder pusher. It is only after she comes to accept that she is a “boulder pusher” herself that she restores her creativity.

...That was about courage, but not the sort of courage I have ever understood. It's a small painful sort of courage which is at the root of every life... And the reason why I have only given my attention to the heroic or the beautiful or the intelligent is because I won't accept the small endurance that is bigger than anything. (Lessing, 1974:543-544)

As an artist Anna Wulf does not attain integrity and a clarity of vision painlessly. She has to experience the darkness of the soul, the harrowing of hell and finally attain

sanity beyond madness. In Lessing's vision, artists are not the "unacknowledged legislators" of the world. They are boulder pushers who help humanity make small steps.

Another important characteristic of Anna's vision of the artist is her refusal to limit herself to being only an artist. What she wants to achieve is the balance and harmonization of diverse areas of experience – political, sexual, artistic, and moral. In life she is a mother, lover, friend, politically committed person, a social worker, editor as well as an artist. She wants to integrate the various responsibilities that these roles involve into a whole human personality. Thus she has more chances of attaining both personal and vocational self-fulfilment than the Alcharisi or Miss La Trobe.

Lessing's heroine Anna Wulf can undoubtedly be defined as a Wordsworthian type of artist according to Lee T. Lemon's classification of artists as she perfectly fits the critic's definition of it:

Without the privilege the Byronic artist claimed, [Wordsworthian artists] must learn to accept their humanity, for ultimately that may be more valuable than their art; it is certainly the basis of their art... And from that, if one also has the technical skill, and the drive, and the courage, may come sufficient caring about the other - whether it be other individuals, society as a whole... - that is the essential gift of any human who would be more than an isolated individual.

(Lemon, 1985:Preface)

Last but not least, it is important to examine the presentation of female subjectivity by these women novelists. As George Eliot, Virginia Woolf and Doris Lessing represent different stages in the literary tradition, realism, modernism and postmodernism, their respective conceptions of the self vary considerably.

George Eliot has a traditional humanist notion of the subject. According to it, the self contains an essential, centred, and unchanging core. Modernists such as Virginia Woolf still tend to view the subject as possessing an essential core despite the surface fragmentation they are well aware of. As a postmodernist Lessing sees the self as unstable, centreless, and dispersed. Rather than as an essential core, it is seen as a set of various culturally constructed roles and positions that cannot be reconciled easily.

In *Daniel Deronda* George Eliot presents her conception of female subjectivity in a very succinct and explicit way by a powerful conversation (Chap.51) in which the Alchari gives a direct expression of her essential self:

...I had not much affection to give you. I did not want affection. I had been stifled with it. I wanted to live the life that was in me... I was a great singer, and I acted as well as sang...I was living a myriad lives in one. I did not want a child.

Her self-centredness is rendered by the frequent repetition of the pronoun "I" with which almost every sentence begins. The abrupt categorical sentences convey her will to power. The whole scene has the elements of a performance. The powerful diva, majestic and queenly, is performing a moving aria. She is the star who holds the stage, speaking from a position of dominance, from the pedestal of her glory and her son Daniel is her audience. It is clear from the text that she has only one role to play – that of a self-centred but successful woman artist. She has rejected the roles of a mother and wife as well as all signs of domesticity. The centred humanist subject thus denies women multifaceted existence. Women are either wives and mothers or they are whores and mistresses. Or a prima donna, as in this case.

Virginia Woolf's conception of the self, as illustrated by Miss La Trobe, is somewhat contradictory. As Magali Cornier Michael argues, *Between the Acts* is a transitional novel and it oscillates between a modernist conception of the fragmented self possessing an essential core and a postmodern notion of the subject as unstable, centreless and dispersed. Thus on the one hand Miss La Trobe is the epitome of the modernist alienated artist. She is presented as an isolated, eccentric figure with a strong central core that allows her to create. Her modernist aesthetics is revealed in her belief that she can represent the essence of characters and subjects on the stage and that she can create a sense of unity among the audience. However, at the end of the play, another vision of the subject is presented that pushes beyond modernism. It is in the scene when all actors come out with mirrors which they point at the audience. The distorted and fragmented reflections of themselves that the members of the audience see reveal the subject as fragmented, centreless and dispersed.

"Here a nose... There a skirt... Then trousers only... Now perhaps a face... Ourselves?" Thus in the play that Miss La Trobe produces on the one hand she attempts to bring the audience together. On the other, however, the use of mirrors at the end denies the audience any sense of wholeness and unity.

In *The Golden Notebook* there is an obvious movement towards the delineation of a new female subject. The novel presents the various versions of Anna. The multiplicity of

Annas challenges the traditional humanist concept of the whole, unified, integrated self. Lessing's novel depicts a centreless subject who is a set of various socially constructed roles: the role of a mother, writer, editor, social worker, lover, friend, etc. Anna's constant shifts from one self to another indicate that the human subject is in process and can never be fixed. The multiplicity of roles and the fragmentation it involves bring Anna very close to madness. However, she is able to attain some balance and restore her creativity only when she comes to accept the fact that chaos and madness are intrinsic to contemporary existence and identity. Thus out of chaos, she attains "a new kind of strength."

In summing up I should say that there is an obvious gradual movement in the presentation of the woman artist as viewed by George Eliot, Virginia Woolf and Doris Lessing. As pointed out earlier, George Eliot depicts only one truly dedicated and successful woman artist in her fiction. The Alcharisi is definitely a Byronic type of artist, set apart from the ordinary prosaic world which she despises. She glories in her difference and firmly isolates the aesthetic from larger issues of life and reality. The opera singer never doubts her genius and believes in one absolute truth about herself – utmost dedication to art. She is more an artist than a woman as she adheres to one role in life – that of a renowned singer. Accordingly her self is presented as containing an essential, centred, unchanging core.

Unlike George Eliot, Woolf depicts several successful women artists in her fiction. Her heroine Miss La Trobe is somewhat a transitional figure. Like the Alcharisi she also falls into the Byronic mould as she is an isolated and alienated rebel, set apart from her kind. However, in contrast to the singer, Miss La Trobe is tormented by a sense of inadequacy and doubts about her artistic powers. What is more, she never isolates the aesthetic but incorporates it in the life of the community. Besides, as she is a transitional figure, the presentation of subjectivity in her portrayal is contradictory and reflects the tension between modernism and postmodernism. On the one hand she is presented as a character with a strong central core in accordance with which she wants to create a sense of unity in the audience. At the end of the pageant, however, by her final trick she denies the audience any sense of unity.

Lessing's heroine in *The Golden Notebook* departs definitely from the Byronic conception of the artist and is classified as a Wordsworthian type. In her portrayal rather than difference from others likeness to others is emphasized. Anna Wulf sees herself as

an ordinary human being, “a boulder pusher”. The role of an artist is only one of the multiplicity of roles that she performs. As an artist she firmly believes that caring about the other, about humanity is what matters most. She places her aesthetic themes in the social and moral context of her age. The greatest difference from the previous novels is that in *The Golden Notebook* there is a movement towards the delineation of a new subject that is protean rather than stable, depicted always in a process.

Finally I should say that though the portrayals of these women artists are conditioned by the spirit and ethos of different ages and different literary movements they are all powerful and memorable. It is significant, however, that the contemporary heroine, Lessing’s Anna Wulf, has the greatest chances of attaining a reconciliation of emotional and vocational self-fulfilment. Thus I’ll finish on an optimistic note and express a belief, together with Doris Lessing, that the future holds in store some hope for womankind.

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CANADIAN NON-FICTION WRITER MYRNA KOSTASH AND FEMINISM

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An approach to Myrna Kostash's work has to take into consideration that she is an intellectually challenging non-fiction writer. On the one hand, one can follow the writer's construction of her own identity; on the other hand, learn about issues like ethnicity, multiculturalism, counter-culture, teen-age cultures, feminism in Canada and, in her writings dedicated to the Slavic countries of Europe, about the "bloodlines" of ethnic and cultural encounters. An interview with Myrna Kostash in *Canadian Literature*, Spring 2002, sums up her career and ideas. The title of the interview reflects the way she had defined herself as a "Ukrainian Canadian non-fiction prairie New Leftist feminist Canadian nationalist". These dimensions of her complex personality have been present in various degrees and combinations all through her intellectual history and each of them deserves special attention. The present article - one in a series of my approaches to Myrna Kostash's work - intends to examine some of her books that especially reflect the writer as a "feminist", using also the author's lucid review of her earlier work. Most of the information concerning her life comes from the above mentioned interview.

Myrna Kostash was born in 1944, in Edmonton, Alberta, one of the Prairie Provinces that had first granted Canadian women the right to vote (Rasmussen, 1976:195). A "privileged daughter" of a Ukrainian family, Myrna does not seem to have been marked by any major traumatic childhood experience. Still, she was aware that her mother's family background, schooling and language competencies were inferior to her husband's: "She came out of this working class - this kind of lumpen family herself. And when she married father, she increased her status within the Ukrainian community because she married a university graduate who belonged to an important family." For all this, the father's attitude could not be described as *patriarchal*. In order that everybody should be on the same level

in the family, he chose English as a common and unifying means of communication. Still, Myrna's uneasiness with and consequently occasional denials of her connection with both her parents and grandmother whenever friends came visiting were generated by their belonging to the Ukrainian minority "with the garlic breath and bad clothes", disregarded by the "Anglos". Later on she was made aware of the differences which also existed inside the community through her mother's attitude towards the later Ukrainian immigrants who, unlike her, came from the city, were Orthodox and were "disapproving of the Ukrainian Canadian culture they found". Myrna and her sister shared their mother's feeling of cultural inferiority inside the community: "we were dumb bunnies compared to the progeny of these DPs who spoke beautiful Ukrainian, knew how to do things, and actually knew how to dress in some strange way that we didn't know." The outcome was "rebelling" against them and, later on, becoming a "left-winger". (*Interview, 2002*)

The first events she remembers of her "intellectual history" are reading the headline about Stalin's death in the *Edmonton Journal* - that was a good thing from the point of view of the Ukrainian community - and the arrival of the Hungarian refugees' children in her school. Later on, these early perceptions, associated with the idea of Ukrainian anti-Soviet nationalism and Hungarian anti-Soviet nationalism, became ambiguous because they "overlapped with the right-wing agendas in North America". (*Interview*) The next important moment was in highschool when, impressed by the South African anti-apartheid struggle and then the emerging civil rights movement in the United States she adhered to internationalism. Myrna's wish to actualise her potential and her growing sense of self esteem had been evident from her undergraduate days in her joining the Liberal Club at the University of Alberta. When they won the elections for the youth's model parliament, she was named Minister of Culture and Immigration and she wanted to do something about the reservations. Even if her bill did not get the approval of Maria Smallface, the militant for aboriginal people's rights, at least it had been an opportunity for Myrna to meet her and get a real insight into the First Nation people's problems. As a graduate student in 1965/66 she went to Seattle and joined the Students for a Democratic Society whom she saw as "pastoral", "quite bucolic", in comparison with the more radical branches in Berkeley or Michigan. This marked her transition to the international New Left until she discovered Canadian nationalism in 1970. Perhaps, in the background, there was also the influence of her mother's family who had been "poor Bolshie immigrants".

Myrna studied Slavic languages and literatures at the universities of Alberta and Toronto, did a Master's degree in Russian literature and wrote a thesis about Dostoevsky, "as a kind of in-your-face gesture towards the Ukrainian community, to show that I didn't share their phobia about the Russians". This was also her period of "eroticising" Bolshevism: "I had pin-ups of Lenin on my wall. Mixed up in all of that as well were the drugs, the sex and rock'n'roll. It was a fertile little period. Nothing like that has ever happened again that's so concentrated." (*Interview*, 2002) These "eroticised" memories were to inspire her later on, in the nineties: the pieces collected in her erotic creative non-fiction book entitled *The Doomed Bridegroom*. Myrna had thought that her own "immensely multithemed experience" was shared by all who grew up in the sixties.

After graduation, Myrna went off to Europe and hitchhiked around for a year in 1969. After having visited Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey, she got back to England in 1970. There her life was changed by reading leaflets, pamphlets and documents issued by the women's movement, among them Anne Koedt's *The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm*. This was the moment when she adhered to feminism. During the same trip, while watching a BBC dramatization of the Chicago Seven Trial, she realized that her identification with the American experience of the sixties had absolutely no connection with the Canadian one. That marked the beginning of her identifying with Canadian nationalism.

At her return to Toronto in the spring of 1971, she got involved with the then still experimental interdisciplinary Women's Studies. As a teacher in the programme, among other activities, she helped her students organize a women's cultural festival at the University of Toronto. They had invited the Chicago Women's Revolutionary Rock Band for the event but the experience was not a happy one as "the big bull dykes with their groupies" seemed to look down upon their Canadian sisters. Later on, she learned that the Canadian women were considered only "instrumental" in organizing things for the American radical feminists and were not regarded as equal partners in discussions. In comparison with the American feminists, Kostash declared herself "a socialist feminist" who "understood that feminism was about a larger liberation". (*Interview*, 2002) Nevertheless, she did not become an activist, choosing to be a writer instead, and it was only later that she realized that it was her own form of activism. Besides her teaching in the Women's Studies programme at the University of Toronto and her "immersion" in Canadian Studies, she had been working for four years as a freelance magazine writer appearing mainly in *Saturday Night*, *Macleans* and *Chatelaine*.

Myrna Kostash returned to Alberta in 1975, on a Canada Council grant, in order to research and write a book about the Ukrainian community. This was when she met Maria Campbell and thought again about the First Nation's experience and wrote an essay entitled "The Indian Ethnic". The outcome of Kostash's project was *All of Baba's Children*, published in 1977, a monograph of the Ukrainian community of the Prairies in Canada in the first half of the twentieth century. It includes both oral and written history and covers a wide range of aspects of the Ukrainians' life viewed from different perspectives. In 1987, in his foreword to the third edition, George Melnyk was already recommending it as a "classic", a "vibrant, radical and revisionist perspective on multiculturalism."(vii) Melnyk underlined that the book enters into the category of "social literature" and its author was presented as a "product" of the protesting generation of the sixties culturally influenced by the "struggle for equality and pride of the women's movement and oppressed minorities, who in the sixties and the seventies were rediscovering their lost past in strong, confident tones." (vii) In looking back at her experience, Myrna thinks that "it had to do with the valorisation of her being Ukrainian" and this because "Ukrainians are really important in multiculturalism in Western Canada" as they were "Left, very Left, they were feminist and were very critical of the Soviet Union". She wrote her book "on behalf of the beleaguered minority who were misrepresented". (*Interview*, 2002)

The *Baba* in the very title of the book could be interpreted as a kind of "Founding Mother" even if the writer's intention is to write about the following generation, *baba's* children. Thus, in comparison for example with the Chinese-Canadian Wayson Choy's book of fiction, *The Jade Peony*, where the figure of the grandmother is a character that dominates the whole book, in Kostash's non-fiction, *baba* functions rather as a permanent point of reference for the author, an effigy of the old country and nation. *All of Baba's Children* explores topics connected to work, family life, education, religion, culture, politics, racial discrimination, nationalism and assimilation, ending with a chapter entitled "Mythologies". As if reflecting the invisibility of women in traditional societies, there is no special chapter dedicated to them in Kostash's book, neither do the writer's quite extensive notes (431-446) list any reference to the topic. But there are quite a lot of women among the "voices" telling their stories and women's problems are present in all the chapters of the book. The writer gives a special attention to their situation in the chapter

entitled “Community”, showing that pioneer women had no legal right to own property, being little better than slaves in their families:

Marriages were arranged, women often did not even eat with the men, but served them first and, over all such transactions, the church spread its benediction. Women endured yearly childbirths and frequent child deaths, untreated pelvic diseases and the often fatal puerperal fever; as noted, they were more often illiterate than the men and, when educated, had a great chance of being taken out of school to marry or to care for younger siblings; as home workers, they tended to be much isolated from social contacts and their participation in community activity outside the church was almost unheard of. (1987:170)

The situation of women in town - where in many cases the wife was also a wage earner - was easier, nevertheless, the author finds a “depressing sameness” in women’s activities as they “only transferred their work from the household to the community at large”. They worked as volunteers and, says the writer: “there is considerable irony in the fact that unpaid labour of women has netted millions of dollars’ worth of goods and services for almost everyone but themselves.” (173) The means that also contributed in perpetuating the patriarchal mentalities were folktales, jokes, stories about shrewish wives etc. The school primers provided lessons spreading the “sweeter but no less stultifying” Anglo-Saxon morality, in which women appeared as “ministrating angels” (173). In her straight and provocative tone, Kostash challenges mythologized versions of history and idealised visions of multiculturalism based upon ambiguous keywords such as: national unity, identity, richness, energy, which hardly reflect individual reality. The end of her journey in the heart of the prairies summarises Kostash’s search for identity only for the time being. She recognises her “otherness” but also asserts her being “of this place”. The book ends this time in a personalised homage to her own grandmother:

If there was any way at all that I carry on from where she [Baba] left off, it won’t be with her language, because I never knew it, nor with her habits, because they make no sense, nor with her faith, because I have lost it, nor with her satisfaction, because my needs have changed. It will be perhaps with the thing she had no choice in bequeathing: the otherness. As the alien, the ‘bohunk’, the second class citizen, and the ethnic she passed on to me the gift of consciousness of one who stands outside the hegemonic centre, and sees where the real world ends and the phantasm of propaganda begins. As for the generation between us, my parents, her children, they gave me the possibility of action as

one who is of this place and this time, free of the ghosts of diffidence. Seeing clearly and acting surely: the journey from Tulova ends here.”(Kostash, 1987:430)

Besides her ethnic community, the most important influence in the writer’s formative years had been her belonging to the generation of the sixties. Almost twenty years later, Myrna Kostash’s second book, *Long Way from Home. The Story of the Sixties Generation in Canada* (1980), reconstituted the events from the documents she could still find as well as from the memories of the survivors. The chapter titles remind of the rhetoric, slogans or graffiti of the period: “Peace now!”, “War is good business, invest your son!”, “Hell no, we won’t go”, “Knowledge for whom?”, “Be realistic, demand the impossible”, “Hope I die before I grow old” etc. Kostash’s personal reason for writing the book is her “becoming of age” in the sixties: “I turned twenty-one, and threw myself into the great learning about camaraderie, war, imperialism, rock’n’roll, the Godhead, vagabonding, lust, appetite and woman power” (XIII).

The first of the sixties’ representatives in the book is Gail Price Douglas, “artist”, “westerner”, “waspish”, “middle-class”. While her brother had gone off to Berlin and returned a Marxist, Gail was completely unaware of the political issues of the day because she was a “good little girl”, sharing her parents’ values (XXIX). She discovered the students’ radical movement only in 1968, when she went to the University of British Columbia to do her master’s in social work. She became a member of an interdisciplinary group and worked on projects with community-help groups. But she was scared of radical ideas and violence. Her real change occurred during the fall of ‘69 in Vancouver, when she settled in a communal hippie house and “learned to relax, to turn on, to make love with abandon and indulgence.[...] Among the hippies it was ‘okay’ to express her own self. She began to weave. In 1969 Gail Price came into her own” (XXX). This idyllic view of the hippie commune as liberating from the social conventions will be criticised later on, showing the women’s exploitation by their male partners.

Quite another portrait and story is that of Lydia Semotuk, “single woman, self-employed researcher on western Canadian populist movements, consultant and lecturer in business administration, a ‘seeker’ still” (XXXI). Her parents’ and teachers’ influence made of Lydia a “socialist” and a “humanist”, and on the university campus she naturally found herself among the left-wingers. But most of her friends were men as “women were peripheral” and “introduced as so-and-so’s girlfriend”. She studied political science, even

though the department chairman tried to convince her that “as a woman she would be happier in some other field of study.” Like the author herself, Lydia travelled to Europe and “discovered she was sexual and that it wasn’t a bad thing”. But back at the university she became less sure of what was right or wrong. When she met Peter Boothroyd who was a “radical superstar, a keynote speaker for the Student Union for Peace Action across the country”, she refrained from telling him her Ukrainian family name, but breaking her family ties and acting against their morality, she agreed to live with him outside marriage and “subordinated herself to him, to his vision, to his ego, to his society”. In Peter’s circle of radical friends in Toronto, Lydia’s role was to cook and clean the apartment and she was completely ignored during the men’s discussions. The situation was the same when she went to attend some courses in the philosophy department where “the male radicals were the darlings of the Marxist professor”. As a result of these experiences she became a “feminist”, though in a rather narrow interpretation of the concept:

Civil rights, Cuba, Vietnam, yes, she had powerful feelings about all these issues, but they were not her issues in the end. Neither any longer were the issues of her ethnicity and class origin, for they had ceased to be troubling when first her friends’ interest and admiration and later her father’s history and convictions had made her proud. In their place the woman’s pain emerged. Around the issue of birth control and abortion and women in workplace, she could finally speak, she, Lydia, not the superstar’s appendage anymore. (XXXIV)

Myrna Kostash includes the women’s liberation movement in the criticism of the sixties’ counter-culture, exposing the sexual-liberation as “fraudulent”:

Double standards prevailed in the vocabulary of sexual put-down, responsibility was evaded in the rhetoric of non possessiveness, and the insistence on the personal construction of sexuality foreshadowed the propaganda that would take the legitimate demands of people for self-determination and hand them back as pornography. (Kostash, 1980:113)

The second chapter in Part IV is entitled “The Rising of Women” and its epigraph comes from the pamphlet “Abortion Is Our Right!” distributed by the Vancouver Women’s Caucus in 1970. Myrna Kostash remembers how in 1963, while a student she and her colleagues were reading, besides de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*,

about the “problem that has no name”, about the women of North America who “felt sexless and barren of personality, and, in shame and guilt, got drunk in the afternoons”:

We read there of the grotesque discrepancy between the image of men in our society - men as revolutionaries and space travellers and physicists and mystics - and the image of women, of us - as childish, frivolous, empty headed housekeepers whose cultural task was to beautify ourselves; social responsibility, to have babies; and economic function, to consume household goods. We were cheated, wrote Betty Friedan, of our self-esteem, disallowed our development as intellectual and moral beings and forfeited our personhood. We had swallowed the lie of our inferiority and obliterated the genetic memory within us of women who had been mighty with the truth about women.

