



**Pembroke Center**  
FOR TEACHING  
AND RESEARCH  
ON WOMEN

BROWN UNIVERSITY

NEWSLETTER

SUMMER, 1984

**1984–85 Seminar**

The theme for next year's seminar is *Production, Reproduction, and Constructions of Sexual Difference*. Research will ask how social organizations of production and reproduction are related to the categories of masculine and feminine. What productive roles are available to women and how do those roles both reflect and define cultural positions of the female? How are the categories of production and biological reproduction articulated in a given cultural system? What forms of social and cultural reproduction are performed by women? By asking such questions, what insights can we gain into theories of sexual divisions of labor? What can be learned in all cases by cross-cultural comparisons?

**POST-DOCTORAL FELLOWS**

**Marnia Lazreg**  
Sociology. *The Reproduction of Traditional Conceptions of Femininity under Algerian Socialism*

**Denise Riley**  
History. *A History of Feminisms in Inter-War Britain*

**Diana Vélez**  
Spanish and Spanish American Literature. *Contemporary Puerto Rican Women's Literature in Historical Context*

**Jerome Wakefield**  
Philosophy. *Sexual Harmony: The Social Constructions of the Natural and the Disordered*

**BROWN FACULTY FELLOWS**

**Kay Goodman**  
Assistant Professor of German. *The Cult of Motherhood and German Women: 1895–1905*

**Louise Lamphere**  
Anthropology. *Women's Strategies and Cultural Conceptions of Work and Family*

**1983–84: Values, Ethics, and the Meanings of Gender**

1983–84 was the second year of the Pembroke Center's research project on *Cultural Constructions of the Female*. Funded by the Ford Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities, the project looks at the various ways different cultures have constructed gender and sexual difference. It asks what the relationships are among symbolic and social representations of gender, social and political institutions, and the lived experience of women and men. It asks how, and under what conditions, cultural constructions of gender change. The special challenge of the project is to promote the exchange of ideas and information among scholars of different disciplines with different kinds of research interests. Thanks to the cooperation and the talents of the participants thus far, the project has, in fact, become a rare and exciting locus for intellectual exchange.

The project seminar, which meets weekly under the direction of Joan Scott, had as its theme in 1983–84, "Values, Ethics, and the Meanings of Gender." The questions asked were broad: How does gender function as an evaluative category? How are "female" and "male" inscribed within the values and normative structures of a society? How do a society's ethics and value systems contribute to the construction of gender? What insights do we get by looking at gender cross-culturally? What variations can be identified according to class or ethnicity?

As the seminar participants and visitors brought their diverse disciplinary and theoretical perspectives to these questions, the importance of the 1983–84 theme became increasingly apparent. Systems of values and ethics and systems of gender differentiation are indeed

interconnected in powerful (though different) ways cross-culturally. In the West, at least, the concept of difference, and particularly sexual difference, can be said to be constructed within the discourse of ethics. Seemingly neutral terms like right/left, white/black, hard/soft, male/female take on evaluative meanings: positive/negative, good/bad, right/wrong. Those meanings are used to define a far-reaching system of hierarchical differences which intertwine with the different sets of binary oppositions. Thus, in Fascism, for example, strength, firmness, national unity and masculinity were linked in opposition to weakness, softness, subversion and femininity; and Jews were characterized as effeminate and thereby antithetical to the aims of the Aryan nation.

The seminar participants worked both inside the Western legacy and cross-culturally, and within a variety of historical periods. Their work demonstrated, in important and interesting ways, how sexual difference operates in relation to culturally and historically specific value systems. And it showed how powerful such systems of meaning are in the lives of women and men and in the functioning of social and political institutions.

## Seminar Participants, 1983–84

### POST-DOCTORAL FELLOWS



**Françoise Basch**  
History  
Project: *The Criticism of Marriage in Mid-19th-Century America*

In Victorian writings marriage seems to have been a central symbolic issue. The criticism of marriage appeared not only in direct attacks on the institution itself, but in the context of discussions of legal, intellectual, religious, economic, and political matters. It was embedded in the discourse of "reform" which characterized ante-bellum America and included such disparate movements as temperance, anti-slavery, women's rights, spiritualism, and utopianism. Reformers articulated a new ethics for personal relationships (in the family, in the commercial, industrial and social orders) in terms of equality between the sexes.

