



## Pembroke Center FOR TEACHING AND RESEARCH ON WOMEN

BROWN UNIVERSITY

NEWSLETTER

FALL, 1985

### 1986-87 Post-Doctoral Fellowships

Brown University's Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women has grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Ford Foundation for a research project on Cultural Constructions of Gender. Under the auspices of the project, scholars study the formation, impact, and transformation of cultural concepts of gender, and the ways those concepts are related to other cultural, social, political, and economic factors. Strong emphasis is placed on the cross-cultural study of gender.

Each year a group of four post-doctoral fellows and visiting senior scholars meets regularly in a research seminar. The post-doctoral fellows in residence participate in the weekly seminar, present at least one public paper during the year, and pursue individual research. In addition, they are encouraged to present their work to interested faculty at other institutions.

The theme for 1986-87 is "Gender in Popular Culture and Popular Religion." Research will look at how gender is constructed and represented differently in high and popular cultures, in institutionalized and popular religions. Has the era of "mass culture" changed the relationships between popular and elite forms? What impact has it had on representations of gender? What are the changing relationships between Western and non-Western popular and elite cultures? How do popular religious movements, found today in so many countries, represent gender differences? Can we gain insights into the relation-  
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### Cultural Constructions of Gender RESEARCH PROJECT FOR 1986-87

The Ford Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities have renewed their funding for the Pembroke Center's continued research on *Cultural Constructions of Gender*. The Pembroke Center research seminar, begun in 1982, recently completed the first three years of its research project on culture and gender. During those three years numerous scholars from the U.S. and abroad came to the Center for what proved to be dynamic interdisciplinary exchange. Some of the products of the first three years of the project are forthcoming in two volumes: one on the proceedings of the March 1985 conference on *Feminism/Theory/Politics*, and the other on *Politics and the Representation of Gender*.

Continuing the study of cultural constructions of gender, the second phase of the project will place increased emphasis on cross-cultural study and will include as part of the annual research group at least two Third World or minority post-doctoral fellows. As in the past, there will be weekly research seminars and a series of Visiting Scholars. Each year's research will focus on a particular topic and each year there will be two intensive research workshops. The workshops will bring together scholars from a variety of disciplines and will include not only people who work

directly on women and gender, but also those whose work relates in other ways to topics of interest to the project.

In 1986-87 research will focus on *Gender in Popular Culture and Popular Religion*. That year there will be workshops on *Gender and Narrative in Popular Culture*, and on *Gender and Religious Fundamentalism*. The topic for 1987-88 will be *Gender, Ethnicity, and Race*, with workshops on *Misogyny and Anti-Semitism and Black Culture in the U.S. and Brazil*. In 1988-89 the topic will be *The Uses of Gender in Theories of Development and Theories of State* and workshops will focus on *The Family in State Theory and Gender in Development Policies*.

#### Roundtable Discussion on Women and Development, Winter 1986

The Pembroke Center has received a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation for a roundtable meeting in January on development theory and the reproduction of sexual difference in labor and culture. The discussions will look particularly at Latin America, South Asia, and Africa, and will include invited scholars whose work focuses on development theory, on women and development, and on humanistic cultural studies. The roundtable will attempt to open up fresh ways of incorporating gender into development theory. The proceedings of the discussions will be available through the Pembroke Center working papers.

## Seminar Participants 1984–85

### POST-DOCTORAL FELLOWS



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

Marnia Lazreg's project aims at presenting an in-depth study of Algerian women, spanning the period from 1954 to the present. Using historical monographs, demographic data, interviews, legal and political texts, as well as novels, poetry, and artistic production, she studies perceptions of women's roles in Algerian society (including women's self-definitions), and analyzes how these perceptions have and have not changed.

In a departure from the prevailing notion that Algerian women's status is determined by Islam, Lazreg argues that religion is but one aspect of women's lives. To capture the complexity of the "woman question" in Algeria, she analyzes the relationships among socialist economic development, political legitimacy, and cultural symbols. She further attempts to specify the conditions under which prohibitions of a religious nature become operative (as was the case during the Algerian revolution) or politically expedient (as has been the case since 1981). Lazreg's project also addresses the issue of the conceptualization of *difference* among women, thereby contributing to the ongoing search among feminist scholars for a theory that takes into account cultural diversity.

*Marnia Lazreg is associated with the Bunting Institute in 1985–86 and is finishing her book on women and Algerian socialism.*



**Denise Riley**  
Philosophy  
Project: *A History of Feminisms in Inter-war Britain*

Denise Riley is interested in how 'women' as a category has been differently consolidated depending on its relation to other categories such as 'humanity,' 'man,' 'class,' and 'the social.' British feminism bears the scars

of its skirmishes to speak both for and against 'women' as a category. Under particular political conditions it has spoken against broad categories of women, denying, for example, that maternity must bound the horizons for all women. At the same time, British feminists have spoken for women – for women's suffrage, for the needs of working women. Riley's work looks at these different invocations of 'women' and at their different genealogies.