(1980:166-167)

What women thought then in 1963 was that their fate would be different from “the defeated brigades of women in the suburbs” and just a few years later they discovered the notion of “sisterhood”. Myrna uses also “sorority” as it hints of the women of Quebec as being part of the province’s political and administrative liberation movement. She records the women’s contribution to the political movements in Canada: “Women’s liberation has engineered the first occupation at the university of Toronto...” One of their slogans was “All power to the people - especially to women!” (174)

By the end of her *Long Way from Home* Myrna Kostash “revisits” some of her portraits. Gail Price Douglas’s “artist’s creativity goes into mothering” and, because she married a potter instead of a doctor or lawyer and they need money, she has to work too. This means that she is not a full-time homemaker and mother but shares responsibilities with her husband. The changes went even deeper with Lydia Semotuk: “The lifeline that was finally thrown to her was feminism.” She ended up teaching other women in her women and management classes that in a corporate world one has “to figure out where power is held and how to get a share of it.” She thinks that the big question for women in order to change the world is “to become part of it to change it” (Kostash, 1980:262). The writer stresses the importance of the Sixties in changing women’s life: “If the Sixties hadn’t happened, she’d have ended up a schoolteacher, uptight, fearful, non-questioning, conformist.”(263) This is also the case of the writer herself. Her political thinking, her feminism, but also her Canadian nationalism had been shaped through the sixties.

Kostash's book dedicated to her sister Janice, *No Kidding. Inside the World of Teenage Women* is entirely devoted to the problems of young women in Canada. Published in 1987, it marks an important moment in the writer's own confrontation with the passage of time, her own femininity and her relationship with another generation she knew very little about, being a childless woman "whose friends were only just starting to raise their families". As a feminist she "was also curious to see whether the revived women's movement, now some fifteen years old, had reproduced itself: in the lives of teenage girls, had we made any difference at all?" (7) The book had started as a research project, the collection of data was based on taped interviews, journals of impressions, reports of unrecorded conversations, and literature related to the subject. Like an anthropologist, Kostash did 'field studies', meaning that she went to all the places where she could meet the members of the sub-culture she was focusing on. The Introduction of the book contains some ideas that could be taken as the writer's conclusions at the end of her research. On the one hand, the generation of the eighties was smaller in number than that of the sixties and many of the assumptions of the former generation "about monogamy, the nuclear family, chastity, heterosexuality" had been undermined. Other things had not changed: "Girls still operate at a tremendous social and economic disadvantage compared to boys - they are paid less money at work, receive less attention at school, and are given fewer breaks at home." According to the writer, some things were even worse: "Now that the taboo against premarital sex has fallen, girls are receiving even less pleasure from sex, as cuddling and necking and petting are foregone in the rush for the joyless humping of teenagers on car seats." (1987b:10) As concerns the adult-teenager relationship, Kostash is reticent in making some definitive statements. She shows the discrepancies between the expectations adults have from teenagers and the way they treat them, and to make her accusations less offensive, she seems to identify with the parents:

We assault, batter, and rape our children, abandon them to the streets, lose them to suicide, as though we cannot do what every simpler creature does: care for its young. We resent our children's 'freedom'. We complain about their lack of responsibility for family relationships and work routines, and grumble about their preoccupation with having a good time, without realising, as culture critic Simon Firth points out, that it is only people utterly without power who can 'account for their lives in terms of play, focus their politics on leisure.' We berate youth for its rebelliousness, its general lack of respect for us and our works, and its uppityness. But we produce, if studies are to be believed, our

clones: young people who reflect back at us the imprint of our own values, prejudices, and opinions. (1987b:11)

The responses she gets from her interviewees, some of them sad, “heart-breaking or hair-raising stories” of violence, rape, promiscuity, make the writer declare that she would not want to be for anything in the world in these girls’ place and she looks back with nostalgia to her former self “who seemed so brave and tough and free” in a time “when it seemed that youth would make a revolution - cultural, sexual, spiritual, if not political.”(11) The book consists of a series of twelve chapters dedicated to individual or pair portraits, alternating with twelve thematic chapters, themes which the author must have thought relevant for characterising the teenagers’ sub-culture: best friends, school, classrooms, boys, families, outsiders, sexualities, jobs, computers, cultures, politics, futures. Though most of the book consists of narratives, comments or descriptions, the writer also reproduces some of the recorded dialogues. The fourteen girls of her “portraits” are chosen so as to give the reader an as wide as possible perspective on the generation under scrutiny in a multiethnic and multicultural Canada. Thus, she chooses girls with different racial, ethnic, social and family backgrounds, studying in different types of schools (public, alternative or religious), living with their parents, coming from disorganized families, or just being on their own. The girl from an average, normal family, as well as the hooker, the anarchist, the computer nerd, the school intellectual, the dancer, the political activist, etc., all get a place in the writer’s gallery. Among the topics, “Best Friends” comes first because, according to sociological surveys, says Kostash:

Friends had replaced parents as the most influential people in a teenager’s life. This phenomenon was regarded by some observers as not particularly alarming, since ‘peer culture’ constructed primarily of trivialities, ephemera, and “non essentials”, implies no permanent rejection of adult-related values. It was seen by others, however, as a sign of the ‘moral authority’ of parents over their growing children had ‘collapsed’. In fact, the conclusions need be neither sanguine nor so lugubrious. Teenagers may seem wild and alienated. But their flamboyant subculture obscures the essential conservatism of their values (their hedonistic goals for their personal future, for example, or their petit bourgeois political attitudes) all of which are derivative of their parents’ own. (Kostash, 1987b:32)

The writer observes that as concerns their view of adult culture, girls have a more optimistic perspective than the boys because: “female adulthood, in an era of spreading feminist culture and of the politicisation of women’s labour, holds more of an attraction for today’s adolescent girl than in earlier generations. She looks forward to her maturity: financial independence, adventure, pleasure.” (32) This explains also why the last of the girls whose portrait she offers the reader has for its motto “I am gonna go for it”. Eva is eighteen and has been living on her own since she was sixteen. Her divorced parents (mother “abusive”) had yielded their child to the government. Instead of becoming a foster child or go into a detention home, she chose a government independent support living programme (SIL), allowing her to live without financial aid from parents, without social assistance and without a room-mate. After she came out of the government programme she found different jobs: first at a fast-food drive-in, then at a bus station café washing dishes, selling Avon products or Tupperware. She found a boyfriend, he moved in with her but she did not like his style of life. In order to understand their relationship she read *How to Live with a Man*. She learned from it that her Territory had been invaded and later on broke off the relationship and found a more suitable partner. She enrolled in a night school to finish her studies and intended to go to “university” to study psychology. The chapter on Eva ends with the writer’s own supportive incentive: “Bon voyage, Eva. Go for it.” (1987b:297)

Exploring the curriculum concerning the science education of women in Canada, (“Classrooms”) the writer concludes that a “minuscule” number of women were working professionally in the sciences at the beginning of the eighties and the percentage of doctoral candidates in the field was also very low. The consequence was that girls had few role models. In science classes the girls were often the object of their teachers’ teasing and their experience marginalized. The reason would be the social definition of femininity, the prejudice that the girl’s personality lacks the traits that would produce a science student: “love of intellectual challenge, pleasure in solitude, satisfaction from theoretical problem-solving, fantasies of inspired break-throughs, and, perhaps, of power and money” (74). Kostash stresses that girls’ performance in maths and the sciences is actually not gender related and has to be understood historically, as “women have only a brief experience, culturally and socially as students of higher education undertaken for its own sake”(75). If the girls coming from middle-class were not encouraged by their families to have the same education as boys in order to perpetuate the ideal of “the happy family”, the daughters

coming from working class had to face other problems. A 1985 report of the Canadian Advisory Council on the status of Women found some evidence that students from working-class backgrounds were channelled into non-academic or vocational programmes by “class-biased” teachers.

The strange thing is that many of Kostash’s interlocutors did not feel discriminated against, accepting their environment’s mentality. A deeper insight into this subject is offered in the chapter on “Politics”. As a conclusion to her interviews the writer realises that the girls, due to lack of proper information, have rather vague ideas about feminism and actually not much has changed in their situation:

Amnesia. How, after fifteen years of a women’s movement naming the ‘putdowns’ and hurts and injuries and assaults (physical, emotional, economic), and worse, that women endure, can a girl not ‘remember’ her own pain? The question suggests its own answer: the act of remembering is an act of historical consciousness not fully available to a sixteen-year-old. But neither, it seems, is it ‘available’ in the social and intellectual life around the girl. If, for example, she does not read feminist texts (and few do), her perception of feminism is limited to the message of the mass media, popular culture, and hearsay, which are distorted and trivialised. (Kostash, 1987b:283)

Due to its representations in the mass media, feminism is perceived as “the ideology espoused by unattractive women who want all humankind to live the same joyless lives they do. In other words, it is a kind of sexual losers against the lucky”, without “the pleasure and exuberance and wonder feminists feel in their communal and collective activity” (1987b:283). Myrna Kostash quotes from Susan Brownmiller’s book *Femininity*, showing that some “grim moralists” of the feminist movement, even though right when they revealed sexual violence and the “self-enslavement” of women as sex objects, their condemnation of make-up, sexy-clothing, deodorants, etc. cannot seem attractive to young girls. Neither do the new roles attained lately by women (career women or superwomen) seem too attractive, condemning them to work even harder than before. But Myrna Kostash is still confident: “wherever or whenever she conspires to make a life organized around female friendship, intellectual curiosity, useful work, and affection, there she is feminism’s daughter.” (284)

The last chapter of the book is about the teenage girls’ expectations of the future. Some of their ideas are inspired by their school’s Career Days and they speak of becoming

rock stars, theatre directors, travel agents, lawyers, dress designers, social workers, some wish to own a beauty salon or a boutique, or simply become rich and famous. Some cannot make up their minds. They are shocked to learn about the “wage gap” between men and women or the “job ghettos” (“the concentration of female employees in clerical, service and sales jobs”), discrimination and female pauperisation (299). Thus, the girls confronted with the reality have to revise their ideal. Kostash quotes a survey published in 1980, showing the difference between the girl’s aspirations and expectations: e.g. she aspires to be a doctor but expects to become a nurse (Kostash, 1987b:307). But Myrna Kostash hoped that still this new generation would fight for itself. Her confidence in change was justified by the fact that many girls were willing to study engineering, mathematics, counselling, law, etc. Most of them thought of a combination of “career” and “family”, but there were also girls for whom raising children was far more important than being married.

The writer ends her book with the hope that female history will stop repeating itself:

Two things would help her realise her possibilities: democratic and non-sexist social and economic institutions; and her own conviction (let her be given space and autonomy enough!) that she can be and do more than she was ever allowed to imagine. Let her imagine herself bold and clever and sovereign. Let her imagine herself a woman.

(1987b:311)

The writer’s capacity to sketch a portrait or to tell a story in just a paragraph makes the book extremely dense, but without a narrative canvas to fix the details in the reader’s mind. Perhaps this is exactly the writer’s intention: to show that all of those girls she had interviewed deserved the same attention. A close reading of the text would try to dwell upon all the portraits and themes, as they are equally important, giving a broad insight into the Canadian educational system, family life, relationships, employment, government programmes etc. at the beginning of the eighties. The extensive notes show that the author did not rely only on her own observations. Avoiding being subjective, she wanted to approach the problems well-armed with a thorough theoretical knowledge in fields like psychology, education, sociology etc. and she consulted the available statistical data as well. As in her former books, Kostash’s literary talent is evident. Not only is she a master of portraiture but also a keen observer of teenagers’ jargon.

The writer’s later experience as Chair of the Canadian Writers’ Union, her participation in writers’ and women’s meetings, her exploration of the Slavic countries in

Europe, have brought about “revisitings” of her former ideas and convictions and resulted in new books: *Bloodlines. A Journey into Eastern Europe* (1993), *The Doomed Bridegroom* (1998) and *The Next Canada* (2000), each of which deserves special attention (See Olos, 1999 and 2000). So does her interview that ends with the message for a new solidarity. Myrna Kostash’s work - her form of activism - should be viewed as a sample of Canadian feminism that can serve as source of information as well as inspiration even for those who have not shared her experience or whose political convictions differ from Myrna Kostash’s views.

Even if she declares herself a Canadian nationalist and stresses the particularities of feminism in her own country, most of her ideas coincide with those of the feminists of the United States. Reading for instance Andrea Dworkin’s *Woman Hating*, published two years before Myrna Kostash’s first book, we encounter similar beliefs and the same rhetoric, though the American feminist is far from being a nationalist like Kostash:

Us - who are we? Jerry Rubin says that we are all the children of Amerika. Eldridge Cleaver calls us the children of BLOOD. It is our parents, Amerika, BLOOD, who through their moral bankruptcy and genocidal ways have forced us from womb onto the streets of the nation. It is our parents, Amerika, BLOOD, whom we refuse to be, whose work we refuse with our children. We are the tribes of Woodstock nation, now in diaspora, roaming the whole earth, we are the New Left, wounded, in disarray. We are not yet extinct, and we are not nearly finished. Our past is only prologue. [...]

What it comes down to is this: through the use of drugs, through sexual living out, through radical political action, we broke through the bourgeois mental sets which were our inheritance but retained the humanism crucial to the liberation of our parents. Our goals are simple enough to understand: we want to humanize the planet, to break down the national structures which separate us into distinct classes, the racist structures which separate us according to skin color; to conserve air, water, life in its many forms; to create communities which are more than habitable - communities in which people are free, in which people have what they need, in which groups of people do not accumulate power, or money or goods through the exploitation of other people. (Dworkin, 1975:76)

For the readers in the former Soviet-bloc countries, most of whom have been marked by other experiences during the sixties, these happy remembrances about use of drugs, sexual liberation, radical political action may appear to come from another world. For them

there was perhaps only rock'n'roll and the echoes of students' movements from the west. Now, when drug abuse and its consequences, pornography and prostitution, violence in the family against children and women have become a social problem, Dworkin's utopian image of a free life in communes in the midst of nature would mean not only evading everyday reality but also lack of responsibility. Kostash's remembrances of her life in the sixties and her praise of New Left socialism would be viewed in the same way. Perhaps her new project based on a quest for St. Dimitri in the countries with Byzantine culture will bring her closer to the rebirth of religious fervour in post-communist countries where it can be a potential threat to the still feeble feminist movements. Nevertheless, with all the differences in former experience, point of view and background, Myrna Kostash's writings are a valuable source of information, besides other topics, on Canadian feminism and women's life in Canada.

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**THE AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL ADOPTEE AS A SUBALTERN
SUBJECT**

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Introduction

Adoption has been a flashpoint for conflicting political agendas regarding the American family since its beginning formalizations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Informal adoption has existed, perhaps, since parenting has existed; in colonial white America, for example, one finds instead of formalized, legal adoptions the “putting out system,” in which girls and boys were boarded with neighbours and kin to apprentice as workers in childcare, farming, and so on. It is in the early twentieth century, when Progressive Era social reformers sought to standardize and institutionalise adoption as a form of benevolent social engineering, that we begin to see quite political notions of appropriate family formation documented by the growing charity and social work professions. The ideologies that informed the standardization of adoption were often infused by benevolent sentimentality, but also the racism, classism, ethnocentrism, and sexism that marked the American construction of “the family” as the basic unit of a white upper class imperialist democratic republic. In this schema, legitimised by the growing field of social sciences, only one kind of family was seen as appropriate, healthy, sane, and desirable as that basic unit: the white middle class Christian nuclear family headed by a male bread-winner and nurtured by a mother who did not work in the waged labour force. Adoption policies were one way that social reformers, charity workers and politicians alike rationalized the removal of white infants from “unfit” mothers and place them with married middle class couples, while further marginalizing and marking as “Other” those non-white and/or non-middle class and/or non-Christian families that did not fit the schema.

This paper offers a postcolonial reading of American adoption by addressing the adoptee as a subaltern subject, positioned by the adoption industry as a mute carrier of white middle class American identity, in much the same way one would think of a “mute”

recessive gene – silent but crucially placed. Postcolonial theory is helpful in this analysis because it enables us to problematize the adoption industry, and the adoptee, as subjects of social engineering by elite administrators of social reform who sought to define America as essentially white middle class. The white middle class family was posited as the only viable social agent to represent and strengthen America, particularly from the late nineteenth century through the post World War II era of the Cold War. The adoptee as a social subject has a subaltern positionality in this schema because the hyper-psychologized discourse with which adoption has been narrated by the adoption industry itself has made it almost impossible for adoptees to speak out without re-pathologizing themselves. The hegemony of the social sciences (particularly in their popular psychology form) over American family life has served, to borrow a term from Ranajit Guha, to *contain* the white bourgeoisie to the point where *political* ways of viewing adoption are excluded by social workers and talk show hosts alike. Guha speaks of the near impossibility of the bourgeois in India to critique its own discourses (1997:6-13). In the case of America, the disallowing of political analysis has desiccated American discourse about family in general, but adoption here in particular, so that concepts of culture, gender, race, class, and generational experience are not easily available to adoptees seeking to develop political and cultural voice.

Lack of vocabulary for developing discourse has consequences. As adoptees have fought for the opening of birth records sealed by the adoption industry, they have been hard put to develop effective rhetoric at the level of civil rights and cultural identities. Moreover, when adoptees have been able to find their birthparents, or even been found, they have been unprepared for the complexity of lost-and-found extended kinship, particularly that which had involved so much discipline by the apparatuses of the state. We will examine an example of these struggles: the documentary film “Daughter of Danang,” which portrays the reunion of an American adoptee survivor of Operation Baby Lift with her Vietnamese birth mother.

Historical Grounding

Before we begin our analyses, it is necessary to look at those structural, ideological and cultural histories that have positioned adoptees as subaltern American subjects. The writings of postcolonial theorists such as Mamdani and Chatterjee are helpful in that they provide ways of examining the role of the bourgeoisie in the development of nations. That

role is crucial in understanding how American adoption has been practiced as a form of social engineering, since it has been primarily white bourgeois women who have developed the field of social work that has administered the adoption industry. Mamdani and Chatterjee have pointed out in their analyses of Africa and India that in the African and Indian experiences of colonization, there had always been popular resistance against the bourgeois, since that bourgeois had been an elite who served an invading colonial power. In America, the development of a strong white bourgeoisie, with all its attendant Andersen-esque qualities of print capitalism and imagined “American exceptionalism,” coincided in the late nineteenth century with Manifest Destiny, large scale genocides of indigenous people, terrorization of free blacks during Reconstruction, enormous increases of both immigration and persecution of immigrants, labour unrest, and American imperialism in the Philippines. The British colonial power that had invaded and established itself independently as “America” was now growing its own bourgeois at a time of incredible demographic, social and political change. It would become the major cultural project of the white bourgeoisie to develop its own particularized versions of family, religious and social life as *the hegemonic model* of a specifically *American* identity.