Françoise Basch has identified two themes within the discussion of marriage: one directed against the repression of sex and defined in terms of "free love," the other directed against the subjugation of women. From the reform groups, Basch has chosen three – suffragists, spiritualists, and utopians – as the focus for her study. Despite vast differences of interest and ideology, each group made criticism of marriage and discussion of "free love" central to the articulation of its philosophy. Basch's project is part of a larger comparative study of debates about marriage in the U.S., France, and Britain in the Victorian period.

*Françoise Basch is on the faculty of the Charles V Institut d'Anglais, at the University of Paris, VII.*



**Janice Doane**  
English  
Project: *A Woman's Place Is in the Past: Nostalgic Responses to Contemporary Feminism*

The current American interest in nostalgia often involves an indictment of contemporary culture, opposing the "deteriorating" values of the present to the "truer" values of a better past. Janice Doane, with co-author Devon Hodges, focuses particularly on the nostalgia of contemporary male writers who see

feminism, or the "liberated woman," as causes of degeneracy. Their study shows that nostalgia is not simply a sentimental longing for the past, but that it addresses the present, and depends upon a characteristic mode of articulation.

The writers in question – people like Christopher Lasch, John Irving, John Fowles, and Ivan Illich – do not respond to feminism in a simple way. Often these writers seem sympathetic to the women's movement and even seem to adopt the positions of some feminists. Doane and Hodges go beyond the writers' stated rhetorical positions, however, to the heart of their work – their strategies of representing the "real." For, in the texts examined, the nostalgic defense against feminism is inevitably attached to a debate about representation itself. In this debate, nostalgic writers understand sexual difference not as constructed by systems of signification but as a truth belonging to a natural, authentic "reality." Their ardent defense of this truth, a truth that would guarantee male certainty and prerogatives, gives rise to their passionate tracts.

*In the fall Janice Doane will be joining the English Department of St. Mary's College in California.*



**Yasmine Ergas**  
Sociology  
Project: *"In Dreams Begins Responsibility." Changing Utopias, Collective Identities, and Feminist Movements: 1960–80*

Feminist thought has emerged forcefully in the past two decades, bearing new images of femininity and new visions of the future. Feminists have directly attacked existing systems of gender, often by appealing to traditional ethical systems (of individual rights or social justice). In recent years, responding to internal critiques and to changing environments, feminist utopias and feminist interpretations of femininity itself, have undergone multiple permutations. Ergas explores these permutations in three countries – Italy, France and the U.S. – so as to benefit from systematic comparison.

The study sees feminism as part of a discursive context in which the nature of ideal societies is debated in terms of gender identities and the proper relation between sex and gender. Ergas ties her work on gender to the sociological literature on contemporary political movements and she suggests that gender be considered an essential part of the question of collective identity. Her

examination of feminist utopias looks at the question of utopias in general, and the relationship between utopian teleologies and mass social movements.

To explore the connection between how feminism has constructed the female and how it has envisioned her future, Ergas analyzes feminist scholarship, along with literary texts and political materials ranging from posters to programmatic statements, as well as the rituals of selected organizations.

*Yasmine Ergas is on the Faculty of Law of the University of Macerata and on the faculty of the Graduate School of Criminology at the University of Bari, Italy.*



**Harriet Whitehead**  
Anthropology  
Project: *Gender and Prestige in New Guinea*

Harriet Whitehead has been doing a study of male initiatory cultism and gender ideology in New Guinea. Her interest is in theories of domination and prestige differentiation as these apply to tribal societies, and in structuralist approaches to regional variation in cultural systems.

Whitehead's work at the Pembroke Center is discussed in two essays she wrote during the year. One treats New Guinea sexual imagery as a system of transformations centered on the idea of preserving and distributing vital force. The other deals with the relationship between the varieties of fertility cultism in New Guinea and New Guinea (or more broadly, tribal) political processes. In the latter, Whitehead focuses on the nature of tribal political economies and the role of the fertility cults in regulating them. Some otherwise puzzling variations in the symbolism of fertility, and the degree of male exclusiveness in fertility cults, is shown to make sense once the difference between tribal gift economies – centered on the exchange of gifts and blows – and Western commodity economies – centered on production for the market – are theoretically appreciated. Whitehead plans to expand upon the last essay, criticizing marxist and bourgeois economic analyses of New Guinea systems.