In order to understand the role of adoption in America’s making of itself as a white imperialist nation-state, we need first to look at the specific role of elite women. Partha Chatterjee has noted in *The Nation and Its Fragments* that elite women were crucial to the nationalist project in India; upper class bourgeois women were to represent the new independent Indian nation state by demonstrating their uniqueness. There was immense pressure on women to demonstrate difference from the West, from men, and from the lower classes (1993:116-157). In America, the process of “making Americanness” also involved utilization of women elites. Then, taking our cues from Mahmood Mamdani’s analysis of Africa as having experienced both centralized and decentralized forms of colonization, we can understand the nation-state as utilizing various forms of power for various spheres of life. In America, during the Progressive Era, white bourgeois women stepped forward as highly specialized, professional administrators in a decentralized state apparatus that accorded them the special responsibility *as women* for looking after “the needy”. That special project, called by some feminist historians “social housekeeping”, resulted from the argument advanced by white upper class women during the era of the Victorian cult of true womanhood that if women were indeed more spiritual, more loving, more nurturing and more compassionate than men, then they should have a hand in setting

social policy. Galvanized by a generation of working for both abolition of slavery and for suffrage, the late nineteenth century “New Woman” social reformers fused traditional white upper class notions of femininity with traditional female charitable carework for the “needy.” Jane Addams’ Hull House is the greatest standing example of that fusion. Charitable organizations joined with government organizations to create a state apparatus run by upper class white women that addressed the family issues of poor, white and non-white families: the Children’s Aid Society, the Salvation Army, and so on.

Progressive Era social reform and charity work were transformed into the full scale “professions” of teaching, nursing and social work by elite women whose newly college-educated, benevolent efforts encompassed social/political issues under the rubric of “social housekeeping”: the care of “waifs” and orphans, feeding the hungry, reform of prostitutes and alcoholics, converting the “heathen,” educating the illiterate, teaching hygiene, providing basic medical care, and so on. This new authority over socio-cultural matters brought the private sphere of the “family” into the public sphere of social policy and social reform, but because it was associated with the feminine, women in the helping professions struggled from the beginning with whether such matters could be dealt with in a straightforwardly political fashion. Their new-found authority could even in the early twentieth century show itself as a Mephistophelean deal: the standard of normalcy applied by workers in these new “helping professions” was quite often specifically white, upper middle class, Christian, and traditionally gendered. Though black women fought for their own advancement in these new professions and applied standards often less racist and classist, they were excluded, at first, by white women as professionals.

As they grew in influence, these new white elite professionals fought for dominance over the burgeoning social services. Rachel Kunzel documents conflicts among maternity home care workers in the early twentieth century; often earlier generations of less educated Christian missionaries and later generations of more educated, professionalized women struggled with each other over definitions of expertise and leadership (1993:9-36). Kunzel, Berebitsky, Rickie Solinger, Wayne Carp and Barbara Melosh, who have all produced different historical analyses of the adoption industry, trace the struggles of social workers in the early to mid-twentieth century for control of adoption on a national scale based on notions of their own professional expertise as social workers. Though social workers were deeply influenced by the work of male eugenicists, psychoanalysts, and social science

theorists, they were themselves at the forefront of the application of educated professional services.

All of these theories were racialized. In the documentation of social worker's notes, racism and ethnocentrism *never* seem to waver over time; African American, Hispanic, Asian and Native American birth mothers were seen by social workers, doctors and other service workers as highly sexual moral ciphers who would, "animal-like," "instinctively" know how to care for their children without help from services; into the nineteen sixties, they were sterilized by force (Solinger, 2000:41-85). Both white adoptees and white birthmothers, however, were conceptualised differently according to whatever social theories were in vogue at the time. As the foci of the nationalist bourgeois project of white cultural dominance, they were the subjects of consistently shifting theories regarding white female sexuality that did not conform to the chastity envisioned by the upper class white elite, which after all had its roots in a Victorian erasure of autonomous female sexuality. Since the nationalist project was to produce white middle class nuclear families, the class background of the white birthmother was sometimes de-emphasized; what was focused upon was that in having sex outside marriage she was being independently sexual in a way that was associated with a racialized Other, and that must be stopped.

The adoption industry served to discipline and control the sexualities of white women in a quite Foucauldian sense. At the turn of the nineteen into the twentieth century, white birthmothers were seen as innocent victims of a seduction-and-abandonment experience at the hands of rogue men, from which they could be saved by benevolent care workers. Maternity homes, doctors and adoption agencies stressed sentimental support and conversion to a Christian, "clean" life (Kunzel). In the early twentieth century, when eugenics became fashionable, upper class white anxieties about a supposed growing population of "imbeciles" and "idiots" resulted in birthmothers being posited as degenerates for becoming pregnant outside marriage, their illegitimate babies as possible seeds of the disintegration of white supremacy; this particular near-hysteria on the part of upper class whites resulted in white poor women being sterilized forcibly for a time. With the emergence of deviance theory in the nineteen twenties, white birthmothers were seen as sexual outlaws who must be punished by having their children taken from them. Maternity homes and adoption agencies hence behaved like reform schools for wayward sexual rebels. In the late nineteen forties, there was a backlash against socio-biological and eugenics theories because of the horrors wreaked by Hitler's uses of eugenics; instead,

Freud came seriously into fashion. Through the nineteen sixties, birth mothers were seen as “neurotic” for having had sex and produced a child outside of marriage; a “troubled” woman who had been “acting out” could redeem herself by relinquishing her child for adoption and go on to make a middle class marriage for herself, “as if nothing had happened.” Birthmothers were then cast by the adoption industry simultaneously as the ultimate monsters for “abandoning” their children to adoption and the ultimate saints for “giving them up,” while adoptees were cast simultaneously as the ultimate abandoned, rejected children and the ultimate special chosen children of the adoptive parents. (Solinger, 2000:103-205).

There are a few points worth noting in all this highly theorized hysteria about white female sexuality, about degeneracy, about idiots and imbeciles and deviance. At the same time this social and political sorting system was administered by white elite women in the cultural sphere, quite civic matters were simultaneously meted out by white male elites in the political sphere regarding rights and citizenship. Suffrage was won by women in nineteen twenty, but African American women and men both were kept from voting, acquiring jobs, housing, education and the use of public facilities on an equal basis. Various immigration laws sought to control the intrusion of nonwhite “Others” into the country. At the same time that the white female elite had ground-level power over the “private” sphere of family-making, sorting out the whites and the middle class and the chaste from the cultural Others for the creation of a strong white bourgeoisie, the “deserving” from the “undeserving poor,” men in the public zone of citizenship and rights were creating a form of “democratic republic” predicated on exclusionary ideologies and practices. Simultaneous to these two separate spheres, then, was the same national project of creating white elite supremacy.

Secondly, it is surprising to note that the practice of sealing records and shutting up into secrecy of the identities of birthmothers, which later became such a firestorm of contention and activism, was a relatively recent practice in adoption begun in the nineteen forties for quite pragmatic reasons. As E. Wayne Carp documents in his study of the Children’s Home Society of Delaware, adoption agencies developed the practice of sealing records as a marketing technique during the nineteen forties. As they worked for control of the white infant adoption market, Children’s Aid and Children’s Home Societies, as well as the Salvation Army, Catherine Booth and Florence Crittenton Maternity Homes found it beneficial to advertise sealed records as forms of protection of the birth mothers’

privacy. This strategy gained popularity in the nineteen fifties as stigmatisation of white single female motherhood reached its peak, and as white infant adoption reached increased, sealed records that neither the birth mother nor the adoptee would have access to become common and compulsory practice, even legitimised by state laws. From there came the practice that was to drive so many searching birthmothers and adoptees into activism: the unwillingness and/or legal inability of adoption agencies to release anything but “non-identifying information” to searchers in the name of “protection of the privacy” of birthmother, adoptees, and/or adoptive parents, many of whom had never sought or wanted such “privacy” to begin with. It is Carp’s contention that the fact that such a marketing strategy “worked,” drawing more birthmothers in the forties away from private adoptions through doctors and underground brokers towards “legitimate” agencies indicates that birthmothers themselves desired sealed records, but he ignores the fact that the practice became so quickly institutionalised and ritualised within adoption services that neither the desires and needs of birthmothers, adoptees or adoptive parents had much time for reception regarding sealed records. By Carp’s own documentation, sealed records were simply the standard practice by the mid-nineteen fifties (1998:102-139). This is an excellent example of the processes by which bureaucratic and marketing strategies of state-sanctioned social services can be institutionalised and even legalized over time, and then, further yet, cloaked with pseudo-psychological mystification regarding privacy rights that were often not sought or desired by clients themselves.

Thirdly, whatever mystifications were chosen by the adoption industry to justify their practices, as time went on those justifications were more and more likely to be accepted in the larger culture because of the hegemony achieved by the white bourgeois elite over America as a whole. The white bourgeois elite embraced popular psychology as the new form of secularised religion by the nineteen fifties, and it was able to project and impose the paradigm of normalcy as white-middle-class-traditionally-gendered into most American homes not only via the print capitalism Benedict Anderson discusses as essential to a nation as an “imagined community,” but also through the increasingly ubiquitous medium of television. The narratives written by pop psychology, the helping professions, and the culture of “experts” regarding family, normalcy, sexuality, motherhood, childhood, and personal fulfilment were promulgated through television, women’s magazines, the self-help industry, advertising, and talk shows which grew ever more confessional regarding the most intimate details of the audience’s and performers’ lives, most of whom

were and are female. The result was and is a very effective form of social discipline that pathologizes all who fall outside the norm of the white middle class male-headed family unit. Though the television and self-help arenas seem quite public and even carnivalesque in their outrageous sorting out of normalcy and freakishness, they do not partake in political discourse regarding family, identity, sexuality, and selfhood. All of these aspects of life had been contained within the much privatised zone of the cultural or personal, and that zone dominated by the discourse of pop psychology, not political analysis. The hegemony sought by the white elite had been achieved.

In the nineteen sixties, however, those disempowered in both the cultural and civic spheres had been organizing and fighting for rights as citizens. The civil rights movement led by African Americans in the fifties and sixties inspired similar activisms on the part of labourers, women, Hispanics, Native Americans, gays and lesbians, and many other groups who had been marked by the white elite as cultural Others outside the realm of civil rights and citizenship. Inspired as well by the discourse of rights to self-knowledge and self-determination, both birth mothers and adoptees began to organize and fight for access to birth records and medical records. As we shall see, they have struggled to create a viable rhetoric through which to fight.

The seventies saw changes in adoption practices themselves. The number of healthy white infants available for adoption began to decline steeply, which has been attributed both to the legalization of abortion and the destigmatization of white single motherhood. The adoption industry began to grapple first with the less hyper-psychologized, more overtly political issues of transracial and transnational adoptions. From the mid nineteen seventies forward, adoption agencies shifted from an almost exclusive promulgation of the white middle class nuclear family unit as the only viable form of family to the adoption of racial, ethnic, cultural and national “others” because of both the dearth of healthy white infants and a growing crises in the American foster care system. Some prospective adoptive parents, seeking infants less racially stigmatised than African American or Hispanics and less daunting than the older American children available through foster care, looked to Southeast Asia, China, and Romania for adoptable children.

At the same time adoption diminished as a vehicle of white upper class hegemony, the white middle class nuclear family itself began to decline. Divorce rates soared through the seventies and eighties; by nineteen eighty-five, half all of marriages would end in divorce. All these sociological factors, which came into play simultaneously, would deeply

affect the climate in which birthmothers and adoptees alike have fought for opening of records, ownership of their identities, and an authentic cultural/political voice. As we shall see, members of the adoption “triad,” as it became known, have used the hyper-psychologized language of the family and identity drama to argue for the need to “find their roots.” This has limited their ability to define a distinctive cultural voice, and made them vulnerable to the co-optation of the media. It is my argument that the media – talk shows, weekly television newsmagazines, print media and the like – co-opted and colonized the adoptee search and birthmother/adoptee reunion narrative as a pop culture folk story before adoptees and birthparents had time to find their own voices. In this co-optation, the reunion narrative was used to portray before viewing audiences an archetypal homecoming experience, at exactly the point in U.S. culture when “family” - i.e. white middle class nuclear families - seemed to be “breaking down.”

Daughter of Danang

I would like to turn now to an example of the consequences of a lack of developed political and cultural discourse for adoptees in search of their birthparents. One of the socio-cultural quandaries presented to searching adoptees is that historically, they have not been considered as adult members of the triad. For all the socio-political constructions of birthmothers along sexual/gender/race/class lines, adoptees were constructed by the adoption industry only as infants. Indeed, the legal confusions caused by adoptee rights groups’ challenges to sealed records are not only created by questions regarding birthmother privacy, but also the fact that the adoptee was never envisioned by the doctors, social workers, court systems and lawyers handling adoption as someday to become an adult who would have his/her *own* takes on his/her identities and needs.

The Adoptee Liberation Movement of America, Concerned United Birthmothers and other groups who have sought to open records have used the psychological discourse set by the adoption industry to argue for the rights of birthmothers and adoptees. Both groups have spoken in emotional terms of loss, of the need to know one’s roots, and the need to “heal” what is now discussed not as a necessary sacrifice in the best interests of the child, but rather a rupture forced by oppressive social circumstances. The trouble with this rhetoric is that it re-psychologizes birthmothers and adoptees, and thus continues the containerisation of adoption experiences within the personal/individual sphere. Attention is then not turned towards the cultural, the political, and the legal. Furthermore,

psychological discourse about adoption that casts separation as a loss and reunion as a healing sets up an expectation that reunion will indeed “heal.” But what if it doesn’t?

“Daughter from Danang” poignantly and powerfully illustrates this quandary. A documentary made by former anti-Vietnam War activists, “Daughter from Danang” portrays the reunion of a Vietnamese-American with her birthmother in Danang, Vietnam. The adoptee, named Heidi Bub by her American adoptive mother, is a survivor of Operation Babylift, a nineteen seventy-five effort on the part of the U.S. government to “save orphans of the war” in Vietnam by airlifting them to America and adopting them out to white Americans.

Operation Babylift was controversial. A plane crash claimed the lives of over a hundred Vietnamese children during the first airlift. The whole of the effort was seen by many as a last ditch effort on the part of President Ford to gain support for the Vietnam War in America. Moreover, many of the children rounded up from the streets of Vietnamese cities and villages were not, in fact, orphans. The efforts of both adoption and military organizations to carry out this “mission” ran blindly and ignorantly the differences between American and Vietnamese ways of child-rearing: Vietnamese families often placed their children in orphanages temporarily if they were unable to care for them or if they feared for their safety during wartime. Yet there was also a directly imperialist and ethnocentric bend to the mission; this documentary includes as part of its historical openings quite chilling footage of white blond American social workers walking through Vietnamese slums and trying to convince mothers who had not even placed their children out in orphanages to give them to Operation Babylift. Lawyer Tom Miller became involved with Operation Babylift along with Vietnamese American journalist and anti-war activist Tran Tuong Nhu:

Miller: Her friends who volunteered to assist, one of them called her and said, “You know, these children, many of them are not orphans - they’re talking about their families.” And we immediately notified the adoption agencies and the U.S. government that many of the children did not appear to be orphans, and they didn’t respond. There was zero response. There was an adoption industry in Vietnam where people would be able to adopt cute Vietnamese children of course there were true orphans - there was no question about that. But often these adoption homes were places where children were placed by their families who couldn’t take care of them. What this whole business was

doing was creating a situation where families were being induced to give up their children.

Volunteer Social Worker, U.S. adoption agency: If you can help me, if you know people who are poor, who cannot take care of their children, if they are mixed children, I would like to help them. I am not taking them away from you. I'll send them to good families. Tell them. Because I can take the children and send them to America. And it's better for everyone.

Vietnamese Woman (unidentified, speaking broken English): He tell me go with you.

SOCIAL WORKER: Let him go with me, aww, can I take him? Can I take him to the United States?

VIETNAMESE WOMAN: No.

SOCIAL WORKER: Aww... you think. You think about it, because he saw me take other boy. Other boy very happy.

VIETNAMESE WOMAN: Yes. Very happy. (Transcript)

Nhu, Miller and many others protested to the government about the imperialism and dishonesty in these practices, even filing a class-action lawsuit, but to no avail. Nhu remained involved with trying to re-establish contact between Vietnamese families and their airlifted children over the years, and was involved with arranging the reunion between Mai Thei Kim and her birth daughter Heidi Bub. Kim had given up Heidi, then named Heip, to Operation Babylift because she was afraid of what would be done to Hiep, who had been fathered by an American G.I., once the communists took over. Hiep was seven. Adopted by a white single mother, she was taken to live in Tennessee, where her adoptive mother instructed her to keep her Vietnamese origin secret and “tried to make me as American as possible.”

Probably the most disturbing aspect of the documentary – and the PBS website that supports it as an “American Experience” presentation – is how obvious it is that there are so many individual agendas regarding this birthmother/adoptee reunion, whose agendas win in the end, and what that has to do with the reunion’s outcome. For Nhu, the archetypal homecoming narrative is a paramount motivation, even knowing as she does the cultural, national, linguistic, generational and geographic differences that Heidi faces:

TRAN TUONG NHU: This for me was also the fulfilment of some dream that I had had. Hoping, that even if it didn’t work for a lot of people, it would work at least for one

person. That they would be able to be reunited with their, their mothers. To be reunited with Vietnam. Just for the sake of some sort of justice. Some poetic ending. There are many, many words for mother, but I believe she calls herself "meh."

HEIDI: Meh

TRAN TUONG NHU: Mah. It goes down... Meh. Or she might call herself "mah." You're going to be crying so hard you...

HEIDI: I won't be able to say anything anyway. I'll just be going "maaaahh."

TRAN TUONG NHU: I don't know if you're going to remember this, because you want to say I love you, right? (Transcript)

Nhu wants that mytho-poetic reunion because of her own background, her own long-term involvement in Operation Babylift, but Heidi's reunion is being scripted out for her in terms of intensity, language and declarations of love in the plane on the way to Vietnam. Although Nhu does inform Heidi that the family will expect economic help, her cross-cultural training seems to be lost in the drama of the coming reunion.

For the documentary producers, the motivation is a good "reality" human-interest story. Gail Dolgin and Vincente Franco, two California filmmakers, had run into Nhu at a party. Nhu and Dolgin had known one another as anti-war activists.

As she (Nhu) described the emotional intensity, Gail remembers feeling her documentary filmmaker's heartbeat accelerate. She expressed to Nhu that she thought it was unfortunate no one had travelled with her to document the moment. Nhu responded saying that Heidi was planning to make the trip to meet her mother - maybe we wanted to come along. Gail instantly knew there was a film to be made about the ensuing mother-daughter reunion and immediately called Vicente.

Six weeks later we were in Vietnam. We weren't quite sure of the scope of the film that might result from the trip, but it would at least be able to capture the reunion and what we believed would be a re-connection by Heidi with her long forgotten Vietnamese roots. The *cultural divide* between Pulaski, Tennessee where Heidi had been raised since age seven and her family and background in Danang seemed rich in possibilities. Our motivation as filmmakers is always inspired by passion-driven stories and the opportunity to step into the unknown and capture life as it reveals itself. In this case, we certainly were as unprepared as Heidi for what was about to unfold. (Danang, PBS Interviews)

The translator/reunion guide is thinking about a mytho-poetic reunion, the filmmakers are thinking about the “passion” and “capturing life as it reveals itself.” Yet it is obvious that neither Nhu, who arranged the reunion, nor the producers, who would help stage the reunion, did any research at all regarding the various histories of Americanised adoptions, what reunion would entail, what other reunions had entailed for other adoptees, and so on.

And what of Heidi Bub herself? What are her motivations? As the documentary unfolds, it is clear that she is almost completely drawn by the hopes that she will find in her birthmother the “unconditional love” that she felt she had missed out on with her adoptive mother, whom she describes as having been cold, possessive, rigid, and abusive: “I’ve always wanted the feeling that someone would love me no matter what. And I never had that with Anne... Y’know I had everything growing up. I just didn’t have a very loving parent... She hardly told me she loved me. I can only remember one time.... Never hugged or anything, she was just not that type of person” (“Danang” Transcript). She had searched on and off through the Internet for five or six years, and had some contact with the adoptee search communities growing on the web. Yet like the discourse in those communities, Heidi’s conceptual models for her adoption experience, and her hopes for reunion, are couched in psychological language exclusively. Growing in a small town in Tennessee, moreover, with some racial integration between children, a legacy of Klan activity, and no other Asian Americans around meant for Heidi a form of insularity that did not at all prepare her for thinking through the international and intercultural clashes she would face.

Though Nhu did understand those culture clashes, she seems, like the documentary makers themselves, just as caught up in the emotionalism of the reunion as the family. She encourages Bub to bring the emotional intensity of the reunion to a very high point from the very beginning, teaching her how to declare love, even though, as Bub’s Vietnamese brother later comments, it is not within Vietnamese culture to declare love all the time in words, but rather in gestures. While Kim’s emotional declarations are understandable within the context of seeing a daughter she’d lost twenty-two yeas ago, there seems no attempt on the part of Nhu or the filmmakers to be careful about the pacing of the reunion they are helping to stage, for the well being of both Bub and her Vietnamese family. In their commentaries on the film, Dolgin and Franco acknowledge Heidi’s emotionalism

may have clouded her judgment, but neither Nhu nor they take any responsibility for their part in the pacing of the first contact:

Heidi was so ecstatic and anxious at the prospect of reuniting with her long-lost mother that anything else associated with the trip to Vietnam was probably of less importance to her. And everything was happening so quickly. From the time she found out that her mother was alive and had been looking for her for all those years to the day she left for Vietnam was barely four months. In hindsight, she thinks perhaps it might have been better if she had waited a little longer.