*Harriet Whitehead has received a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities to continue her research next year on New Guinea.*

## BROWN FACULTY FELLOWS



**Melinda Rabb**  
Assistant Professor of English  
Project: *Re-forming Women: Female Metamorphosis in Eighteenth-Century Satire*

Melinda Rabb's project is part of a larger study on "Satiric Re-forming in the 18th Century." She is studying female transformations in the language and literature of the period and assessing their significance as reflections of or aberrations from cultural constructions of gender. Her general thesis is that 18th-century satire – the angry genre – typically proposed practical reforms by means of imaginative re-formations of people and things (heroes were turned into swine; women into uncorked bottles; lovers into sylphs, and so on). By invoking an unstable world of fluctuating shapes and identities, satiric reforming often undermines the efficacy of its own stable "truths."

Traditional literary criticism has focused on the implications of such satire for the "nature of man." Rabb wants to understand its implications for the nature of woman, especially because female metamorphoses and female sexuality figure so largely in works of the period. Further, writing by 18th-century women forms a neglected yet crucial part of polemics and reform. Rabb's study includes texts in which women are subjects or agents of transformation, texts by women, and research on the women who belonged to the Swift-Pope circle. Her contention is that female metamorphoses reveal much about a culture's assumptions about gender and thus how a culture defines its systems of values, beliefs, and knowledge.



**Naomi Schor**  
Associate Professor of French Studies  
Project: *George Sand and Company*

Unlike that of her male counterparts – the canonical figures of Balzac and Flaubert – Sand's reputation rests not so much on her writings, as on her life. Rather than dismiss the "Sand legend" – which attests to the public's enduring fascination with her radical challenge to conventions of bourgeois propriety

grounded in codes of sexual difference – Schor devises a textual strategy adequate to Sand's specificity. Using a decentered approach, she focuses on what might be called Sand's *intersexual* relationships with friends, family, and lovers, for it is the dense warp of her *textual* relationships with others which constitutes the author we know as Sand.

Another part of the study examines the concomitant crisis of sexual difference in Sand's fiction. Writing on *La Petite Fadette*, for example (one of Sand's best known works), Schor chooses not to approach the text in what might be called the conventional manner – highlighting the strong female protagonist. Rather, she locates the meaning of "femininity" at another level: *La Petite Fadette* is Sand's most fully elaborated fiction of individuation in which she uses "enchantment" to explore the painful passage from the Imaginary into the Symbolic (Lacan). Schor's project thus explores women's relation to systems of representation which are organized in terms of sexual difference.

## VISITING SCHOLARS

**Jacqueline Rose**  
School of Cultural and Community Studies, University of Sussex  
*Hamlet, the Mona Lisa of Literature: Sexuality and the Objective Correlative*

**Peggy Kamuf**  
Department of French Literature, Miami University (Ohio)  
*Signature Rhetoric or, I, the Undersigned . . .*

**Elizabeth Fernea**  
Center of Middle Eastern Studies, University of Texas-Austin  
**Aziza Al Hibri**  
Editor, *Hypatia: A Journal of Women and Philosophy*  
*Veiling and Unveiling: Implications for Women's Status in the Middle East*

**Sheila Briggs**  
School of Religion, University of Southern California  
*Images of Women and Jews in 19th- and 20th-Century German Theology*

**Carol Gilligan**  
School of Education, Harvard University  
*Remapping Psychology's Development Theory: The Power of Discrepant Data on Women*

**Jacques Derrida**  
Ecole Normale Supérieure, Paris  
*Au delà du genre (Devant la loi)*

**Sherry Ortner**  
Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan  
*Gender Analysis and a Theory of Practice*

## BROWN STUDENTS

### GRADUATE STUDENTS

**Lynne Joyrich**  
Ph.D. Candidate, American Civilization  
*Days of Our Lives: Women and Daytime Television*

**Gloria-Jean Masciarotte**  
Ph.D. Candidate, English  
*The Female Bildungsroman in 19th-Century Fiction*

**Mary Moran**  
Ph.D. Candidate, Anthropology  
*Women and Power among the Cape Palmas Glebo*

### UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

**Tracey Aronson**  
Women's Studies  
*Beyond the Looking Glass: Femininity and the Monstrous in Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's Frankenstein.*

**Susan Fendrick**  
Women's Studies  
*The Black Woman in the Antebellum South: The Cultural Construction of Work, Sexuality, and Gender under Slavery*

**Katherine Garrett**  
Women's Studies  
*Fathers and Daughters: Colette, Woolf, and the Psychoanalytic Tradition*

**Melissa Robbins**  
Women's Studies  
*Identity, Utopia, and Ideology: The Problem of Sexual Difference in the American Radical Feminist Movement*

## VISITING FACULTY AFFILIATES

**Irene Q. Brown**  
History  
University of Connecticut

**Maria Luisa Nunes**  
Portuguese  
University of Pittsburgh

## Textual Politics

Janice Doane and Devon Hodges

The following is an excerpt from a chapter on Ivan Illich's most recent book, *Gender*. In that book, Illich claims that in the traditional cultures of the distant past which were characterized by a subsistence economy, life was happier for both sexes, and particularly for women. In contrast, women now suffer acutely from the modern transformations brought about by economic growth. For Illich, economic growth is crucially linked to the problem of sexual identity. While life in a subsistence culture defines a stable and separate identity for women and men, life under capitalism promotes and depends upon a "unisex world" which confuses sexual roles and identities. Women are the losers in this transformation. Illich would like to persuade us, because the gendered existence of the past marked out distinct spheres of power and authority for women; in the bleak uniformity of the present, women are losing their hold over these spheres. As he puts it: "The encroachment and usurpation of normative space [in the present] frustrates the flesh of women as it does not and could not affect men's. . . . Their potential contribution to homemaking is frustrated, and they are yanked out of their proper gender context; in both respects they suffer more than men."<sup>1</sup>

It is a rare contemporary woman who complains that her flesh creeps at the very idea of a man doing the dishes in her kitchen. Illich's hidden agenda clearly protects men's privileged spheres of authority. Not surprisingly, several feminists have denounced Illich's book as "reactionary, unintelligible propaganda."<sup>2</sup> Yet none of these commentators has discussed the significance of Illich's heavy reliance upon feminist scholarship to support his claim that life was better for women in the distant past. Our chapter shows how Illich borrows extensively from those feminist analyses of woman's culture which locate and praise a distinctly feminine identity. He relies particularly on certain anthropological studies which argue that a gendered existence, where women had their own spheres of power and prestige, coincides with a subsistence culture.<sup>3</sup> While Illich relies heavily upon these studies, he at the same time degrades their "weakness and dullness," and presents the material he uses in such a way as to display his own superior grasp of its implications. His text thus emerges as the singular, the authentic, and the true, while the feminist scholarship is consigned to the realm of proliferating confusion. Moreover, Illich's desire to halt what he calls "language production" and economic growth is related to his wish to maintain existing categories

of sexual difference. This desire for both a fixed sexual difference and a subsistence culture is nostalgic. It locates an "authentic" difference and a subsistence economy in the past, and it establishes them as "real" and stable referents. While Illich and the feminist critics he relies upon share certain assumptions about the greater "reality" or authenticity of the past, Illich, in his anxious insistence upon these assumptions, demonstrates their dangerous implications most clearly.

In Illich's account, capitalism is sometimes the cause for the loss of gender, sometimes the effect. In the opening pages of *Gender*, capitalism is the effect: "The loss of vernacular culture is the decisive condition for the rise of capitalism" (p. 3). Yet, a few pages later, capitalism is the cause: "All economic growth entails the destruction of vernacular gender" (p. 5). We get the idea that capitalism, or economic growth, as Illich puts it, is a fundamental problem (although later in his text it disintegrates as an adequate historical explanation), and we can see what subsistence represents to him. Subsistence culture is a culture in which people have direct access and are in direct relationship to meaning: the meanings of who they are, what they do, the words they speak. "Kinship" in these cultures, Illich tells us, "organizes the rules of who is to whom . . ." and "gender not only tells us who is who, but it also defines who is when, where, and with which tools and words [sic]" (p. 99). There is, moreover, an origin for this meaning in the home: "Vernacular means those things that are homemade, homespun, homegrown, not destined for marketplace, but that are for home use only" (p. 68). In capitalism, on the other hand, we no longer have privileged access to the authentic truth and meaning about ourselves: "The paradigm of homoeconomicus," that is, women and men under capitalism, "does not square with what men and women actually are" (p. 66).

Capitalism depends, not upon direct exchange and direct relationships to meaning, but upon the creation of surplus whose value is determined within a system of an abstract means of exchange — money. "Historically," Illich tells us, "the regime of scarcity was introduced through the proliferation of money as a scarce means of exchange" (p. 19). Money proliferates, but it is scarce. Illich does not offer a detailed economic or class analysis of the relationship at work here; what seems more important to him is the connotations of the word scarcity, which suggest the poverty of the present as compared to the plenitude of the past.