(Danang, PBS Interviews)

Even the highly psychologized language with which adoptee reunions are discussed in adoptee search groups, internet communities, and pop psychology magazines acknowledge that the search process has a velocity which tends to make even the most careful searcher obsessive and quick to arrange actual contact once s/he sees the possibility. One would think that the fact that contact in this case also involved international travel, a language barrier, a separation story to do with American warfare, myriad cultural differences, and so on would have at least given Nhu pause, if not Bub herself, but Nhu is not terribly thorough as a reunion guide. Ambivalent and fuzzy about her dual role as translator and cultural guide, she seems to shrug off Bub's overwhelmed state, and leaves the reunion early, so that Bub must rely on another translator:

With Heidi, there was no way of really telling her what she was going to come up against. And I don't know if it was my job to tell her all of this, I mean I was trying desperately to teach her to say hello to her mother. I tried to warn her about how things were different in Vietnam. She gave me this: "I have to leave. I have to get out of here. I'm gonna' go back with you." I was going to go home a little early. I tried to comfort her, and I said to her: "listen, if you stay, after a few days things will become much less pressurized for you." (Transcript)

Yet Nhu had been doing much more than "trying to teach her to say hello to her mother;" she had been setting the emotional timbre of the reunion. And, as the guide for the reunion, whose job would it have been to prepare Bub for Vietnam if not Nhu's? Things do not improve for Bub after Nhu's departure. The reunion crashes when Bub, who has never travelled outside the U.S., and is without family and friends to support her,

becomes exhausted by culture shock, homesickness, and disappointment that her fantasy birthmother was not a reality. She becomes hurt and offended by her Vietnamese family's repeated demands for financial help. Though she had been warned that the Vietnamese consider whomever makes it to another country to be that family's financial lifeline, and had prepared gifts and cash, she is unprepared for how quickly she is expected to take on responsibility for her birthmother's care:

HEIDI: He wants me to bring her to the U.S. to live with me? And then send her back?

DUNG: It's a suggestion - to make up for lost time.

HEIDI: Tell them that it's impossible to make up for all that lost time, and I don't want to make it up. I just want to live for now and the future. Not for the past.

TINH: Okay, then, let's live in the present. And while we're waiting for her to go to the States, maybe Hiep could, with the consent of her family, help support our mother with a monthly stipend. Feel free to say yes or no.

DUNG: When you go back to United States, you can talk with John, and if you cannot bring mother to the United States, then you can provide her with some money monthly to have her... I have been frank with you, and so I would like you to be frank with me.

TINH: We have a present from us and Lien's family. You want to give it now?

SPEAKERS OFF CAMERA: Just give her the gifts now? We don't want to force her. This is too... awkward. She's too emotional. She's just come back for a visit. This is how things are done in Vietnam.

HEIDI: I can't do this.

PHOUC: It's all too uncomfortable for her. She can't say no, but she also can't... This is her first visit to Vietnam. Let's go slowly.

HEIDI: I can't do this. I am so mad. I can't do this. I'm so mad. (Transcript)

The ensuing anger and anguish unfortunately destroy the tenuous communication begun between Kim and Bub. Kim tries to heal the damage:

Seeing you is what matters. I don't want you to be miserable. All I want is for you to be happy with our family. I know you'd never abandon me, or else why would you have come back? If you'd lived in Vietnam all your life and refused to take care of me, then I'd be angry that you behaved like this. Since you've lived abroad

for so long, your reaction is different. Life is different there. I understand, and I don't blame you. We've got lots of time. Today, tomorrow, this year, forever. It's not as if you're going your way and I'm going mine. It's forever. (Transcript)

But the high drama, isolation and culture shock render Bub unable to handle any more by herself. After a stilted gift-giving scene, she returns home to her husband and children in American. She refuses further contact with her birthfamily in Vietnam. Later, she evinces enormous embarrassment and shame over her behaviour with her birth family, and fears criticism from viewing audiences if the documentary is released. There is a long process of negotiation with the filmmakers over the film. Finally, she agrees to allow its release, seeing the documentary as a set of pieces of a "puzzle" that helps her with each viewing to understand her experiences. The relationship with Kim, however, is damaged; Bub will not answer her letters, and cannot bring herself to offer the financial help the family requests. The door is closed, she says "but not locked."

According to the documentary notes, in 2002 Nhu visits Kim's family again in Vietnam and delivers to Kim a letter from Bub, so there may be hope for some continued contact. The last scenes of Kim in the documentary, however, are tragic: she prays to the ghost of her own mother, and sobs at the kitchen table over the second loss of her eldest daughter. Nhu set out to arrange a mytho-poetic reunion between an Operation Babylift Eurasian "orphan" and her Vietnamese birthmother, the documentary makers set about to film a passionate human interest story, but neither party take responsibility, in the documentary or in the notes, for how they have deeply affected the lives of both Bub and Kim and their families.

It is my contention that Bub and Kim have been taken advantage of, albeit unintentionally, by the makers of this documentary. Though she is a twenty-nine year old woman when she goes to Vietnam, the white American insularity Bub has lived has put her at a great disadvantage. The historical and political ignorances, psychological neediness and intense emotionality that characterize her entire approach make her vulnerable to having her experiences co-opted by others who have agendas that will not necessarily serve her best interests. The political history of Vietnam and the horrifying losses experienced by Kim make her vulnerable as well. In trying to craft a reunion story as an archetypal homecoming after the ravages of warfare, the guide for the reunion and filmmakers failed to do enough homework to adequately and compassionately respect

those involved in the lived experience both live and tell their own stories. For Nhu, Dolgin and Franco, the war story “arc” came from their *own* backgrounds as protestors and activists against the Vietnam War, yet there were many aspects of the reunion that would have been difficult whether or not Kim and Bub had been separated during a time of warfare. For Bub, the reunion was containerised in the white American experience of the highly psychologized family drama; ignorant about Vietnam, war, cross-cultural contact, and, apparently, the tenuous and often explosive nature of adoptee reunions, she could see only a chance for a mother-love she had missed out on. For Kim, the complexities of having lived through war and peace, marriage, motherhood, spousal abandonment, military occupation, sexual relationships with American G.I.’s, loss of a daughter, and the demands of family are exposed in the documentary, but certainly not acknowledged, respected, or focused upon as worthy material.

This documentary is terribly sad not only for the reunion that “doesn’t work out”, but also for the stories that could have been told. In applying the archetypal homecoming story, the filmmakers drew upon American pop culture’s views of family and missed out on the chances to tell amazing stories about the families of both Bub and Kim in such a way that would perhaps de-emphasize the drama and give more respect to complexities. The limited cultural discourse about adoption shows through in the meta-narratives that these filmmakers and their subjects had to choose from in trying to frame and understand such a complicated, intense experience. Though the film encompasses many complex issues, the sensationalism of its emotionality sacrifices a strong undertaking of the issues it portrays.

Towards a De-Colonized Discourse for Adoptees

The adoptee is a subaltern subject as long as s/he stays in that white elite container, because s/he doesn’t have the vocabulary for the complexities s/he encounters and must make decisions about. Bub did not have the tools she needed to face the challenges of reunion, because she could not - and perhaps, would not - imagine reunion outside any context but the psychological. Her own voice remains unheard until she put the pieces of the puzzle together for herself in an empowered way, beyond the realm of emotional neediness and the story arcs imposed by American pop culture.

There are some signs of this undertaking. Bastard Nation, a political activist group that works to open sealed adoption records, directly addresses the need for adoptees to re-

write their own histories and identities as adoptees. In re-claiming and transforming the notion of “bastards,” turning a critical eye on the hegemony of pop psychology, and directly challenging the cultural, professional and legal authority of the adoption industry, Bastard Nation represents the vanguard of adoptee radicalism. It holds rallies for court cases regarding the unsealing of adoption records (two states, Oregon and Tennessee, have repealed sealed records thus far), tracks and views adoption literature, and organizes state-wide action chapters. Its website at www.bastards.org includes gallows humour as well as the typical sharing of search and reunion stories; in a section called “True Tales of Revolting Reunions,” adoptees whose reunions did not turn out well document details of the ambivalences and shocks that reunion can entail. Letters and stories also question and criticize the socio-political notions of childhood, identity, sexuality, race, and family through which their own adoptions – or those of loved ones – were arranged by the adoption industry. The development of this anarchic, critical, political voice is crucial to bringing adoptees into the civil culture as awake and aware adults, not eternal infants.

What would happen if we – as scholars, activists, advocates, feminists, and family members – decontainerized our discourse about adoption, fosterage, “orphans” and parents in America? What would happen if we began to look at the histories of parenting – biological, adoptive, fosterage - while fully understanding the American constructions of family as the deeply imperialist project of a white elite? I would like to conclude this paper by suggesting that a postcolonial reading of adoption history would pull the lid off the container of the psychologized nuclear family drama. If we could see not only how individual love and loss operate in family, but also the ways in which race, class, gender, nationality, and sexuality are factored into what is considered and constructed as viable or non-viable bond by those who engineered America as America, we could give better respect to the complexities and the power relations lived by people like Bub and Kim. We could also enact a major calling to accounts for the white female elite who have served as a managerial class for the apparatus of the state, looking beyond altruism to a tough-minded understanding of both power to transform lives and complicity in systems. Adoption and fosterage could become less a sorting system of desirables from undesirables and more a compassionate and complex response to the myriad forms of family, parenting, and childhood.

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SECOND WAVE REVISITED

TOWARD A NEW FEMINIST THEORY OF RAPE

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Sexual violence has become the taboo subject of feminist theory today. The topic has been relegated to introductory women's studies courses, where it is predominantly subjected to issue-oriented and experiential analyses. Its discussion in that context typically follows a predictable pattern, namely, that of identifying the source of violence (gendered power relations) and its effects (trauma). Contemporary feminist theory, by contrast, tends to ignore the topic of rape in favour of more ambivalent expressions of male domination such as pornography and sexual harassment. The kind of theoretical and genealogical scrutiny that other aspects of women's lives (the body, gender performativity, eating disorders, transgender politics, etc.) have occasioned is remarkably absent from studies of sexual violence. Rape has become academia's undertheorized and apparently untheorizable issue. One need only skim through the issues of feminist journals over the last ten years to see this puzzling scholarly neglect reflected in the pages of some of the most influential journals in the field¹. Even a critique of contemporary feminist oppositional projects as important as Wendy Brown's *States of Injury* (1995) only briefly alludes to the antirape movement and this despite the fact that Brown's arguments have very direct implications for antirape activism. *States of Injury* does, however, provide a thorough discussion of Catherine MacKinnon's theory of pornography. In a field as dynamic and changing as that of feminist theorizing, Catherine MacKinnon's eleven-year-old paradigm (1989) thus remains the one to debunk or invoke in analyses that (albeit only implicitly) engage the antiviolence movement². Why is there such stagnation in the theorizing of sexual violence precisely at a time when the body is so high on feminist scholars' list of priorities? Such indifference is all the more remarkable since gendered crime such as rape and domestic violence show no sign of abating³. So why has feminist theory turned away from issues that continue to affect women's lives so pervasively? Since the term theory is often used interchangeably with analysis on the one hand and interdisciplinarity on the other, some clarification as to what it specifically denotes in this essay is in order⁴. The feminist theory I have in mind does not accept existing premises and established "truths" but problematizes them by asking alternative questions and offering different conceptions. Most important, it is a self-reflexive practice, that is, it does not

interpret social relations without making explicit the assumptions on which it itself relies to make sense of the social fabric. Rather than merely describe reality, it questions the terms through which reality is made intelligible. It is aware of the potential political effects of its own readings in the particular cultural context from which it evolves and does not assume that the meaning of “women’s experience” is transparent.

Postmodern feminist theory in particular has been instrumental in challenging existing paradigms about the category of (women’s) “experience” that too often constitutes the unproblematised basis of a positivist feminist politics. Following a Foucauldian model of power, feminist postmodernists have argued that using women’s experience as the source of explanation rather than as what requires analysis often entrenches the very categories (man/woman, sex/gender, etc.) whose origins and effects we should be questioning. As Joan Scott (1992) puts it in her influential essay “Experience”, “the project of making experience visible precludes critical examination of the workings of the ideological system itself, its categories of representation (homosexual/heterosexual, man/woman, black/white as fixed immutable identities), its premises about what these categories mean and how they operate, its notions of subjects, origin and cause” (Scott, 1992:25). In other words, instead of justifying our critical discourse through an appeal to women’s rape experiences, for example, we should examine what the category encompasses in different spaces and times and investigate its relation to other areas of women’s lives in the public sphere.

In light of postmodern feminism’s germinal contribution to the theorization of “women’s experience”, it is all the more surprising that it has been so reluctant to theorize what constitutes one of the most prevalent aspects of women’s existence as well as of second-wave feminist scholarship, namely, sexual violence. Although postmodernists have written at length about the discourse of victimization, their inquiries stop short of examining the social meanings grouped under the category “rape.” In fact, when sexual violence is discussed in academic criticism, it is generally in terms of its cinematic representation. Feminist scholars have done a particularly thorough job of exposing the voyeuristic depiction of rape that dominates films and media representations today. They have revealed the ways the film industry and/or feminist criticism reproduces the “ideology of rape” by depicting women as powerless and subordinated to the will of men⁵. This critical focus on the conventions with which women and the issue of rape have been represented is undoubtedly an important contribution to feminist scholarship. However,

this concentration has failed to render explicit and theorize the relationship between these signifying practices and antirape politics and activism in and outside of academia. While it is true that representative practices always mediate relations of power and the political, we also need to remember Stuart Hall's warning that "there are ways of constituting power as an easy floating signifier which just leaves the crude exercise and connections of power and culture altogether emptied of any signification" (1992:286).

In this essay, I draw conclusions about how the "crude exercise and connections of power" operate in relation to the dynamics of sexual violence and its processes of signification. While investigating academic treatments of rape, I single out postmodern feminists because their appeals to the theorization of experience make their lack of engagement with rape all the more significant. Specifically, I focus on two postmodern theorists whose work has problematical implications for antirape politics whether they are directly (Sharon Marcus) or indirectly (Wendy Brown) tackling sexual violence. I argue that there is paradoxically more continuity between contemporary postmodern feminists and the "backlashers" than between postmodern and activist feminism. Yet the incompatibility between feminist research and activism does not simply, as postmodernists claim, derive from activists' denial of the discursive nature of rape or the reluctance to problematize women's experience but also from the regressive implications of postmodern approaches to rape. Indeed, when postmodern feminists do tackle rape and antirape politics, they seem unable to do so in any other way than in the psychologizing and victim-blaming terms that have dominated hegemonic approaches to gendered violence in contemporary culture.

The extraordinary lacuna that characterizes contemporary postmodern feminism can only be understood, I argue, in the context of the general (re)turn to interiority that animates cultural theory today (of which Judith Butler is the most prominent example). I investigate the problems associated with this renewed focus that, I argue, too often reduces antirape politics to a psychic dimension. I conclude the essay by calling for an alternative theoretical model that challenges this overemphasis on subjectivity and interiority without falling back on the unproblematised category of "experience." Indeed, while the impasse academic feminism seems to have reached in its analysis of rape might point to the limit of postmodern theory, it does not invalidate theory per se.

Theory means speculation, and speculating about traumatic experiences has always been a contentious agenda. Yet what I find questionable is precisely the assumption that

offering anything but the same unequivocal explanation for an experience amounts to denying that experience's destructive effects, or even that experience's "reality". It is time we stopped thinking that subjecting the same experience - that is, the violation of a woman's body - to different explanations is a suspect gesture. An alternative analysis is too often perceived as denying victims' suffering or their accounts of the incident, as if victims' accounts could be so neatly separated from the signifying practices and discursive frameworks culture (including a feminist one) has made available to them for making sense of their experience. Victims' accounts of their experiences do not exist in a vacuum of authenticity awaiting a feminist revolution to be able to safely express themselves, since victims, like all of us, get their cues from the intersecting and conflicting discourses through which the world is understood and shaped.

I argue that more theorizing of sexual violence is needed in order to challenge not only reductive perspectival and issue-oriented approaches that have dominated the field but also the politically reactionary implications that have characterized academic treatments of victimization. This new theory of rape will supplement feminist accounts of women's experience with a contextual analysis of the ways in which experience is given meaning at a particular time and space. It will also reconceptualize the term victim so that the contemporary focus on the evidence of rape victims' personal agency ceases to extenuate the reality of violence in women's lives.

As a result of the notable lack of theoretical engagement with sexual violence in academia, it is media friendly conservative writers such as Katie Roiphe (1993), Camille Paglia (1991), and Christina Sommers (1994) who have set the tone and the parameters for the analysis of rape in the public sphere, so much so that any discussion of the issue seems inevitably locked in terms established by the backlash. These self-proclaimed feminist writers all have one thing in common beside the fact that their books have been best-sellers: they downplay the severity of the problem of rape by blaming the high incidence of rape in the United States on the warped and unnecessarily alarmist representations of "radical" feminism. They go to great lengths to debunk the rape statistics offered in feminist surveys and antirape literature and to argue that the problem is really not as widespread as we are led to believe. Victims in fact owe their victimization not to the experience of rape but to a feminist propaganda that has brainwashed women into thinking of themselves as victims. For Paglia (1991), the main proponent of the gender-wars theory, the battle of the sexes is a natural phenomenon that is here to stay, so women might as well

quit trying to bring about any systemic change to this incontrovertible aspect of men and women's relationships. They should instead stand up, learn the rules, and participate in this perennial war game they have been willy-nilly playing with the other sex. Rape is only one aspect of this game that has been misnamed as a crime and should be returned to its original and healthy natural definition. Similarly, Roiphe, the author of the controversial and extremely popular *The Morning After* (1993), attacks feminists working against sexual violence and, more specifically, against date rape for goading women to keep their dresses down and their pants up. According to Roiphe, because they promote a "Victorian" version of female virtue, feminists deny female sexual agency and infantilise women (1993:66). Thus, feminist propaganda is ultimately what brings women to rename a harmless, albeit confusing and unsatisfactory, sexual experience as date rape.

It is certainly important to debunk such unresearched and polemical conservative attacks against radical feminism⁶. In fact, others have already convincingly revealed the backlash's dubious distortion of statistical data, its blaming of the rape crisis on feminist "hysteria" or alternatively on the victims themselves, its dangerous conflation of bad sex and date rape, its use of undocumented and anecdotal sources as evidence, and its "paramnesiac" reduction of feminism's complex past to a homogenizing and essentializing narrative⁷. However, I am less interested here in exposing the rhetoric and arguments of "patriarchy's prodigal daughters" (to use Elizabeth Minnich's [1998] spirited phrase) than in trying to understand the popular acclaim this kind of polemical writing has received in the public sphere. How can we explain the immense popularity of these distorting best-sellers? I contend that what has attracted such a large audience is not false consciousness so much as these writings' destabilizing and speculative effect on a field (rape theory) that has been ignored for too long.

Insofar as these authors make us look at the dynamics of sexual assault from a different angle and hold feminists accountable for our own implication in the available discourses concerning rape, they are doing "theory" in the broadest conceivable sense. It is the worst kind of theory, unresearched, undocumented, polemical, nonacademic, but it is theory nonetheless. And in a field that has not been theorized anew for the last decade, theorizing of any kind, even of the worst kind, is bound to attract and fascinate. The fact that victims of sexual assault are themselves sometimes drawn to rather than repulsed by such conservative accounts of their own experience also reveals that feminism needs to reconsider some of its truisms about rape and rape victims⁸. Indeed, this forces us to

acknowledge that there is no homogeneous standpoint among rape victims that is available in an unmediated fashion. Their experiences themselves are steeped in historically and culturally contingent constructions and require that we attend to the signifying practices (including feminist ones) through which they are given meaning.

Let me clarify that I am in no way implying that we need to reread these texts more carefully in order to appreciate an argument whose theoretical complexity escaped us the first time around. These best-sellers are based on the petty and undocumented impressions of archconservative pundits, and no reading between the lines will throw a more favourable light on their methods and goals. Christina Hoff Sommers, for instance, was paid six figures by the right-wing John M. Olin and Harry Bradley Foundations to publish her antifeminist tract *Who Stole Feminism? How Women Have Betrayed Women* (1994). Yet, these conservative writers have succeeded in dislodging rape from the issue-oriented and experiential perspectives that have circumscribed its examination. They ironically echo postmodern feminist critiques of “standpoint theory” insofar as they too challenge the assumption that the “authentic” truth about gender subordination lies in women’s “voicing” of their own experiences. Like postmodern feminism, they offer instead a bold account of women’s existence whose grounding is not in women’s experience but in the discourses constructing it. The “dutiful daughters of patriarchy” are inadvertently highlighting the impossibility of separating the “reality” of rape from the feminist institutions and ideologies through which the experience is given meaning. They thus not only unsettle feminism’s positivist explanations of women’s lives, but they turn the spotlight from victims of rape to the operations of feminist epistemology. Their account is problematical, however, because, while holding feminists accountable, they ignore that feminism does not exist in a vacuum and cannot be studied independently of the cultural environment in which it operates. They also flatly deny the reality of the “rape crisis”.

Feminist academics need to start theorizing rape lest we are willing to let the writers of the backlash completely reconceptualize the field and continue to set the terms of the debate. The pervasiveness of the reductive opposition between power versus victim feminisms both outside and within academia is only one example of the ways in which the terms have already been reconceptualized⁹. And, unfortunately, the ways in which some feminist scholars have engaged the issue has only contributed to entrenching such oppositions by making rape and its prevention be about women’s interiority and self-reflexivity.

In *Feminists Theorize the Political* (1992), a collection of essays edited by Judith Butler and Joan Scott, Sharon Marcus provides one of the very few academic attempts at engaging rape theoretically in the last ten years. Her essay “Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words: A Theory and Politics of Rape Prevention” is sophisticated and lucid, and her desire to offer a more efficacious theory of rape prevention extremely laudable. Yet, her reasoning and conclusions are also disturbingly reminiscent of popular antifeminist manifestoes such as Roiphe’s *The Morning After*. As I pointed out earlier, according to Roiphe, the “rape epidemic” on campuses is a linguistic phenomenon generated by feminist extremists who cry wolf at the sight of one when their female protégées are on a harmless tour of the local zoo. She claims that women are the naive dupes of a feminist propaganda that infantilises them by representing them as virginal beings who could not themselves have initiated sexual pleasure¹⁰. Sharon Marcus does not go so far as to accuse women of misnaming their experiences because of feminist prudishness. However, she too holds feminist discourses of rape partly responsible for the high incidence of sexual assault and abuse. Specifically, she takes issue with feminist antirape literature and activism for representing women as always already raped and rapable. The “apocalyptic tone” adopted in feminist political action, she argues, reinforces the “rape script” that presupposes masculine power and feminine powerlessness and that society more or less successfully inscribes on men’s and women’s psyches. Rape victims are thus women whose minds are colonized by a sexual scenario they could instead learn to recognize and use to prevent the scripted experience: “To speak of a rape script implies a narrative of rape, a series of steps and signals whose typical initial moments we can learn to recognize and whose final outcome we can learn to stave off.... The narrative element of a script leaves room and makes time for revision” (Marcus, 1992:390-91).

According to Marcus, the rape script pre-exists the act of violence and only “momentarily” creates the identities of rapist and victim when enacted. Rape is thus “a scripted interaction in which one person auditions for the role of rapist and strives to manoeuvre another person into the role of victim,... a process of gendering which we can attempt to disrupt” (1992:391). In other words, it is up to the woman to recognize that her assailant does not simply have the power to rape but that his power is created by the extent to which she succumbs to the social script’s efforts to secure her participation. Marcus sees each individual rape as comprising various stages, such as verbal threats and other forms of action and harassment, and argues that the time and space between these threats and rape

constitute “the gap in which women can try to intervene, overpower and deflect the threatened action” (1992:389). Thus, she takes the very notion of a continuum that feminists use to describe “rape culture” and applies it to individual rape tout court. Women need to identify the various parts of their interaction with the to-be rapist as stages within a continuum. They need to get their act together and take their cue rather than conform to the “self-defeating rules which govern polite, empathetic feminine conversation” and that generate their “noncombative responses to rapists” (389).

The assumption that rape occurs because of women’s “noncombative response” to the social script of gender is dubious. It is extremely problematic to assume that women share a similar psychological makeup or relation to the social script before the rape. It is true that victims themselves often corroborate the assumption that they could have done more to prevent the rape in the gap between the threat and rape: they typically blame themselves for what happened and list all the ways in which they could have averted the situation had they acted differently (see Lamb, 1996).

This retrospective response, however, is a coping mechanism in reaction to the rape as well as to social responses to sexual violence and not a testimony of the victim’s participation in gender socialization before the assault. Indeed, self-blame occurs systematically, whether the victim fought back or not, whether the rape occurred or was thwarted, whether in fact she or he did try to subvert the sexual script or not. The assumption that rape is successful because of women’s passive compliance with a sexual and linguistic script is problematic on two counts: first, because it implies that women who get raped do not in fact strategize prior to the rape and therefore that their rape necessarily signifies their submission to the role of victim; second, because focusing on women’s reaction or lack thereof during an attack necessarily takes the focus off the rapist and places it - along with the “responsibility” for the outcome of this scripted interaction - on women and women alone. For the last three decades, representations and discussions of rape and domestic violence have almost exclusively concentrated on the suffering of victims and have comparatively all but ignored the few studies of the behavioural and psychological traits of perpetrators. Certainly, this lopsided focus originated out of concern for the welfare of victims and as a means of alerting the public to the destructive effects of sexual violence. Yet, this focus cannot be dissociated from the metaleptic obsession that characterizes responses to rape in our culture. Responsibility is still laid on the victim. Years of educating the public about these issues seem to have resulted only in the

expectation that women should now know better than to let themselves get raped. Popular discourse is more than ever invested in transforming this social problem into a personal transaction, while psychologists, psychiatrists, and sociologists continue to study the issue of male violence - by studying women. Experts examine women's physical and mental health, attitudes to gender ideology, personalities, religious beliefs, interpersonal skills, previous experiences with violence, and last but not least their "low self-esteem." They explain the issue of male violence by invoking the victim's psyche and create new categories such as "self-defeating personality disorder" to explain the rape (away).

This is taken to an extreme in one of the most recent psychological studies of rape that advocates holding perpetrators accountable for their actions, so that "victims can then take a realistic look at *themselves, and we can feel free to acknowledge some of the assertion, free will, and yes, blame, that also belong to victims*" (Lamb 1996:8); emphasis added). Ironically, Lamb supports her point by turning feminist standpoint theory on its head. She makes the familiar claim that we should "honour their [the victims'] perspective," but what she means is that, since victims blame themselves, "by informing them that they are sadly mistaken in their perception of choice and free will we do them an injustice" (22). Thus, out of respect for their point of view, we too should blame victims. Far from challenging the stereotype of victims as "passive, incapacitated shells," this standpoint model would be hard pressed to provide any other reason for not challenging the victim's perception than consideration for her victimization. It also wrongly assumes that the victim's perspective does not change over time¹¹.

At the risk of raising some postmodern eyebrows by appealing to my "experience," five years of volunteering as a hospital and hotline advocate for a local rape crisis services centre convinced me of the futility of looking for common characteristics among women who are victims of sexual assaults. I met and talked to women whose demeanour or religious beliefs made them the most likely candidates for reproducing the social script that underlies rape but who resisted their assailant in a way others, more self-conscious about gender roles, did not. I met women who fought or talked their way out of a rape and felt their victimization more keenly than women who had been raped and badly injured. I saw women who were bruised and beaten for having resisted; prostitutes raped by pseudoclients whose violence both they and the hospital staff considered a side effect of such a line of work; teenagers, raped after passing out at a party, blaming themselves for drinking; others who, while undergoing the evidence collection kit and various

bureaucratic procedures in the hospital emergency unit, were shocked by the magnitude of the institutionalised response to an experience they had only thought of in interpersonal terms; and still others who were cracking jokes and holding conversations about errands they had to run even as they were being administered the morning-after pill and treated for the venereal disease they had contracted during the rape.

While I am all for disrupting processes of sexist gendering, advocating that victims do so during the process of getting raped not only has limited political efficacy, but it would also ultimately entrench existing social relations and gender inequalities. It assumes a category of women unified by a common psychic orientation to social gendering where there is no such category. Some women stop fighting back because they are afraid they might get killed; others fight back for the same reason. Some freeze up. Others weigh their options and decide not to resist. Arguing that the dynamics of sexual violence can simply be reversed through a more self-reflexive attitude assumes that women have a linear and simplified relationship to the social codes that constitute them. A model like Marcus's therefore downplays the "materiality of gender" and ignores that social inscriptions - that is, our physical situatedness in time and space, in history and culture - do not simply evaporate because we are made aware of them. It is strongly reminiscent of Judith Butler's theory of gender as "performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (1990:25) and suffers from the same shortcomings. Susan Bordo's pointed critique of Butler's *Gender Trouble* is also true of Marcus's approach to rape: "Many postmodern readings of the body become lost in the fascinating, ingenious (and often, prematurely celebratory) routes that imagination, intellect, and political fervour can take when looking at bodily 'texts' without attention to the concrete contexts - social, political, cultural, and practical - in which they are embedded. And so they need to be reminded of the materiality of the body" (1997:185)¹². As Bordo points out, cultural discourses "impinge on us as fleshly bodies, often in ways that cannot be determined from a study of representations alone" (183). The cultural, institutional, bodily, and practical realities of our culture are not "'transcended' or 'transgressed' just because we can 'destabilize' them in theory" (185). We need to consider the effects of our preventive politics in the discursive context of contemporary configurations of power. Making women's behaviour and identity the site of rape prevention only mirrors the dominant culture's proclivity to see rape as women's problem, both in the sense of a problem women should solve and one that they caused. Any discourse on rape needs to take into account the metaleptic reversal

rape is constantly subjected to that retrospectively constitutes effects as origins and causes. Indeed, while enlisting the help of potential victims in preventing a variety of crimes is common practice, only gendered crimes generate the kind of victim-blaming responses rape and domestic violence produce. Whereas forgetting to set the antiburglary alarm or getting robbed despite the “neighbourhood watch” does not exculpate the thieves, getting raped always elicits an investigation into the ways in which a victim might ultimately have been responsible for what happened. Bad judgment becomes cause, and victimization becomes manipulative or concealed agency. The responsibility of the rapist is seen as inherently linked to the victim’s behaviour and as a result often gets erased. Whether it is because she did not fight back physically or verbally, somehow rape always comes to be grounded in the victim’s behavioural or emotional dynamics rather than in the perpetrator’s actions.

Ironically, the Foucauldian paradigm, which postmodernists often evoke to buttress their claims, itself helps make visible the reason why making women’s psyche the site of the analysis of rape or of rape prevention is a depoliticising gesture for feminist politics. As Foucault’s work has shown, the history of the modern subject has been one of depoliticization carried out mostly through the construction of a psychologized and ahistorical subject. In the nineteenth century, medical, legal, religious, and social discourses came together to construct the now naturalized idea of sex as the secret of the individual’s being, thus concealing the “power/ knowledge” involved in creating the notion of sex as essence. Turning the “minor chronicle of sex” (1978:5) and “inconsequential bucolic pleasures” (31) into the prediscursive core of the individual was a successful “ruse” of power that would keep the subject focused on changing the inner self rather than on addressing power relations. A whole system of institutional, cultural, and economic practices and social inequities was obscured when inner transformation was established as the only genuine means of achieving social change. The psychological and inner realm - that is, the individual’s “centre” - overrode material considerations. Similarly, Nancy Armstrong’s Foucauldian reading of the history of the novel reveals the domestic novel to have been instrumental in producing the ideal of the modern individual as psychological reality. Written representations of the self replaced the aristocratic ideal of “the family name” with “moral value” and of attractive and opulent surface with psychological and emotional depth. Armstrong (1987) explains that, with its presumptions of naturalness, this new female ideal (which would become the prototype of the modern individual) removed

subjectivity and sexuality from their place in political history. Indeed, “to define political resistance in such psychological terms was to remove it from the snarl of competing social and economic interests in which every individual was entangled” (1987:252). In emphasizing inner life as the source of being and happiness, the middle class could justify social hierarchies in moral rather than economic terms.

When postmodern analyses locate rape prevention inside women’s psyches, they ironically replicate modern techniques of power even as they seek to challenge them. Nineteenth-century hegemonic culture has left an indelible mark on our own times. Although postmodern feminism problematizes nineteenth-century assumptions by replacing naturalising premises with social constructionist ones, it too runs the risk of displacing the subject’s locatedness in history and culture when it advocates an inner revolution as the more efficient site, for instance, of rape prevention. As Wendy Brown points out in her critique of identity politics, “The question here is not whether denaturalising political strategies subvert the subjugating force of naturalised identity formation, but what kind of politicisation, produced out of and inserted into what kind of political context, might perform such subversion” (1995:55). In the current political context, locating rape prevention in women’s self-reflexivity vis-à-vis their own imbrication in wider cultural dynamics runs the risk of becoming a new form of panopticism, an interiorised and individualized system of surveillance by which every woman becomes her own overseer. It is as if, having noted the failure of the panopticon project to reform criminals individually, we now applied it to their victims by gradually asking women to police their own behavioural and mental maps. Rather than question the principle of self-surveillance itself, we thus merely change its object.

The focus on power over one’s social and discursive conditioning vacates the conflict between power relations and the autonomy of the self. It makes women’s lack of reflexive examination the new grounds for explaining male domination and for holding them responsible for their subordination. The “technologies of the self” (to use Foucault’s later terminology) thus overcome the materiality of the body insofar as such a focus locates the source of male violence in the female subject’s failure to reinvent the self¹³. Its individualistic mode conflates social contestation and self-constitution and undermines the social and political solidarity necessary to combat relations of domination such as rape. Representing women as the peacekeepers of rape culture will only result in making them responsible for the war they could not prevent. Although it highlights the constructedness

of identity, such process of self-scrutiny is no more liberating than the Christian tradition of inwardness.

Grounding rape prevention in the reinvention of the female self implies that the fight against sexual violence depends on and has to be preceded by the individualized questioning of normalized female subjectivity. Such critical hermeneutics of the self will not only fail to diffuse male violence, but it will also corroborate the metaleptic cultural narrative of victims as the source of their own problems. Hegemonic culture typically represents women as dominated by inner and complicated compulsions that require personalized self-help rather than political transformation. Advocating the microlevel cultivation of female self-knowledge and inwardness as deterrent to rape is bound to compound this slide into therapeutic discourse. Feminists need to stop casting their antirape politics in terms of women's inner and psychological change. As the backslashers have shown, victim-blaming assumptions based on women's internal proclivities flourish whether the subject's interiority is seen as derived from nature or from a social (or feminist) script. The question is no longer whether women's identity is immutable or constructed, or whether they need to discover or continually produce their inner self, but whether an emphasis on interiority and self-reflexivity is not itself a technology of domination that pathologizes women and displaces male agency.

This emphasis on the “psychology of power” in academic treatments of rape is so pervasive that it is sometimes extended from the characterization of “victims” to that of feminist politics. In *States of Injury*, Wendy Brown uses a psychologizing framework to critique the feminist reliance on identity politics as the means of recognition by the state. Like Foucault, she takes issue with legislative proposals (such as MacKinnon's) to construe sexual subordination through porn, harassment, or rape as a violation of women's civil rights¹⁴. Writing sexual subordination into the law, she argues, ultimately creates an identity politics that reinscribes “femaleness as sexual violability,” “injury as identity,” and keeps us locked in a logic of recrimination and ressentiment: “Foucault (along with certain strains of psychoanalytic thought) reminds us that the law produces the subjects it claims to protect or emancipate. How, then, might a formulation of women's civil rights as violated by pornography or sexual harassment produce precisely the figure MacKinnon (1989) complains we have been reduced to by sexism, a figure of woman wholly defined by sexual violation, wholly identified with sexual victimization?” (Brown, 1995:131).

Besides fixing women's identity as "wounded," the effort to seek legal redress for injuries also "legitimises law and the state as appropriate protectors against injury" while obscuring the masculinist state's own power to injure. Injury "is thereby rendered intentional and individual, [and] politics is reduced to punishment" (1995:27). This critique highlights how the best-intentioned projects, including feminist ones, can betray their emancipatory goals by creating "dependent subjects" and by reproducing the depoliticising and regulating social norms of liberalism. Brown's argument is important and persuasive. Her work reinforces the scholarship produced over the last decade on the critique of the "subject" and "identity politics." It also helps once more to expose what is wrong with the victim's rights movement and its efforts, for instance, to enact a victims' rights amendment to state constitutions and to the U.S. Constitution. This type of lobbying has already been quite successful in twenty-nine states where constitutions were amended to legislate the rights of victims. Yet the guarantees included in the amendment, such as the right of victims to be present at all public proceedings, to register objection to negotiated pleas and releases, or to receive financial restitution from the offender, ultimately reinforce victim status. They personalize and hence preserve the relationship between victim and assailant. They turn crime victims into a vengeance-rights squad and the state into a neutral arbitrator ready to intervene when, for instance, constitutionalized restitution does not, and it often does not, occur. The state then responds by increasing the offender's prison sentence¹⁵. What I take issue with is thus not Brown's acute and cautionary account of feminist entanglements with the state but the Nietzschean framework in which she casts it. Brown argues that the politicised identity of feminist struggle is structured by a Nietzschean logic of ressentiment, that it is "an effect of domination that reiterates impotence, a substitute for action, for power, for self-affirmation that reinscribes incapacity, powerlessness, rejection" (1995:69). Feminist moral claims are a symptom of weakness, of feminists' incapacity to action and thwarted "will to power" that leads to vengefulness and "toxic resentments." Thus, Brown sees feminist fights-based politics as turning powerlessness into "a dissimulated political discourse of recriminations and toxic resentments parading as radical critique" (xi). While her critique of rights discourse is well taken, her characterization of feminist scholarship and practice reproduces the tradition of inwardness through which women and feminists are typically discredited. Indeed, attributing a feminist practice to a logic of resentment applies a trait Nietzsche uses to define individual character to a political movement and thus personalizes and

psychologizes the latter. While I agree that the effects of politicised identity might lock us into a politics of recrimination, to resort to the Nietzschean notion sets up ressentiment as the driving paradigm in feminist thought. It is not a critique of the negative effect of a well-meaning but limited political strategy but a critique of the source of negativity from which feminist politics derive. Feminism is endowed with a “slave morality” that makes it react to pain emotionally by inflicting suffering in return.

Brown’s account of ressentiment as reaction to hurt, or in Nietzsche’s own words “as a desire to deaden pain by means of affect,” is a forceful description of the effects of capitalism and the bureaucratic state on the individuated and “impotent” late modern liberal subject (1995:68-69). As a characterization of feminist reformist strategies, however, it succeeds only in anthologising and individualizing an oppositional political movement that is made to sound like it is more in need of therapy than of a renewed political emphasis. Ressentiment in Nietzschean terminology is too closely associated with instinctual and affective conditions for it not to invoke an internalised and pathological interiority that takes a life of its own above and beyond the injury it seeks to address. As a result, feminist politics is not seen in terms of the potentially antidemocratic effects of its prescriptions but in terms of its underlying motivation itself. Nietzsche’s (1967) account of the workings of ressentiment cited in *States of Injury* highlights the psychologizing tendencies I am pointing out here:

“For every sufferer instinctively seeks a cause for his suffering, more exactly, an agent; still more specifically, a guilty agent who is susceptible to suffering - in short, some living thing upon which he can, on some pretext or other, vent his affects, actually or in effigy. ... This ... constitutes the actual physiological cause of ressentiment, vengefulness, and the like: a desire to deaden pain by means of affects,... to deaden, by means of a more violent emotion of any kind, a tormenting, secret pain that is becoming unendurable, and to drive it out of consciousness at least for the moment: for that one requires an affect, as savage an affect as possible, and, in order to excite that, any pretext at all.” (Quoted in Brown, 1995:68)

Postmodern feminist discussions of the antirape movement seem more drawn to an examination of the “psychology of power” than to the discursive study of rape and victimization¹⁶. They analyse rape victims and the antirape movement by looking at or

implying hidden depths and inner meanings lodged within an individualized configuration. In trying to undo the distinction between psychic and social lives, however, they contribute to subordinating the effects of gender and social differences to the self's inferiority. Not surprisingly, a similar displacement also characterizes critiques of the practice of consciousness raising. Postmodern feminists like Brown have singled out consciousness raising and speak-outs as some of the sites where unproblematised experience takes dangerous proportions as the basis of feminist epistemology. They invoke the women's liberation movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s with which consciousness raising is so closely associated to critique the positivist assumptions of feminists whose main representative today seems to be Catherine MacKinnon.

Brown argues that most contemporary North American feminists "seek to preserve some variant of consciousness-raising as a mode of discerning and delivering the 'truth' about women" (1995:41). She then singles out speak-outs against sexual violence as one such "forum for feminist truth-telling" (42) where the project of making experience visible entrenches the categories of representation such as man/woman instead of denaturalising them. Brown goes on to draw an analogy between the "voicing of women's experience" staged in speak-outs and Foucault's genealogy of confession (this argument was first made by Alcoff and Gray (1993)).