As Eugene Vance has pointed out, the proliferation of money, its increased use as a means of exchange as well as a source of profit, is precisely bound up in the same problematic as the proliferation of

the printed word, the text. Vance, in a discussion of medieval poetry, explains more clearly than Illich how the story of the losses brought about by a money economy is a story about language as well.<sup>4</sup> According to Vance, the development of a "new economics" based on the circulation of money, disturbed an "ethics of Christian transparency" in which words were provided a clear and stable referent through God's act of naming the world. This ethics of transparency was promoted by the church fathers in what Vance calls "the culture of Latinity." In this culture, all texts gained their truth in relation to the founding truth of the divine Father.

In an effort to appropriate some of this authority for himself, Illich uses Latin as the language of truth. So, for example, the true man of the gendered past is the "*vir laborans*," the true woman a "*femina domestica*," while today, the genderless individual is a "*rapacious neutrum oeconomicum*." This reminds us that the "ethics of transparency" was (and is) not neutral because it awards the male voice privileged authority through its access to the Father's truth. There are echoes of this privilege not only in Illich's use of Latin but also in the way he describes male and female language within a vernacular culture. Men have "straight speech," a language of immediacy and presence, and women are given the voice of "whisperings and gossip" (p. 113).

As Vance says, money "developed a special power of abstraction . . . and functioned independently of origins in men. . . . The referentiality of money was only the system of currency itself."<sup>5</sup> Moreover, money began regularly generating profit from money, giving rise to the practice of usury, which the clergy condemned. It is precisely this homology between the productivity of money in capitalism, and the productivity of texts which Eugene Vance stresses:

Just as the circulation of money gave rise to a productivity that was strictly monetary (usury) so too the errant (that is freely circulating) text could compel, in its displacements and transactions the production out of nothing, of other displaceable texts . . .<sup>6</sup>

Illich's response to economic growth, to monetary proliferation, constitutes not an objection based upon an historical analysis, but upon the same sort of immediate response of denial that he has to the proliferation of textuality. "Traditional cultures," he writes elsewhere, "subsisted on sunshine. . . . [I]n these essentially sun-powered cultures, there was no need for language production."<sup>7</sup> Just as he must restrain the proliferation and displacement of textual meanings, so too he wants to restrain the proliferation of money. "Subsistence that is based on the progressive unplugging from the cash nexus," he tells us, "now appears to be a condition for survival" (p. 17). *Whose survival? we might ask.*



It is women's survival that is supposed to be at stake; for Illich, women are the losers under capitalism. At the same time, his book gives testimony to the proliferation of women's writing, to their productivity, their displacements of meaning. One senses that it is primarily the rise of women's power to shape and define meaning through discourse that threatens Illich. They have moved into his territory. In this respect, it is interesting that capitalism fails entirely as a mode of explanation in the last chapters of Illich's book. Instead, he turns to the church and its increasing associations with womanly functions.

If the language of transparency is associated with a valued past and a metaphorical power granted to the father, the language of the devalued present has taken on the metaphorical power of the mother. Illich details a transformation that echoes in interesting ways Ann Douglas's portrait of the feminization of American culture. Priests who formerly adhered to doctrine now become pastors devoted to care, nurturing, and the analyses of psyches. Illich calls this transformation the rise of the "monopoly of lactation" (p. 160). The scorn he heaps on the church as "alma mater" (p. 154) parallels his jibes at the rise of the "taught mother tongue" which he claims replaces vernacular speech. Earlier, Illich seemed to valorize women's role as the "source of life," but by the end of the book, it becomes clear that women's motherly abilities and her metaphorical powers are finally objects of contempt.

In *Gender*, then, the mother is both a powerful and threatening figure, which is not surprising in a book that looks for origins. But whereas feminists promote the power of the mother, Illich's fulmination against her at the end of his book reveals that he relies on a natural role of woman (a role that is opposed to a natural role for men) in order to keep woman in her place. His ways of describing the present are clearly misogynist;

the present is not so much a unisex world as one in which women have circulated too far outside the home. The construction of sexual difference, in other words, is for Illich a strategy of containment. Illich is threatened by the movement of women away from their "natural" place towards participation in the process of signification.