As mentioned earlier, for Foucault, sex was constructed as the secret of our being in the nineteenth century, by confessional, medical, psychiatric, legal, and other institutional forces that represented it as prediscursive even as they were producing it through discourse. This was how, for instance, homosexuality was transformed from a sexual act into an identity:

There is no question that the appearance in nineteenth-century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and the literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty, and 'psychic hermaphroditism' made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of 'perversity'; but it also made possible the formation of a 'reverse' discourse: homosexuality began to speak on its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturality' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified (1978:101).

Thus, the unearthing of the “hidden” histories of repression and silence in the world of homosexuality ultimately entrenches the category itself and reinforces the transformation of “the homosexual” into a species. This is why, Foucault explains, sexual liberation is not a transgressive move, because it simply works within the terms set by power and reinforces the idea of sex as key to our identity.

Following the same logic, Brown argues that “truth-telling about our desires and experiences is construed as deliverance from the power that silences and represses them (rather than as itself a site and effect of regulatory power)” (1995:42). Her critique of speak-outs and of their process of revealing the “hidden” histories of silence and repression also echoes Joan Scott’s warning in her influential essay “Experience”: “The project of making experience visible precludes critical examination of the workings of the ideological system itself, its categories of representation, … its premises about what these categories mean and how they operate, its notions of subjects, origin and cause” (1992:25). It is true, for instance, that sexual violence as a violation of the self has a different valence in the West, where sex has come to be defined as key to one’s identity. In other words, insofar as the destructive psychological effects of rape are indissociable from the production of sex as our deepest identity, exposing rape as a violation operates within the same economy. By contrast, in ultra-traditionalist contexts where rape is marked as the defiling of the family’s and village’s honour rather than of the victim’s right to self-determination (which she does not have), marrying the victim to her rapist is perceived not as an adequate redress for the harm done to the victim but for the debasement incurred by the clan. In some Muslim countries, when such a match fails to occur, the shamed family often resorts to the “honour killing” of the rape victim¹⁷. (Self-)revelation as liberation in such a context is not only a life-threatening proposition, but it is also a completely meaningless one. I am very sympathetic to postmodern appeals to rigorous historical and critical examination of the workings of ideological systems and their categories of representation. The point that we need to be attentive to the ways in which our own assumptions might reproduce the very terms we should be questioning is well taken. Nevertheless, I fail to see the “homology” Brown identifies between confession and speak-outs against sexual violence. Surely, the experience of confessing a sexual act or “sin” one commits and that involves the “truth” of one’s own identity is a far cry from speaking out against a transgression committed by an agent exterior to oneself¹⁸. This would simply amount to confessing someone else’s “sin.” Such conflation is all the more unfortunate

insofar as it reproduces reactionary beliefs that rape is a reflection on the victim's identity. It yet again collapses differences between rape and sex by establishing an equivalence between the process of telling about one or the other. An alienating and violating experience such as sexual assault is not the equivalent of sex, the modern producer of identity.

Furthermore, unlike confession in the Christian tradition Foucault had in mind, the speak-out is a site of collective enunciation. In this context, "truth-telling" is no longer a confession about the self, nor are the debated "truths" perceived as "the secrets to our soul" (Brown, 1995:42). Instead, what is made visible is precisely how "linguistically contained, socially constructed, discursively mediated, and never just individually 'had'" (41) women's experiences are. Through consciousness raising and speak-outs, women come to understand that an experience they might previously have perceived as interpersonal in nature is in fact rooted in historical and social relations. The forum does not preclude so much as foster the analysis of the processes of subject construction. As a site of collective enunciation, it politicises rape even as it allows victims and survivors to examine the very terms they use to describe their experience. Some reject the very term 'victim' and its attendant connotations; others raise similar concerns about the word 'survivor'. They discuss the ways in which societal responses to rape shape their own. Making the experience of rape visible at speak-outs or in other feminist forums does not, as Brown contends, obscure the workings of the ideological system or preclude their analysis. In fact, it often entails precisely the kind of denaturalising postmodernists advocate, namely, that of the equivalence of sex and identity or correlative of sexual violence and self-loss.

The sense of empowerment women derive from speak-outs or consciousness raising does not presuppose a unified and prediscursive sense of self whose recovery is staged by these events. While the consensus about speak-outs remains that they are empowering to the participants, I would like to suggest that they are not so because they provide access to an inner space and foundational "self" that is being unearthed and validated. Most rape victims' narrative of their experience varies over time and ranges from self-blame to anger directed at the assailant, relatives, and others. Their feelings are far from continuous or consistent, and no scenario of rape, no matter how saturated with evidence of the crime, guarantees victims' definitive adherence to one script over another. Nonetheless, speak-outs remain sites where victims feel empowered by their vocalization of a narrative they know to be fluctuating and confusing. What is at issue is not, as Brown claims, to recover a

“foundational centre,” a “hidden truth” through the “confessional” discourse of the speak-out, so much as it is the voicing of the experience, the act of narrativizing itself. What ultimately empowers survivors of sexual assault at speak-outs is not the process of reclaiming a unified self so much as the production of narrative itself¹⁹. The focus is on the potential for the invention of the self this word-shaped reality entails rather than the excavation of a core centre. Rape is a reality that feels anything but real to the victim, yet this very same unreality can become the basis of a representation the speaker can manipulate and gain control of, that can command an audience’s attention and be made intelligible in other than the available cultural terms. Empowerment in this respect is about accessing one’s life as material rather than depth²⁰.

Similarly, it is unclear that the consciousness raising of the late 1960s functioned, as Brown contends, as a site where experience was unproblematically taken up as the basis of feminist epistemology. According to Jean Curthoys (1997), for instance, feminist experientialism is in fact a distorted representation of second-wave feminism or of consciousness raising *tout court*. Curthoys casts quite a different light on the second wave’s relation to the category of experience. In contrast to MacKinnon (1989), who identifies consciousness raising as the epistemological practice from which her social theory of gender (as sexuality) derived, Curthoys argues that the early women’s liberationists never relied on experience “epistemologically, as a justification for a theory” but as “the immediate object of the theory” (Curthoys, 1997:166). The familiar postmodern mantra regularly reminds us that feminist discourse often contributes to maintaining the very same unequal relations it seeks to undermine. We are told, for instance, that, in representing women as victims, feminism often entrenches powerlessness as an identity. As a result, any discussion of women’s victimization is now automatically a suspect gesture. But whether critics are using the term victim or criticizing its use, they wave the category without ever scrutinising what it encompasses and how it operates historically. Whether the condition it refers to is seen as a result of male dominance or, as is more often the case now, of feminist discursive practices, the concept immediately invokes a form of suffering, passivity, and interiority. It assumes an obviousness that obscures its historicity and the theoretical difficulties it presents. Critics use the term but fail to look at the processes through which cultures count or discredit people as victims and at the ways in which victimisation has been defined by historically changing conditions of intelligibility²¹. Although this article cannot provide the kind of genealogical investigation

of the term I am advocating, I would like to conclude by pointing to the ways in which the systems of categorization through which we make sense of victimization have evolved over the last thirty years.

II

Whether in academic postmodernist circles or in the mass media, feminism is now irredeemably associated with what I call victimology. According to Brown, this emerging “discipline” is about fixing “the identities of the injured and the injuring as social positions ... [and] fabricating something like a plastic cage that reproduces and further regulates the injured subjects it could protect” (1995:27-28). I want to suspend the assumption that it is the “reality” of feminist practice that motivates such prevalent contemporary discourse about feminism. Instead, I adopt a Foucauldian stance whereby representations are not seen as reflections of reality but as reflections of particular discursive formations that determine “regimes of truth” (what counts as the truth). In other words, I am trying neither to absolve nor accuse feminists of adhering to “victimology” but rather attempting to assess the climate that could make such a portrayal of feminism so popular. Specifically, I ask how the radical and revolutionary women of the 1970s whose activism has remained unparalleled in the history of second- and third-wave feminisms have come to represent “victimhood” two decades later? There is at least a paradox in this discursive development that requires a scrutiny of the very term ‘victim’ and what it encompasses.

I argue that it was precisely at the historical moment when women became active in fighting to dismantle the oppressive structures that subordinated them that the category of “victim” was reinflected and ideologically redefined to support the depoliticization of gendered class relations. Indeed, although the radical feminists working under the banner of the second wave initiated the focus on the psychological effects of power that still characterizes the study of sexual violence, their articulation of victimisation and exteriorisation was worlds apart from its contemporary counterpart. While victimization and interiority were indeed articulated through consciousness raising, they were not yet welded together to the point of occluding agency. The 1970s were a time when women suffering from domestic and sexual violence - that is, forms of violence that were not yet identified as crimes - started demonstrating in mass against rape and battery. The movement’s examination of the destructive effects of power on women’s psyches could therefore not be divorced from these waves of feminist activism that were sweeping the

country. In such a context, being a victim did not mean being incapacitated and powerless. It meant being a determined and angry (although not a pathologically resentful) agent of change.

The opposition between victimization and agency is one that developed in response to the radicalism of the late 1960s and has since shaped and refashioned both mainstream and academic configurations of feminism. I contend that feminist anger and activism - that is, the very fuel that was driving the social movement for change - has been radically and increasingly disarticulated from the victimization that caused such a reaction in the first place. In focusing exclusively on portraying women as “victims” of sexual and domestic violence, the media have been effectively erasing their visible agency and contributing to the ideologically motivated rift between “real” and “fake” victims that motivates mainstream representations of sexual violence. Real victims have been increasingly distinguished from the “angry feminists” whose anger, as a result, is seen as self-contained and pathological. Contemporary representations of feminists stereotypically see “angry” feminists as harbouring an anger that has, very much like Nietzsche’s resentment, taken on a life of its own and has a motivation that exceeds its originating moment. It is pathological, groundless, and unrelenting. It goes on independently of the changes that have occurred in the social sphere and that should have assuaged it, and it is therefore not grounded in reasonable expectations.

It is only when victimization is fused with passivity that identifying oneself as a victim leads to the kind of circular logic exposed by postmodernists. One of the legacies of the second wave that still shapes counselling techniques consists precisely of bringing victims to distinguish between these two conditions whose conflation inevitably translates into self-blame. For instance, the counsellor casts a new light on behaviours or actions (laughing, screaming, remaining silent) the victim would not otherwise have identified as signs of agency. The victim’s agency is thus redefined as doing whatever she deemed necessary at the time to survive the attack, whether that entailed fighting back or submitting to the rapist. Seen from this angle, passivity itself becomes a defence mechanism and can no longer be opposed to agency unless it is reduced to an internal logic that is divorced from material considerations. The reduction of the discourse of victimization to an agentless interiority has contributed not only to changing our perceptions of victims of violence but also to refashioning the feminist movement itself. What made the second wave strong was that victims of male violence took social

transformation into their own hands and started organizing and demonstrating, founding and running shelters and women's communities, and volunteering their time and energy to promote social justice. While such political activities still occur, they have been irremediably dissociated from victims insofar as the latter are now the objects rather than the subjects of these movements. We are back to a model of nineteenth-century charity whereby privileged women are perceived as better equipped to help victims cope with and make sense of their experience. Victims themselves are represented as irremediably and unidirectionally shaped by the traumatic experience of rape and hence incapable of dealing with anything but their own inner turmoil. The strength of the second wave was precisely that it showed the world and victims themselves that they were more than the sum of their traumatic experiences, which they had the capacity to act and organize even as they were dealing with the psychic effects of rape or domestic violence.

Today, while the language of such radical democracy is brandished and waved triumphantly, it has become empty rhetoric. Feminists are busy accusing each other of infantilising women, while they fail to acknowledge that hegemonic representations have successfully split victims of male domination from their own movement. Both academic and popular representations are engaged in a race to try to determine what discourse does or does not represent women's best interests, and both reinforce in the process the gap between incapacitated and naive victims, on the one hand, and thinking politicised feminists who speak for them, on the other. Feminist postmodernists like Marcus (1992) locate the source of women's continued oppression in their inability to distance themselves from restrictive social codes and argue that feminists are responsible for rape victims' lack of critical assessment. Others have questioned the "evidence of experience" so thoroughly and convincingly that the practice of making the experience of victimization visible is immediately deemed suspect and undertheorized. Consciousness raising has become identified as a site of reinscription rather than demystification, and its emphasis on the concrete consequences of living in a gendered and racially structured world has become evidence of the victim's inability to account for the constructed nature of her own experience²². The "backlashers" go further to suggest that it is because victims simply assimilate deluded feminist assumptions that they experience bad sex (or the sex wars) as rape. Even mainstream representations that do condemn sexual violence go out of their way to separate victims from feminist politics and to revise the history of the second wave accordingly.

Yet, in claiming that victims today are spoken for in a way that they were not in the early women's movement, I am not arguing that the study of or advocacy for rape victims must be done by survivors alone. While I am advocating for a return to collective sites of democratic enunciation, I am not promoting a standpoint theory whereby the perspective of the oppressed is more valuable by virtue of their "experience" of oppression. There is no guarantee that being raped makes an individual more sensitive to the workings of the discursive context through which experience is given meaning. Victims are as likely to reproduce rape "myths" as other members of society, nor does the fact of not having undergone a traumatic experience guarantee one's obtuseness to the dynamics of sexual violence. The perspectival and embodied location of speakers has a bearing on the meaning they give to an event but does not determine it²³. I am, however, claiming that antirape politics today not only fails to accommodate victims' participation in the fight against violence but that it is actually based on such exclusion. Although questioning the perspectival approach was both salutary and important, it has also contributed to doing away with the very sites of self-fashioning and politicisation that early feminist consciousness raising and organizing provided.

The second wave sought to address the discursive context whereby, because of their positionality and location, women's utterances were discarded as untrue. As Linda Alcoff explains, how an utterance "gets heard depends on who says it, and who says it will affect the style and language in which it is stated, which will in turn affect its perceived significance (for specific hearers)" (1991-92:13). In a context that undermined women's participation in the public sphere, earlier feminists responded by privileging women's words and interpretations of their own experience. Contemporary feminists are rightly critical of the creation of this alternative "regime of truth" as a means of redressing women's marginalization, but they fail to address the discursive context that continues to treat victims as a different "species". Like homosexuality, which in the nineteenth century became a question no longer of acts but of identity, victimization seems now to have more to do with women's inner self than with the criminal act that brought it about. The consequences of this ghettoization through discourse are more far reaching than it first appears. Victims have been relegated to the backdrop of the movement, cast as a uniform group of individuals driven by an emotional and incapacitating response to their own experience²⁴. The meaning of the term victimization itself has simultaneously changed from an external reality imposed on someone to a psychologized inner state that itself

triggers crises. The dominant perception is that survivors need to be helped, taken care of, counselled, talked about, spoken for, studied, rather than assured the decision-making power and opportunities for self-making that characterized the beginnings of the second wave²⁵. This transformation reflects the change one cannot help but notice in many women's shelters and rape crisis centres which no longer function as democratic grassroots organizations working toward ending the "social" problem of sexual violence but as state-funded liberal agencies promoting self-help and personal healing. The egalitarian frameworks such as consciousness raising or consensus models of decision making have all but disappeared from many women's centers²⁶, and the division between victim and feminist that legitimates the institutionalisation and hierarchization of these organizations is increasingly naturalized and dehistoricized.

I have argued that the way out of this impasse for feminist politics is to reconceptualize and reappropriate the word victimization and its meaning. We need to resist the facile opposition between passivity and agency that has motivated popular and academic discussions of violence against women. As I pointed out earlier, victims' passivity is not necessarily tantamount to their compliance to a dominant social script of femininity and is in fact often a symptom of the very agency and rational decision-making power it is opposed to in dominant discourses. Alternatively, when victims do display the kind of strategic behaviour that is typically associated with "agency," the likely outcome is less rape prevention than the dismissal of rape charges by legal authorities. In a much publicized case in Florida in February 1999, a videotape of a stripper's attempts at de-escalating an alleged rape through sarcasm, taunts, and belligerence resulted in her arrest for filing a false police report, notwithstanding the evidence of violence that otherwise corroborated her story²⁷. We need a feminist politics that addresses the psychological and individual effects of victimization without, however, locating the solution to victimization in individual or psychological narratives. At a time when feminists agree that women's subordination should be understood in terms of a wider social system, it is unfortunate that this larger context nonetheless fails to be highlighted as the site of transformative action. In *Ludic Feminism and After*, Teresa Ebert (1996) wonders why the dominant feminist theory in the postmodern present ("ludic feminism") disregards the relations between gender and patriarchal capitalism, between rape and "the systematic working of wage labour and capital and the way that such a system needs the super exploitation of women" (1996:20). Contemporary feminist theorists' relative indifference to rape might indeed be a symptom

of this reluctance to engage systemic practices of power. At any rate, their focus on the reformation of women's (or feminism's) psychic and affective orientations unfortunately corroborates the hegemonic discourse on victimization and reduces the political to the personal.

Since the second wave, the gulf between the rape victim and those who speak for her has widened and will only continue to do so lest we begin questioning the emphasis on female interiority in approaches to sexual violence. The feminist community needs to become more alert to the ways in which the source of women's powerlessness is constantly located within victims themselves rather than in the institutional, physical, and cultural practices that are deployed around them. Feminist theory in particular can do a lot to change the depoliticising course that approaches to rape have taken in the last decade. We need to theorize and reconceptualize the meanings of categories such as "victim" and "experience" rather than merely criticize their use. We need to identify the ways in which women are no longer "silent" but are in fact encouraged to speak (out) through numerous yet nonpoliticized channels controlled by the liberal and bureaucratic state. Indeed, without a concerted effort on the part of both feminist academics and activists to reconceptualize rape, the radical feminist slogan "break the silence" might soon have no more valence than "keep talking."

This essay is dedicated to Anna Marie Gire, whose work on behalf of rape victims exemplifies empathy anchored in respect and advocacy devoid of paternalism. I would also like to thank Amanda Anderson, Melissa Deem, Jim Holstun, Janet Lyon, Mireille Rosello, David Schmid, and the anonymous reviewers at *Signs* for their comments on an earlier draft of this article.

Notes

¹ Over the last ten years, only one essay on sexual violence has appeared in *Feminist Studies*. Vivien Ng's "Sexual Abuse of Daughters-in-Law in Qing China: Cases from the Xing' An Huilan" was published in summer 1994 and focuses on the material limits of women's, and more specifically daughters-in-law's, agency in nineteenth-century China. In summer 1996, *Differences* devoted a special issue to violence and published Pamela Haag's "Putting Your Body on the Line," one of the few theoretical investigations of rape I have come across. Haag's essay provides a genealogy of feminist thinking on violence from the second wave through the 1980s. Of the six articles on rape that appeared in *Signs* over the last decade, two share the kind of theoretical and speculative impulses I have in mind. In "Survivor Discourse," Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray (1993) argue that media representations of rape survivors disempower survivor speech and diminish its subversive potentials. Janice Haaken's "The Recovery of Memory, Fantasy, and Desire" (1996) surveys feminist approaches to sexual abuse and incest and critiques the narrow psychologizing that sexual abuse undergoes in most analyses. The other four essays provide either traditional psychological accounts or

more straightforward sociological studies of the issue: Sherene Razack's "What Is to Be Gained by Looking White People in the Eye?" (1994) exposes the imperialism and racism embedded in the legal system's response to violence against North American aboriginal women and women of colour; Janet Jacobs's essay "Victimized Daughters" (1993) draws conclusions about the empathic bonding between victim and perpetrator based on fifty interviews of incest survivors; Jacobs's earlier article "Reassessing Mother Blame in Incest" (1990) adopted a similar method and used clinical data from a support group project treating twelve girls to study the destruction of the mother-daughter bond in cases of incest. In both articles, her claims are grounded in the "reality of the child's subjective experience" (1993:514). Last but not least, David Lisak's "Sexual Aggression, Masculinity, and Fathers" (1991) also follows a conventional psychological framework in its study of rapists and links male sexual aggression to father-distant child-rearing practices. While this essay was in press, two more articles on rape appeared in *Signs*, both of which address its conflicting meanings. The anthropologist Christine Helliwell (2000) focuses on the nonexistence of rape in the Dayak community of Gerai in Indonesian Borneo to offer a critique of the universalising tendencies of Western feminists, while Laura Hengehold (2000) analyses rape in relation to the expert institutional discourses of psychotherapy and the law "in order to relieve some of the psychological stress that survivors experience when their trauma enters the arena of conflicting social expectations mediated by these discourses" (2000:189).

² See Wendy Brown's "The Mirror of Pornography" in Brown, 1995. In his book *Negotiating Difference: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Positionality*, Michael Awkward (1995) states that "[MacKinnon's] collection, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, provides, in a manner approximated by no other critical text ... a theoretically dense and politically astute gynocentric analysis of the trajectories and consequences of a gendered hierarchy" (97).

³ Rape and domestic violence are in fact the only crimes whose rates have increased. The rate of other violent crimes has decreased by 7 percent compared to 1998 and has reached an all-time low since authorities started keeping track of crime rates in 1973.