Of course, Illich is not alone in his desire to represent authentic reality and essential differences. Some recent feminist studies have led to surprising expressions of nostalgia in their assertions of realities that are supposed to be prior to language. A desire for a better past is understandable in a man who is threatened by the loss of his territory and prerogatives, but what do women have to lose? Perhaps because the past can function as a place where there seems to be a stable referent, a decidable meaning, women become nostalgic for this fictional locus of security. Certainly, writers gain power by claiming to present "reality," since the writer seems to be speaking truth itself. And perhaps the positing of "real" differences seems necessary, if the loss of difference is assumed to mean a blurring that might eliminate sexual difference altogether. But paradoxically, the insistence on prior and "authentic" sexual difference can easily perpetuate sameness by setting up a fixed set of oppositions that have long constituted men and women in stereotypical ways. At the end of his book, Illich writes that our hopes for the future depend on austerity, renunciation, and an "openness to surprise" (p. 179). But relying on stereotypes and a commitment to going backwards eliminates the possibility of surprise. If, contrary to Illich, we think of differences as constructed by language rather than preceding it, if differences are assumed to be in the making, placed in order to be displaced, then real surprise is possible. We look to the future.

**Janice Doane** was a Post-Doctoral Fellow of the Pembroke Center Seminar in 1983-84. In the fall she will be Assistant Professor of English at St. Mary's College in California. **Devon Hodges** is Assistant Professor of English at George Mason University in Virginia. She was a work group visitor to the Seminar this past year.

#### NOTES

1. Ivan Illich, *Gender* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), p. 122. All future references to *Gender* are from this edition and will be included in the body of the text.
2. Arlie Hochschild, "Illich: The Ideologue in Scientist's Clothing," *Feminist Issues*, Vol. 3, no. 1 (Spring 1983), p. 11. This issue is devoted to a symposium criticizing *Gender*. Hochschild's view is representative of other feminist critics' writing on the book.
3. We look at two texts, cited by Illich, as representative of this trend: *Women and Colonization: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Mona Etienne and Eleanor Leacock (New York: Praeger, 1980), and "The Position of Women: Appearance and Reality," Ernestine Friedl, *Anthropological Quarterly* 40 (1967), p. 97.
4. Eugene Vance, "Love's Concordance: The Poetics of Desire and the Joy of the Text," *Diacritics*, Vol. 5 (Spring 1975), p. 49.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
7. *Shadow Work*, Ivan Illich (Boston & London: Marion Boyers, Inc., 1981), p. 66.
8. We are specifically referring here to works analyzed in detail within the chapter, such as *Women and Colonization*, and "The Position of Women," cited above. Both are representative of a trend in Women's Studies, noted by Hester Eisenstein in *The Future of Difference*, to valorize women's difference from men. Eisenstein remarks: "What was originally seen as a source of oppression, [i.e. sexual difference] is now seen as a source of enrichment" (*The Future of Difference* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1980), p. xviii). In this respect we might also mention Germaine Greer's latest book, *Sex and Destiny: The Politics of Human Fertility*. Greer idealizes the child-rearing practices of non-Western countries in such a way as to suggest that female sexuality and identity are naturally bound to reproduction and mothering.

## Brown Faculty Research

*Beginning with this newsletter, we will report on the work of Brown faculty who do research on women and gender or who are engaged in feminist theory and criticism.*

**Lina M. Fruzzetti** is Associate Professor of Anthropology at Brown and author of *The Gift of a Virgin: Women, Marriage, and Ritual in Bengali Society* (1982). This coming academic year will find Fruzzetti back in India where she will continue her research on Indian women in two farming communities. Fruzzetti, who is also co-editor, with Akos Ostor, of *Ritual and Kinship in Bengal* (1984), has been an important contributor to the field of women's studies. Focusing her research primarily on India and Sudan, she has explored such areas as women's ritual activities in India, rural women's development in India and Sudan, and women's political and social roles in both countries. Fruzzetti is also involved in several ongoing projects, including the design, implementation, and evaluation of an integrated rural development scheme in the Blue Nile Province of Sudan, which has as a partial focus issues of rural women's development; and a film project in India and Sudan, developing films dealing with various aspects of her research. At Brown since 1975, she has designed and taught several women's studies courses on such topics as anthropological perspectives on women, comparative sex roles, and women in socialist and developing countries.