⁴ For instance, the recent anthology *Gender Violence: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (O'Toole and Schiffman 1997) includes essays from various disciplines, some of which (e.g., O'Toole's) do and some of which do not theorize rape. Crossing disciplinary boundaries often helps but does not necessarily make visible the assumptions derived from any particular disciplinary affiliation: one can do interdisciplinary work without questioning the premises of one's approach or the terms through which one analyses social formations. *Gender Violence* brings together essays from various discipline-specific perspectives, but while some of them individually offer theoretical and/or interdisciplinary insights, readers are left to their own devices when it comes to generating a theory from the interdisciplinary framework the anthology states. The introduction to each section recapitulates the argument of each essay but does not draw any conclusion from the juxtaposition of the various viewpoints. For an anthology that provides a sustained theorization of victimization, see *New Versions of Victims: Feminists Struggle with the Concept* (Lamb, 1999). This collection brings together scholars from two disciplines (sociology and psychology) that write from a constructionist perspective and provide a critical examination of the practices of their disciplines.

⁵ When films (including progressive movies and documentaries) stage rape or its retelling by a victim on screen, they often fall into the trap of representing the suffering (and usually beautiful) victim in terms of pathos and horror. See, e.g., Lesage, 1978; Alcoff and Gray, 1993; Meijer, 1993; Johnson, 1995; Mills, 1995; Walters, 1995.

⁶ For instance, representatives of the backlash relish questioning the validity of the alarming rape statistics offered by feminist organizations. In fact, they spend so much time debunking feminist data that, according to Roiphe, one can only conclude that "the rape epidemic on campus is more a way of seeing, of interpreting, than a physical phenomenon" (1993:57). The results attained in the 1984 survey of thirty-two colleges by May Koss and Diana Russel are a favourite butt of acrimonious conservative attacks. According to this well-known survey, one in four women is a victim of rape on campuses, while the FBI offers a one in eight statistic, hence the accusations of distortions against feminists. What the backlash never considers, however, is the way in which these statistics will inevitably change depending on the definition of rape that is adopted. Legal definitions of sexual assault vary from state to state: some include only vaginal penetration by a penis, while others consider forced oral sex or penetration by objects or fingers as part of the definition, and so

forth. The FBI statistics are also always based on reported rapes that were deemed legitimate by the police taking the report, while the *Ms.* survey also includes experiences that the students themselves did not classify as rape but that fit the legal definition of rape. What is of course petrifying in the backlash's efforts to deflate feminist statistics is the assumption that one in eight or one in ten suddenly makes rape disappear as an important social issue.

⁷ See Deem, 1999 for an excellent account of the ahistorical contemporary discourses about feminism in the popular media today. Deem criticizes the media's "paramnesiac" containment of feminism whereby the complex history of the movement is represented through a cluster of reductive and recycled images and figures (feminism as dogma, as an acontextual and essentializing practice, etc.). For a review and critique of conservative feminist writers in the 1990s, see Minnich, 1998.

⁸ This observation is based on discussions of the backlash in women's studies classes as well as in the workshops and advocacy I did as a volunteer. In both contexts, participants openly shared their histories of victimization.

⁹ For an analysis that breaks down the opposition between victim and powerful woman see Jones, 1997. Illustrating that "there is no unencumbered feminist explanation of violence against women" (14), the essay focuses on what would typically be considered an unlikely eventuality, namely, the murder of an activist feminist student (trained in self-defence) by her boyfriend.

¹⁰ A guided tour at her local library would have disabused Roiphe of her preconceptions concerning radical feminism's relation to female sexuality and agency. Feminists spent well-documented years fighting against the court's use of the victim's sexual daringness, visibility, and promiscuity as evidence of "consent." Until 1988, for instance, Illinois courts allowed the prior sexual activity or the reputation of the victim to be used against her. This allowed the defendant to have community witnesses come into court to testify to the victim's "reputation." Because she had prior sexual activity, the assumption was that a woman could not be raped. Until January 1, 1992, the victim's manner of dress could also be used as a sign of "consent". And, to this day, I have yet to hear of a state's attorney agreeing to take the case of a raped (and living) prostitute to trial.

¹¹ In a recent essay published in her edited anthology *New Versions of Victims* (1999), Lamb no longer subscribes to this paradoxically victim-blaming standpoint model but emphasizes instead that "a subject might misrepresent herself" and "the spoken version of an event may be only one version, one narrative" (130). She analyses two women's experiences to illustrate how their conceptualisations of their experiences are moulded by the culture's expectations of victims.

¹² Bordo originally published her critique of Butler's gender theory in "Postmodern Subjects, Postmodern Bodies" (1992), an essay that prompted Butler to acknowledge that the subversion of norms and the destabilizing power of parodic bodies could not be determined independently of the concrete (and often limiting) contexts in which they are situated. See the psychologist Nicole Gavey's work for an example of a feminist theory that, while influenced by a postmodern perspective, does not ignore the materiality of the body in stressing the constitutive effects of the language of sexual victimization. As Gavey explains, "At any one point in time, we are some complex and fluid product of embodied-biography-in-cultural-history. We may be socially determined in some sense, but this does not imply we are blank spaces, able to be totally shaped by discrete discourses" (1999:63).

¹³ The subject's potential for overcoming socially imposed limitations is an important aspect of later Foucault's analysis of power relations. In *The Use of Pleasure* (1986), for instance, he advocates self-monitoring and self-discipline - i.e., the reflexive examination of the self's imbrication with wider cultural dynamics - as the basis of individual autonomy. In stressing self-fashioning and self-mastery, he seeks to offer an alternative to the Christian tradition of self-renunciation. Foucault does not, however, just transpose this model to conditions of "domination" like rape. Indeed, at the same time as he promotes an ethics of the self, he emphasizes the ways in which the solidification of power relations into "domination" limits the practice of resistance and freedom. This distinction between domination and power is important if we are to acknowledge the role of physical violence - even when it is not directly exercised - in shaping the materiality of the body.

¹⁴ In *La folie encerclée*, Foucault (1977) goes further to advocate desexualising rape by decriminalizing it and treating it like any other civil offence such as a physical attack or a punch in the face. See Plaza, 1980 for an account and critique of this position.

¹⁵ I agree with Brown that feminists should be critical of such rights-based agendas, all the more so since the history of the emergence of the victim's rights movement in the United States itself betrays the movement's reactionary ethos. Indeed, the victims' campaign cannot be dissociated from a continued right-wing patronage. In 1982, it entered the world of politics never to leave it again: Ronald Reagan and Attorney General Edwin Meese created the President's Task Force on Victims of Crime, which was to issue the report that first proposed a constitutional amendment. This extremely emotional and undocumented report about a fifty-year-old rape victim convinced Congress to start an Office for Victims of Crime in the Justice Department and to secure funding for various victims services. Since then, the victims' movement has increasingly worked under the aegis of right-wing funders and politicians who push for increased executions and longer prison sentences and whose vengeance-rights agenda isolates crime from broader social and economic issues. See Shapiro, 1997 and Rapping in press. This is not to say, however, that victims' participation in legal proceedings will have the same negative effects outside the ideological context of the Western juridical model that I am examining here.

¹⁶ Ironically, this approach is also grounded in the very tradition of feminist scholarship and activism from which feminist postmodernism likes to distinguish itself, namely, that of the second wave. According to Curthoys, the 1960s and 1970s women's liberation movement was primarily aiming, through the activity of consciousness raising, at exposing the psychological effects of power. Its "liberation theory" provided "an account of the psychological workings of power, where power is seen straightforwardly as the ability of one person or group to determine the behaviour of another person or group.... The account is of the destructive psychological effects of power but it is also about how it can be confronted and undermined" (1997:6).

¹⁷ See, e.g., Jehl, 1999. Jehl discusses the prevalence and acceptability of this practice in Muslim countries. We need to be wary, however, of conceptualising the Arab world as the monolithic other of Western culture in relation to gendered violence. As Uma Narayan (1997) points out, the cross-cultural connections Western feminists make on issues of violence against women tend to foreground fatalities in Eastern contexts as examples of death by culture, whereas similar forms of violence in the West are not related to culture or religion. In fact, domestic violence murders in the Western context are often not even given the kind of prominence that characterizes discussions of sexual violence in the "third world".

¹⁸ For another illustration of such conflation of experience and identity, see Jones, 1997 and, more specifically, the description of her reaction to the murder of a feminist activist student: "From the moment I received the first phone call, ... I have been in the middle of a tale unfolding in more than one direction at once. Here was Andrea the activist, and there was Andrea the victim.... Here was Andrea the self-defence instructor, and there was Andrea the 'battered woman'. What had any of us seen or known of Andrea after all?" (15). This is a typical cultural response that, at the same time as it sets up victimization and agency (activism/self-defence) as mutually exclusive terms, presents them as on a par with each other and in so doing turns victimization into an aspect of the victim's identity. Jones's essay is an attempt at deconstructing these false dichotomies and their victim-blaming consequences.

¹⁹ In her analysis of the incest survivor movement, Jan Hake makes a similar claim about the controversial issue of recovered memory. She argues that instead of emphasizing the literal truth of the memories of childhood sexual abuse, feminists should acknowledge the transformative process such recollections necessarily entail: "We must recognize how feminist memorial projects mobilize a wide range of psychological and social meanings, some of which are woven unconsciously into the fabric of memory. We need not be embarrassed to acknowledge this deeply social aspect of remembering or the mind's tendency to transform mental images and imprints of events, imaginatively embroidering on their narrative content. Indeed, if we are to achieve full equality, we need more than the courage to remember or to heal. We also need the courage to imagine" (1999:39).

²⁰ I agree with Wendy Brown that empowerment as a substitute for the discourse of freedom is a vacuous move if it signifies "an oddly adaptive and harmonious relationship with domination" and locates "an individual's sense of worth and capacity in the register of individual feelings" (1995:22). I do not think, however, that speak-outs and consciousness raising are necessarily sites where such individualizing moves occur.

²¹ For an analysis of the contemporary meanings associated with victimization, see Lamb, 1999.

²² Scott and Brown both make passing disclaimers according to which we need not abandon the category of experience to question and redefine it. Brown explains that “dispensing with the unified subject does not mean ceasing to be able to speak about our experiences as women, only that our words cannot be legitimately deployed or construed as larger or longer than the moments of the lives they speak from; they cannot be anointed as ‘authentic’ or ‘true’” (1995:40-41). In the conclusion to her essay, Scott claims that “experience is not a word we can do without, although it is tempting, given its usage to essentialize identity and reify the subject, to abandon it altogether. But ... given the ubiquity of the term, it seems to me more useful to work with it, to analyse its operations and to redefine its meaning” (1992:37). In highlighting the essentializing gestures associated with its use, however, they have, along with Foucault, definitely contributed to enhancing our wariness of the term in academia. Rather than asking what “truths” experience reveals, scholars are now increasingly studying what blindnesses its invocation hides. This might explain why the analysis of the concrete experience of sexual assault has fallen out of favour with feminist theorists.

²³ See Alcoff, 1991-92 for an elaboration of the ways in which the meaning of an utterance or event is affected by the positionality of the speaker and by the discursive context.

²⁴ The psychologist Nicole Gavey criticizes the positivism of the empirical psychology research on these same grounds. She takes issue with the field’s creation of ready-made categories of victims and its disregard for women’s contradictory reactions (1999). Similarly, in her essay “Trauma Talk in Feminist Clinical Practice”, Jeanne Marecek reveals how the language practices of feminist therapists construct victims as “wounded” and “broken” and, in the process, turn therapy into a form of apolitical caregiving. Like Gavey, Marecek thus concludes that “psychology’s habits of authoritative expertise and its claim of privileged access to a single Truth, even when practiced in the name of feminism, should be received with scepticism” (1999:180).

²⁵ This is not to say that survivors do not work within the movement or achieve positions of leadership in women’s agencies, but it is to say that victim participation is now an individual career choice and no longer a structural element inherent to the running of these centres.

²⁶ This development is partly an outcome of state funding. In order to sponsor various organizations, the state requires that they conform to a structure it can recognize, namely, one in its own hierarchical and masculinist image. At Rape Crisis Services in Urbana-Champaign (Illinois) where I volunteered for five years, one of the pamphlets given to new or prospective board members justifies the hierarchical structure of the agency by addressing the “conflict” between new, more efficient management practices and nostalgic, well-meaning, but disorganized feminist ones inherited from grassroots organizations. Notwithstanding the condescending and distorted representation of the movement’s origins (consensus building equals lack of structure), the document also represents this “conflict” as two equal forces struggling to find a balance. The staff, however, sees hierarchization and professionalism as having clearly supplanted the egalitarian framework of grassroots organizing. See Mardorossian:2000.

²⁷ See Baumgardner, 2000 for a detailed account of this case.

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CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING, IDENTITY POLITICS, AND THE PUBLIC / PRIVATE DIVIDE

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Summary

My paper inquires into the formation of intersubjectivity within consciousness raising

groups. It begins by outlining the debate over the meanings of experience and their implication for feminism. I contend that, while experience needs to be adequately theorized and understood as discursively constructed, the context of the narration of experience matters too. Then I proceed to explore the specifics of this context in the case of consciousness raising groups, understood as alternative public spheres and using poststructuralist feminist theories of the public / private divide. I contend that it is issues, not identities, that are politicised and traded within the public sphere, and I plead for disentangling consciousness raising from identity politics. At the same time, I call for a more historically contextual and less monolithic understanding of identity politics; I claim that the exploration of political issues as stemming from historically specific discursive contexts can allow for a more imaginative and future oriented activism.

The category of experience has been crucial in the emergence of second wave feminism, allowing women to formulate a critique of patriarchy and to resist universalising men's experience as human experience. However, the category of female experience has soon been accused of the same universalising gesture. Lesbian, Black, and post-colonial feminism argued that in its opposition to (white) patriarchy the Second Wave was

advancing the point of view of white heterosexual middle-class women, downplaying other structures of oppression. A central tenet of these later approaches is that race, ethnicity or sexuality can be just as decisive factors as gender in articulating one's identity. From a different point of view, the category of experience itself came under attack, especially from poststructuralist theorists who were claiming that experience, like identity, is rather a construct than a given fact.

In the following I am going to outline the main terms of the discussion of experience as occurred in the debate over the use of experience in the context of the women's studies classroom; I am using the exchange between Diana Fuss and bell hooks in order to sum up the main arguments that have polarized the discussion. In order to reconnect the debate later, suffice it to say that the women's studies classroom can be extrapolated for any kind of a public sphere.

“Exactly what counts as ‘experience’ and how should we defer to it in pedagogical situations?” asks Diane Fuss in a well-known essay, *Essentialism in the Classroom*. In this essay, Fuss is concerned with the way in which what she terms the authority of experience operates as a guise for essentialism in the classroom. Fuss counterposes two understandings of experience: the classical Aristotelian view in which empiricist knowledge allows for the apprehension of the essence, and a poststructuralist view, in which experience is constructed (“a sign, mediated by other signs”); the author herself openly leans towards the second understanding, and, in this regard, it is remarkable how close her position is to Joan Scott’s critique of experience in her famous essay that originated the debate (Scott, 1991). To begin with, speaking with the authority of empirical experience means excluding those who do not belong to the circle of insiders “in the know”. Furthermore, using experience in the classroom can also have the unwanted effect of creating hierarchies of oppression: “Identities are itemized, appreciated and ranked on the basis of which identity holds the greatest currency at a particular historical moment and in a particular institutional setting” (Fuss, 1989:116). Again the unwanted effect consists in silencing students whose “experiences” simply “do not fit”: a discussion of race would apparently set aside the topic of sexual orientation. Although Fuss seems to acknowledge that the authority of experience works not only to silence students, but also to prompt them to participate in discussions of issues that they perceive relevant, in her view this is due to the fact that students believe in the “fiction” that truth and experience are the same. The solution she advances is to bring to the fore of the classroom debate the very fact of the

constructiveness of experience: one needs to theorize the lived experience from which one speaks yet at the same time to deconstruct it.

In a response to Diane Fuss, bell hooks criticizes her account of essentialism and its dynamics in the feminist classroom on several grounds. First, hooks claims that Fuss assigns the politics of experience only to marginalized groups: “Fuss does not address how systems of domination already at work in the academy and the classroom silence the voices of individuals from marginalized groups and give space only when on the basis of experience it is demanded” (hooks, 1994:81). While dominant groups speak of “human experience”, marginalized groups speak of the “experience of oppression”. If the authority of experience can silence those who cannot claim it, as Fuss suggests, then it is the same mechanism at work that has contributed, and still is contributing, to silencing minority groups, whose claim to speak from the position of “human experience” has been denied; once the “minority experience” becomes the topic, the marginalized are thus empowered. hooks claims that experience is too precious a tool to be relinquished, that while it may lead to marginalization and exclusion, the fact that it provides a standpoint for oppressed groups is too important for experience to be let go.

To sum up the debate: for Fuss, personal experience, understood as the empirical knowledge of oppression, if used in the classroom can cause exclusion, marginalization and in the end precludes any authentic communication and ongoing dialogue; the only thing one can do in order to use it properly is to adequately theorize it, or rather deconstruct it. For bell hooks, the use of personal experience in the classroom is necessary precisely because it empowers students from minority groups; in the end there is no way “out” of experience, as any claim to knowledge relies on it.

Furthermore, in order to avoid the paternalist connotations that “authority of experience” has for Diane Fuss, bell hooks suggests as alternative term, the “passion of experience”: “There is a particular knowledge that comes from suffering. It is a way of knowing that is often expressed through the body, what it knows, what has been deeply inscribed on it through experience... it is a privileged location.” (hooks, 1994:91) By this statement, hooks addresses one of the sensitive spots of constructivism, namely the relationship with the material. However, one can claim that hooks does not theorize enough about this relationship. One might easily object that while experience is inscribed on the body, communication is a discursive act, and any appeal to it is, in the end, part of a narrative. The example that hooks gives, of Rigoberta Menchu, is one of a “narrative of

experience” that is “told retrospectively”, so that bell hooks can hear “the passion of remembrance in her words” (hooks, 1994:91). At this point it appears clear that the concept of experience that hooks employs is not necessarily considered real, natural, and immediate. On the contrary: – unless ‘experience’ is not considered to exist until related experience is always part of a narrative, told retrospectively. The experience of suffering is inscribed on a body that provides a privileged location for the knowledge of suffering; nevertheless, once expressed, narrated retrospectively, the experience of suffering becomes mediated by discourse, which is always/already political. Furthermore, hooks does not address the claim made by Fuss that relying on an immediate transparent notion of experience, while empowering traditionally disenfranchised groups, does little to further dialogue: my experience is different from yours is different from hers. The question of what is to be made out of these experiences and how they can enter a truly dialogical relationship remains unanswered.

There seems to be a tension at work here, between standpoint epistemology and the constructiveness of narratives. I am going to attempt to solve this contradiction in the following pages by looking at two historical examples of how oppressed groups have advanced their narratives of the experience of oppression: the two cases being the Combahee River Collective, and consciousness raising during the Second Wave, will provide the historical examples in point.

Experience and identity politics

Let us look more closely at the meaning of experience as it has been articulated in identity politics. The group credited with the invention of the term ‘identity politics’ is The Combahee River Collective. While in the Black Feminist Statement they claim a personal genesis for Black feminism, namely “the political realization that comes from the seemingly personal experiences of individual black women’s lives”, the category of experience the Collective employs is in no sense uncomplicated. “In the process of consciousness raising, actually life-sharing, we began to recognize the commonality of our experiences and, from that sharing and growing consciousness, to build a politics that will change our lives and inevitably end our oppressions” (Combahee River Collective, 364). It was during an already political process that the commonality of experience came to be recognized as such. Furthermore, experience itself became relevant mainly as a springboard for political action.

Lisa Tessman argues that the fact that oppressions are interlocked is a crucial feature of identity politics.

She interprets the Combahee River Collective's claim that the freedom of black women would be the freedom of everybody as an acknowledgement of interlocking and simultaneous oppressions. Once black women are free, that would mean that gender, class, and racial oppression would be over. There is a second implication to this claim; namely, by recognizing the interlocking and simultaneity of oppressions, identity politics as articulated by the Combahee River Collective avoids positing one feature of identity as more salient than another (Tessman, 1995:67). Thus, the narrativization of experience is bound to be fluid and permanently readjusted to new challenges. As the members of the Combahee River Collective admit,

In the fall, when some members returned, we experienced several months of complete inactivity and internal disagreements which were first conceptualised as a lesbian-straight split but which were also the result of class and political differences.
(Combahee River Collective, 370)

One can conclude that the experience of oppression can be narrated in many ways; that given that oppressions are interlocked, at some point it is possible to frame the experience of oppression in terms of gender or race categories, or gender and race, or sexuality, or age. However, this seems to revert to the mere definition of identity politics, as politics rooted in identity; if at a certain historical moment, experience can be narrated as shaped by gender rather than race, or gender and race rather than class and sexuality; if power differentials operate even within the most oppressed categories; then not only is experience constructed, but identity is as well, and, instead of taking identity as a foundational ground, one should rather focus on how political identities are constructed through processes of narrating personal experiences. Now it is worth taking into account that not all experience is bound to form a political identity at any given time; that while some of these narratives can contribute to establishing a political identity, others are to be excluded, rendered as noise, or relinquished as irrelevant. It also seems, from the Combahee River Collective's statement itself, that the connection between feeling and political action is less immediate than it looks at first sight. Are C-R groups mere emotional support groups, or instances of confession as conceptualised by the later

Foucault, or are they real ferment for political action? The next section of this paper will attempt to answer this question.

Narratives, Therapies and Confessions

As mentioned above, arising from the Black feminist statement itself, not all narratives of common experiences are bound to generate political identities. A pertinent way to exemplify this distinction is by comparing recovery groups and C-R groups. Elayne Rapping claims that, while there are continuities between these two not so contemporary social phenomena, there are also important differences: while the C-R groups contextualized the experiences of their members in the wider social circumstances of, most often, sexism, and had as a final purpose collective action to redress power imbalances between men and women, the recovery groups identified the roots of their members' problems in their personal histories and attempted individual, not collective, redemption, imbued with religious values (Rapping, 1996:55). The context of the narrativization of experience thus plays its evident part here; to revert to a previous example, Rigoberta Menchu's narrative of suffering would be understood differently in the two instances outlined above; simply put, while we can claim that her experience, inscribed on the body, would be the same, the narrative would be different.

Another distinction that needs to be addressed is between consciousness raising groups and confessional practices in the Christian tradition, a difference conceptualised by Michel Foucault (Foucault, 1980). Wendy Brown, for example, criticizes consciousness raising and speak-outs as confessional practices; such a sweeping critique has far reaching implications, to the extent of accusing feminism of being just another knowledge production process, operating in exactly the same way as the patriarchal power it seeks to dismantle:

“Consciousness raising, as / like confession, delivers the hidden truth of women and women’s experience... While women are socially constructed to the core, women’s words about their experience, because they issue from an interior space and against an injunction to silence, are anointed as Truth, and constitute the foundation of feminist knowledge” (Brown, 1995:42).

In a reply to Brown, Carine Mardorossian stresses the fact of collective enunciation as a main characteristic of consciousness raising groups and speak-outs:

“Through consciousness raising and speak-outs, women come to understand that an experience they might previously have perceived as interpersonal in nature is in fact rooted in historical and social relations. The forum does not preclude as much as foster the analysis of the processes of subject construction” (Mardorossian, 2002:764). Referring in the following paragraphs more to speak-outs than to consciousness raising, but, in the writer’s opinion, with equal validity about both, Mardorossian claims that their empowering effects result not from the recovery of a “foundational center”, and “... not the process of reclaiming a unified self so much as the production of the narrative itself. The focus is on the potential for the invention of the self this word shaped reality entails rather than the excavation of a core center” (Mardorossian, 2002:765).

It is worth mentioning at this point that this invention of the self takes place in an intersubjective relation, in what can be termed a public space, and let us inquire for a moment into the nature of the conceptual relation between identities and public spaces.

Identities and the Public Private Divide

Women’s participation in the public sphere has been one of the main concerns of first and second wave feminists. It is however, with the third wave that the constitutive nature of the public sphere, the nature of public communication and its discursive rules, have come under critical scrutiny.

As a starting point example, let us consider Chantal Mouffe’s essay, *Which Public Sphere for a Democratic Society?* Mouffe criticizes the post-1989 idea of “... the need to go beyond left and right towards a consensual politics of the center” (Mouffe, 1995:55). She decries the consequences of such an approach, namely the replacement of political discourse with a “moral, and, in many cases, even a moralistic, one”; due to the presupposition of the elimination of political antagonism, this results in a confrontation between non-negotiable positions, in which one discourse plays the part of the moral good and any contesting position is cast in the role of pure evil. In contrast to this, Mouffe explores the possibility of an agonistic public space, based on an understanding of democracy as confrontation among political positions. In such a space, mere antagonism is to be replaced by agonism, i.e. a friend/enemy relation is to be replaced by a confrontation between adversaries obeying similar discursive rules.

This rough and ready notion of the public space does little to explain how structural inequalities preclude certain groups from access to defining the discursive rules governing

participation in the agonistic public space, and, more importantly, how these inequalities can be remedied.

In a different essay, Mouffe details her position with regard to one such group, namely women, by exploring the issue of feminist politics and its relationship to the category of woman. Mouffe rejects a feminist politics based on an unproblematised essentialist category of woman. A radical democratic politics should not rely on already-constituted identities whose interests are then “carried” to the public. Instead, she argues, identities can and should be created in the public sphere around political issues, such as, for example, feminist issues. These identities, for Mouffe, have a common feature, namely the adherence to the principles of radical democratic citizenship and to a “grammar” of citizen conduct based on interpretations of the notion of public good. Merely subscribing to these principles can therefore install a condition of “equivalence” among participants in the public sphere, by creating a common “we” whose ultimate purpose is achieving the common good. The creation of such a community requires, as Mouffe admits, the existence of a constitutive other, as no community can be all-inclusive, thereby the common good remains a vanishing horizon point and radical democracy can never be completely achieved. While this can be regarded as problematic enough, Mouffe never explains how the (dialectical?) integration of various constitutive others in the political public community occurs; neither does she explore how the relationship between power, the ability to draw the “grammar rules” of citizen conduct, and exclusion operates; nor does she examine how equivalence in the public sphere can be achieved while structural inequalities still persist. Two counterexamples can clarify my point here. Joan Landes’s historical inquiry into the constitution of the public sphere in France reveals that democratic discourse “has exhibited an unfortunate potential for substituting its own universal for the real competition of interests. Likewise, appeals to the universal have concealed the gendered division of space and power... in any event (...) not all speech acts or styles of talking are necessarily equal” (Landes, 1995:108). A more contemporary example shows that it is not always necessary to abide to the current “grammar rules” of citizen conduct in order to participate in the public sphere: postmodern activism has witnessed many instances in which “happening” as a form of art has been used successfully to bring issues into the public sphere (the Guerrilla Girls may be a case in point).

However, Mouffe's point that identities should be created in the public sphere around issues rather than considered fixed and immutably linked to a political project seems a good starting point for a postmodern conception of the public sphere. Nancy Fraser details three assumptions informing the constitution of a postmodern public sphere: 1. participatory parity requires the elimination of systemic social inequalities, 2. where such inequalities still persist, a postmodern multiplicity of contesting publics is preferable to a unified one, and 3. the postmodern public sphere should countenance the inclusion, rather than exclusion, of interests labelled as private by the bourgeois masculinist ideology. Fraser's subsequent analysis of the Clarence Thomas hearings further advances the point that structural inequality translates precisely in the ability, or lack thereof, of defining what is of public interest (and hence, the discursive rules of various public "languages" shaped by various issues) yet at the same time of defending the private, namely a space free from the political intervention of the state (Native American women were not able to draw that line outside of their body, as for example in cases of forced or unconsented sterilization). It may be the case that one needs a postmodern definition of the public/private divide.

In "A Semiotic of the Public Private Distinction", Susan Gal espouses a radical constructivist concept of space in order to account for the shifting nature of the public/private divide. She contends that "Public and private do not simply describe the social world in any direct way; they are rather tools for arguments about and in that world. (...) By using the public/private dichotomy, participants can subdivide, recalibrate, and thus make fractal recursions in their categorization of cultural objects and personae" (Gal, 2002:79). Rejecting the geographical / spatial notion of the private and public and replacing it with a deictic understanding casts the previous designation of separate spheres into the relativism of communication in certain contexts between social actors. The spatial opposition between, for example, the house as a private area and the street as public is thus replaced with various branching distinctions: within the house, the living room is public while the bedroom is private, the street right in front of one's house is private (illustrated, for example, by one's responsibility for clearing the snow) while lanes are public, and so on. Now these divisions that can multiply infinitely (like fractals) depending on the context also depend on the power of social actors to act upon that space, to claim it as public or private; similarly, an actor's social position within a certain context would allow her to define an issue as private or public.

To pull these threads together, a postmodern understanding of the public sphere would take into account the historically constituted nature of the public sphere, but also of the possibility of imagining various articulations of the public / private opposition; the existence of a multiplicity of contesting public spheres organized around various interests; and an understanding of individual political participation within these multiple public spheres, where multiple, not singular, identities can be created, again, around politicised issues rather than based on a postulated continuity between the position in the social system and immediate interest. The question remains, however, given the need of these multiple public spheres to communicate at some point, of whether such a communication is possible. In this sense, a positive example is given by AIDS activism, whose achievements were conditioned by the possibility of translating between several public spheres: the scientific community, the pharmaceutical industry, and the community of people with AIDS. AIDS activism was successful in that, while the AIDS community was trying to raise the issue of AIDS as one of public concern, it managed to identify other arenas where AIDS was already of public interest and then translate between the grammar rules of these public spheres. Their success (no matter how limited) may have been conditioned precisely by this postmodern understanding of the public sphere; their activism may be taken as an example of what activism can do today.

Wendy Brown, or about universal victimization

How then can one, taking into account all of the above, conceptualise the creation of collective identities within the public sphere of C-R groups? If the alleged linear relationship between feeling, narrative, (collective) identity, and political action reveals complications at each juncture - a similar point is made by Lauren Berlant - let us pause for a moment and examine the last one of these, namely the link between collective identity and political action. Wendy Brown attempts to offer a psychoanalytic reading of identity politics focusing precisely on subject formation processes that are understood as the roots of identity based political action. She focuses on

... the historically specific desire to be punished—not for crimes as such, but for what might be termed the “social crimes” of being female, colored, or queer in a sexist, racist, and homophobic social order that also is acutely conscious of and has fashioned a

sophisticated set of critical discourses about these injustices. ... If subordination or injury through these markings is not simply a matter of political oppression or repression producing a certain kind of social positioning, but instead entails an ongoing process of subject formation, to what degree might that process include the generation of desire for the injurious and punitive social treatment its subjects also decry? What would such treatment confirm, allay, or release in psychic and political identity created at the site of social rejection and subordination? (Brown, 1995:46)

Brown attempts to answer these questions by offering a reading of Freud's essay "A Child Is Being Beaten" and then transposing this reading onto identity politics, trying to identify the libidinal investments that occur in the process of politicising a wounded identity. Her conclusions are at best depressing: as she read it there is, for identity politics, little way out of a "closed economy of guilt and punishment". In order to maintain a political identity rooted in injury, one has to keep generating scenes of victimization; or, in a second reading, "the guilty desire for exclusive and inappropriate love finds its only conceivable outlet in the desire for punishment" (Brown, 1995:58). In a third reading, "the desire to be punished is distributed onto others such that it does not appear as one's own desire but rather as the inevitable fate of the of the punished, the wretched of the earth, the downtrodden." (Brown, 1995:59)

If there is little to contradict the terms of Brown's bleak reading of identity politics, in what follows I am going to criticize her method, namely her use of Freudian psychoanalysis.

1. To begin with, although her attempt is to read a specifically historical phenomenon, her analysis fails to be historical: in the end, Brown displaces an ahistorical narrative of subject formation onto a specifically historical phenomenon. Such an approach, especially when not matched by an attempt to capture the irreducible difference of that social phenomenon, forms an infinite regress disclosing its true nature. Reading identity politics through Freudian psychoanalysis has the unwanted effect of making it sound eerily familiar to "similar" discourses; for example, the post-Holocaust Jewish discourse could easily replace any of the examples Brown gives in order to ground her analysis of identity politics. Now, if there is little historical difference between the two,

Brown performs a universalising gesture. If she criticizes a certain strand of identity politics for claiming “universal female victimization”, as in “Anita Hill is every woman”, in the end she enacts a parallel gesture, implicitly claiming that all traumas are the same and all victims are equal - and even, in a harsh reading, that maybe they should stop complaining because we’ve heard enough of that.

2. Her focus on the “specifically historic desire to be punished - for social crimes such as being female, colored, or queer” and her brushing over the fact that “these markings produce a certain kind of social positioning” leaves us with several monolithic categories of oppression with little difference within and communication between them. The best criticisms of identity politics, often formulated from within identity politics groups, focus precisely on power differentials between members of the oppressed groups and on mechanisms of exclusion operating within these groups (Anzaldua is an example in point here). The quote from the Black Feminist Statement above highlights precisely the way in which an apparently unitary group cohering along lines of gender and race was complicated by issues of sexuality and class. Then again, establishing the binary opposition between the oppressed (the victims) and the oppressors pays little attention to the capillary circulation of power: no subject position is ever completely on one side or other of the divide.

3. Ignoring the complex operations of power within what we loosely term minority groups also equates with ignoring the micro-level historical processes that bring them together. If identities are, and can only be, forged collectively - with all the reductions that crafting these collective identities entails - then it is important to look at the empowering effects of these narratives too. Here is, for example, Elayne Rapping, writing about her encounter with what is, in the end, another story of female victimization, namely the story of unwanted sex found in Doris Lessing’s *The Golden Notebook*:

“Reading that passage, and discussing it later with my friend, I understood, for the first time, what the phrase ‘the scales fell off my eyes’ meant. Doris Lessing had dared to give voice to a set of female feelings and experiences never before spoken or acknowledged. And in doing so she had, somehow, made these feelings - previously experienced as crazy or wrong or so suppressed - suddenly feel legitimate. To share this epiphany, first with Lessing and later with other women, was, as we would come to say, ‘liberating’” (Rapping, 1996:5)

4. It follows from the above that not all victims are created equal. Linda Marciano and Anita Hill, although both invoked in histories of female victimization otherwise have, as Brown astutely notices, little in common. “Anita Hill is every woman”, the typical example of universal victimization mentioned by Brown, does not necessarily signify only “the eschewal of the complexities of race in the United States”; on the contrary, in a more charitable reading, it can be understood as an appeal to gender solidarity - in spite of, if we please, race - and this precisely in a case that was lost because, as Nancy Fraser shows, the narrative of racial oppression casting Clarence Thomas as the victim of a high-tech lynching overpowered the narrative of sexual oppression through sexual harassment; it was, after all, white feminist groups that were among the most ardent supporters of Anita Hill, and, if anything, Anita Hill, far from being a victim, reclaimed her agency. To conclude, any account of identity politics has to include a historical dimension, as well as understand it as a collective phenomenon.

Consciousness Raising: Private Stories Made Public

Consciousness-raising was reclaimed for feminist use in 1968 by New York Radical Women. It began casually, during a meeting, with a reflection on the issue of women as sex objects and with women sharing the same stories that would coalesce into a pattern. Kathie Sarachild, one of the founders of the group, saw C-R as a means of creating a mass movement, and indeed within a few years thousands of groups had formed around the country. “The women who joined them found that consciousness raising challenged many of their basic assumptions about themselves and about their relations to men. (...) As women talked in small, homogenous groups about various issues, they discovered that problems they’d thought were theirs alone were shared by all - and created by the male dominated culture” (Davis, 1991:88).

The initial purpose of consciousness-raising was to facilitate women’s participation in collective political action. Its founders thought that once women identified the common cause of their problems in the context of wider political and social inequalities, they would get involved in collective action. “If C-R didn’t lead to collective action, it was simply a form of therapy, aimed at changing women themselves rather than at changing society” (Davis, 1991: 89).

The literature on consciousness-raising includes many personal stories detailing the life-changing experiences of the women who participated in them. Elayne Rapping, participant in the C-R movement, described these groups:

“Consciousness-raising, (or CR) groups generally had anywhere between four or five and perhaps fifteen or twenty members. Some groups were quite political in focus while others - probably the majority - were concerned with the politics of personal life. Some groups chose topics for the evening and stayed with them; even regulating the number of times and for how long each member was allowed to speak. Others were more free floating, following the inclinations and often urgent needs of members as they arose. But all groups shared a common goal: to develop an analysis, through comparing and sharing details of personal experience, of the sexist culture which was dictating the patterns of our lives as women” (Rapping, 1996:54).

Consciousness raising was first formally introduced to the Women’s Movement on Thanksgiving Day 1968 in Chicago, at the first national women’s liberation conference. It is significant that more than 200 women from thirty-seven states and Canada gathered; however, black women’s groups were not invited. “The white feminists were afraid that if they talked in front of black women about the oppression of middle class housewives, there would be ‘snickers and sneers’” (Davis, 1991:79).

During one of the meetings, a paper was presented entitled “A Programme for Feminist ‘Consciousness Raising’”. In itself, the paper was trying to defend New York Radical Women and their C-R practice against charges of being “trivial” and “non-political”. The paper stated, among other things, “We assume that our feelings... mean something worth analyzing... that our feelings are saying something political... Our feelings will lead us to ideas and then to action” (quoted in Shreve, 1989:10). The stated causal link feelings-ideas-action is defining for C-R, and can be found in later accounts as the one of the Combahee River Collective.

Similarly, Rapping describes the dynamics of these groups:

CR groups, developed and institutionalized by radical feminists, boldly articulated rules and methods whereby the principles of the new feminist insights into gender relations could be codified and circulated to women everywhere, as a way of building a movement based on the idea that the personal was political. They set guidelines for sharing and generalizing about our experience so that action could be taken - individually and collectively - to change our circumstances. The idea was

that individual, private relationships and dynamics parallel collective, public ones.
(Rapping, 1996:55).

The personal experience of participating in a C-R group was, as the stories told later reconstruct it, “liberating”. In similarly reverent terms, this is how Anita Shreve sums up the stories of women who had participated in C-R groups. “The heart of the matter, say the women, was “the click” - the light bulb going off, the eye-popping realization, the knockout punch. It was the sudden comprehension, in one powerful instant, of what sexism exactly meant, how it had collared one’s own life, the way women were in this together. It was an awe-inspiring moment of vision and of commonality, when a woman was instantly and irrevocably changed from naïve to knowing, from innocent to experienced, from apolitical to feminist” (Shreve, 1989:53).

However, there were problems that soon led to the dismantling of most groups; it seems as if once the groups had fulfilled a certain function, there was no more necessity for their existence. Furthermore, once the main issue, generally of sexism, was acknowledged, and by the specific social positioning of those involved in it, it had to be limited across lines of race and class, the groups were not apparently necessary anymore.

The problem for a political movement like the second wave, it soon became clear, was that the assumptions upon which C-R rules of discourse were based - the ones which gained their theoretical and procedural power by insisting upon the uniformity of all female experience - were too overly simplified, reductive and dogmatic, to survive as anything but a limiting and politically regressive imperative. Based as they were on the limited experiences of a very narrow segment of the female population -, educated, middle class, young whites - they soon became impediments to the growth of the movement, to its implicit mandate to reach all women everywhere.
(Rapping, 1996:56).

It may rather be argued that the dynamics of consciousness raising was to a certain extent misread by its own founders. It was not in the unmediated connection between feelings and action that the strength of consciousness raising resided, but rather in the creation of an alternative public sphere, where issues were retrieved from the space of interiority, of the personal, of the private, and recast as political and public. Now while women’s refusal to admit men to the first C-R groups was understood as a refusal to

perpetuate gendered power relations in such a context, the discovery was soon made that there were differences and power relations between women themselves. The great achievement of consciousness raising was not, as its proponents repeatedly argued, the creation of a unitary female identity; it was rather the creation of an alternative public sphere where issues previously relegated to the private were coalesced into an analysis of patriarchy doubled by a claim to agency.

Conclusion

To pull these many threads together, experience is shaped by one's position in a wide net of social relations; and narrating experience by linking it with that position can be understood as politicising one's identity. However, the link does not operate pre-discursively. The error of identity politics is to have posited *what one is*, rather than *what one narrates*, (especially together with others, and then taking into account what can be told and what can be left out in such instances of collective narration), as the ground for one's politics. It is *issues* that are political, not identities, and the act of collective sharing creates a public sphere with its own discursive rules that can define them as such at particular historical moments: this is what happened, with striking similarity, in the case of consciousness raising groups and in the activism of the Combahee River Collective. If gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, and age, are taken as historically contingent categories of analysis, if it is issues that can be politicised, not identities, then one needs alternative public spheres where new issues can be imagined. The success of consciousness raising lay in attempting to re-shuffle power relations (it is irrelevant for how long it lasted before mechanisms of domination were set into motion) and claim political agency for its members. That later the narratives coalesced into a binary model of gender, or, with the Combahee River Collective, of gender and race and sexuality, does little justice to the radical nature of such a collective process. Consciousness raising groups were not only formulating their collective critique of the patriarchal / racist / capitalist system from narratives of past experiences; through their insistence on re-shaping power relations and claiming individual agency for their members they were in the end spaces for imagining the future.

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