Fruzzetti began her work on India with research on the Muslim minority in West Bengal in 1967. She returned to the country in 1971 and for two years studied the social and ritual activities of women in rural West Bengal. Critical of earlier studies of Indian kinship and marriage which failed to treat the women's domain as distinct from the men's, or which imposed Western values on the culture, Fruzzetti looks at the special significance of the marriage rituals. She sees these rituals as qualitatively different from the rituals of the larger society – those presided over by men – and ones that give meaning to the daily activities of women, both in their separate domain and in relationship to the society as a whole. Indeed, for Fruzzetti, it is not possible to understand Bengali society as a whole without exploring the domain of women. She sees the relationships among members of a society as ties "culturally formed and understood, suspending persons and groups in relation to each other in a web of meaning." Each locally defined domain – kinship, marriage, politics, the bazaar economy, and so forth – has its own relation to every other domain. And according to Fruzzetti, it is only through an analysis of women's rituals that the fundamental principles of Indian society – the principles of hierarchy, purity and

impurity, maleness and femaleness – can be fully accessible and meaningful.

Whereas *The Gift of a Virgin* explores traditional aspects of women's lives, Fruzzetti's current research focuses on changes in women's lives resulting from development in urban and rural areas. In an urban setting, she plans to look at the spread of education and the growth of devotional religious movements to see what effects these changes have on women's participation in public careers and religious movements. This coming year, Fruzzetti will examine how the development of agricultural technology has affected women's position in society, particularly their role in the production and ritual uses of rice. She will study socio-economic and cultural changes in two settings: one a traditional subsistence farming community, the other a more advanced agricultural farming village in West Bengal. She will be looking at the ways sexual divisions of work and responsibility are defined in these rural contexts and what changes are occurring. Have farm families changed the way they divide the labor and decision-making for the planting and harvesting of rice? If there are newly adopted ritual observances, what status do they occupy and what is the role of women within them? In short, asks Fruzzetti, "can one see a pattern where the advancement of agriculture would correlate with an advanced position for women?"

## Conference

In March, 1985, the Pembroke Center will hold a conference designed to explore issues related to "cultural constructions of the female." The focus of the conference will be *Feminism/Politics/Theory* and the questions to be addressed are central to feminist inquiry: how to develop and use theory to understand the operations of sexual difference; how to grasp "cultural constructions of the female" as far-reaching and complex processes as well as in their specific detail; how to use the resulting critical insights to bring about social change. The conference as a whole will focus on feminist theories and the theories that have informed and intersected with them. Individual sessions will examine particular areas of feminist concern and will ask how the theories in question both open up and cut off critical inquiry and how they both enhance and impede the achievement of political goals. The sessions will involve scholars from a variety of disciplines and will address the following topics:

**Writing History** Feminists have long worked to write women's history, to write women back into history. What are the contributions and limits of what has come to be known as "women's history"? To what extent has the work

of feminist historians challenged the conventional practices of history? What bodies of theory address the problems posed by the historicizing of women and sexual difference?

### **The Feminist Politics of Interpretation**

The politics of interpretation are nowhere more evident than in feminist readings of cultural texts. Yet, what is specifically *feminist* about the varieties of feminist critical practice? To what degree have feminists introduced a new ethics into their readings? Are feminist strategies of reading written and visual texts transferable to the study of such things as social and political institutions?

**The Paradoxes of Empiricism** Feminism has provided valuable critiques of the institutional and ideological abuses of empiricism. At the same time, feminists have traditionally found *women's experience* to be a powerful and necessary element of analysis. How do feminist theorists, those studying social, political, economic, and scientific institutions, use a notion of women's experience as a critical tool? Do they simultaneously avoid reinforcing the notion that there is an essential truth of "women's nature" that can be revealed through empirical documentation?

**Feminism and the Discourses of Sexuality** Questions of sexual difference seem to turn naturally on issues of sexuality, and yet feminism has helped to show that there is, indeed, nothing natural about sexuality. In what ways has feminism challenged the dominant discourses of sexuality? How has it reinscribed elements of those discourses? What are the implications for feminist theory and politics?

**Feminism and Cross-Cultural Inquiry** Feminist critical discourses have been developed in a largely white and Western intellectual and political context. How does the consideration of third world women challenge the terms of those discourses? How can the work of third world theoreticians inform Western feminist theory? Are there indigenous feminist movements in the third world or is feminism a Western import?

**Rethinking the Political Economy of Women** Feminist examinations of production and reproduction have necessarily been elaborated with references to Marxist theories of political economy. What has emerged from Marxist/feminist mutual critiques? Do we have new understandings of production, reproduction, and the sexual division of labor?

The conference will run from Thursday afternoon, March 14, through Saturday afternoon, March 16. If you are interested in attending, please return the form on the next page and we will send you further information and registration materials.

## Affiliated Lectures 1983–84



Artists Diana N'Diaye, Betty Blayton, and Catti.

Brown's two focal points for feminist activity – the Pembroke Center and its coordinate organization, the Sarah Doyle Women's Center – offered an exceptionally rich calendar of programs in 1983–84. A number of these programs complemented the *Cultural Constructions of the Female* project in interesting ways. Both centers helped sponsor a series on *Feminism and Science* which brought to campus Carolyn Merchant ("The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution"), Evelyn Fox Keller ("Gender and Science"), and Sally Gregory Kohlstedt ("Strategies for Survival: Lessons from Women in Science and Education a Century Ago"). The Sarah Doyle *Women and Labor* series brought anthropologist Maria Patricia Fernandez ("Women in the Maquiladoras: Industry on the Mexican Border"), anthropologist Nina Shapiro Perl ("Women Workers in the Jewelry Industry"), Heidi Hartmann ("Pay Equity for Women: The Comparable Worth Strategy"), and sociologist Judith Rollins ("Women and Domestic Servitude: Yesterday and Today").

Lelia Gonzalez, Professor of Sociology at the Catholic University in Rio de Janeiro and a Workers Party candidate for the Brazilian Senate in a recent election, spoke on the state of the women's movement in Brazil. Political scientist Frances Fox Piven gave her views on "Politics, Women, and the Welfare State." There were two discussions of the question of reproductive rights: one by Brown political scientist, Darrell West, on "The Politics of Abortion," and the other by Pat Russian, of the Southeast Sex Desegregation Center, on "Reproductive Rights

and U.S. Social Policy: 1973–1983." In a different vein, historian Ann Douglas delivered a lecture on "Freud's Family Romance Revisited: Contemporary Narratives of Terror," and Stephen Heath, of Jesus College, Cambridge, met with the Pembroke Seminar participants for a discussion of his recent work on discourses of sexuality.

During Black History Month, the Sarah Doyle Gallery had a successful invitational show *In Celebration of Black Women Artists*. During the exhibit, the artists – Betty Blayton, Catti, and Diana N'Diaye – all of whom work as artists in New York, came to campus for a fascinating discussion of their work. Also for Black History Month, the Sarah Doyle Center helped sponsor a discussion of "Black Women in the Freedom Movement and Beyond." Part of a larger series on *Problems of Historical Memory*, the program featured two women active in the Civil Rights movement, Rosemarie Harding and Rosemarie Mealey.

The Pembroke Center celebrated Women's History Week, also in February, by a program entitled "Back to Basics? No! Women's History in the High School Curriculum: A Report from the Teachers." Beatrice Wiggins (a teacher of law and government in a Providence high school), Mary Lou Roberts (a history teacher in a private girls' school in Providence), and Debra Blumberg (a student teacher in a local junior high school), gave interesting accounts of *how* they have included women in the history curriculum as well as heartening news of the enthusiasm of their students for their approaches.

## Pembroke Associates

When the Pembroke Center was established in 1981, it took the name of Pembroke, the women's college which was Brown's coordinate college from its founding in 1891 to its complete merger with the University in 1971. The Pembroke Center continues the tradition of Pembroke College in its research and teaching emphases on women and education. It is fortunate to be able to draw on the talents of many Pembroke and Brown graduates through the Pembroke Associates.

The Associates are a group of alumnae and other friends who support the Center through their membership and their work. With the help of the Associates, the Center has been able to expand the University libraries' archival collections relating to Pembroke College and to lay plans for making Brown a major resource for research on the history of women in education. Associates will help produce a new history of Pembroke College and they have organized the Alumnae Forums, a series which brings Brown/Pembroke graduates to campus to talk about their professional experiences. The Alumnae Forums, held once a month, serve both as career forums for students and as an opportunity to look at issues of concern to women. Most recently, the Associates organized a very successful program for the 1984 Commencement, which examined the history of women as members of the Brown Corporation. An annual *Newsletter* reports on all activities undertaken by this energetic and dedicated group.

## Pembroke Center Conference: *Feminism/Politics/Theory* March 14–16, 1985

Send me further information on the conference and a registration form.

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