Focusing on the period between the two wars, Riley sees the dilemma of British feminism as whether to espouse egalitarianism or "difference." For egalitarianism, gender is an interruption on the slow road to democracy. For "difference," issues like maternity will always need particular dispensations. The associations with present day feminism are clear and, indeed, for Riley, the tensions are inextricable elements of any systematic look at the volatile and fragile category of 'women.'

*Denise Riley returns to England this year to finish her book on inter-war feminisms in Britain. She is also editor, with Colin McCabe and Stephen Heath, of a new series, Language, Discourse and Society, published by MacMillan.*



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

Diana Vélez is working on a project analyzing prose narratives by five Puerto Rican women writers, in the context of the sociohistoric changes brought about by the process of industrialization following World War II. Her study of the literature – its strategies, themes, and references – includes an examination of the cultural and economic milieu of Puerto Rican women of different social strata. Post-war Puerto Rican women's literature is a particularly well-suited corpus for the study of the relationships among economics, culture, and literature, as the country's economic structure and its literature both reflect rapid changes in women's roles. Moreover, these roles are constructed from elements of the North American, Spanish,

and Black cultures, each of which represents different manifestations of the patriarchy.

Particularly important for Vélez's work during the research year were the stories of Rosario Ferré and Ana Lydia Vega. During her time in the seminar Vélez wrote a critical introduction for a volume of Ferré's stories and a chapter on "The Representation of Female Sexuality in the Writings of Ana Lydia Vega."

*Diana Vélez returns to her position as Assistant Professor of Spanish and Portuguese Literature at the University of Iowa, where she is continuing work on her book.*

### Jerome Wakefield

Philosophy

Project: *Sexual Harmony: The Social Construction of the Natural and the Disordered*

Jerome Wakefield's study is a conceptual, historical, and cross-cultural exploration of the social constructions of natural and disordered sexual functioning. It looks at how other cultures respond to sexual disharmonies between the sexes and it traces historically and critically our own culture's problematization of sexual functioning in medical terms. The project relates concepts of natural and disordered functioning to broader cultural practices, to reproductive strategies, and to the construction of similarities and differences between men and women. It also looks at how the complementary structure of male and female disorders are seen as deviations from a constructed concept of natural sexual harmony. By looking at the history and social meaning of concepts of proper and disordered sexual functioning, and by integrating those findings with a philosophical analysis of current concepts of normalcy, Wakefield aims to illuminate our own situation and to argue against spurious medicalization of sexual practices.

*In 1985–86 Jerome Wakefield is on the faculty of the School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago.*

## BROWN FACULTY FELLOWS



### **Kay Goodman**

Assistant Professor  
of German  
Project: *The Cult of  
Motherhood and  
German Women:*  
1895–1905

In her study, Kay Goodman is examining the cult of motherhood which swept German intellectual circles at the turn of the century. While rooting itself in modernist efforts to rethink the autonomy of the individual, the movement also coincided with the abatement of efforts to open male-dominated fields to women. Explicitly anti-Liberal and pro-difference, it affirmed female wholeness and nurturance and the redemptive role of women and mothering in society. West German feminists and scholars often see philosophical connections between the cult and the Nazi nationalization of motherhood. Others see the Nazi ideology as a perversion of the movement's goals. Goodman is studying the manifestations of the cult of motherhood in literature, art, politics, sociology, and psychology, and is analyzing the varied and complex reactions to the movement.

*Kay Goodman resumes teaching in 1985–86 and is continuing her study of the ideology of motherhood in Germany.*



### **Louise Lamphere**

Professor of Anthro-  
pology  
Project: *Women's  
Strategies and Cul-  
tural Conceptions of  
Work and Family*

During the research year Louise Lamphere completed a book on *Working Class Women: Perspectives on Work, Family, and Ethnicity*. The book studies the continuities and changes in the industrial work and home life of working class women in a small Rhode Island city between 1915 and 1977. It contrasts the lives of Polish, French-Canadian, English, and Irish women who lived in the study city in the early decades of the century with more recent Portuguese

and Colombian immigrants. Lamphere focuses on women's "strategies" as a way of understanding how women deal with conditions in the workplace and forge a daily life at home. Her analysis of behavioral strategies is integrated with an analysis of the "cultural construction" of women's work and family roles. The project thus integrates historical, sociological, and anthropological approaches to the study of gender in production and reproduction, and aims at linking work and family in the same theoretical framework.

*Louise Lamphere is on leave from Brown in 1985–86 working on her next book, Working Families and Sunbelt Industrialization: Changes in the Home and Workplace.*

## VISITING SCHOLARS

### **Deniz Kandiyoti**

Social Sciences Division,  
Richmond College, London  
*Third World Feminism: Is It Possible?*

### **Maria Patricia Fernandez**

Center of US-Mexican Studies,  
University of California, San Diego  
Centro des Studios Fronterizos del Norte  
de Mexico, Tiajuana, Mexico  
*Global Fantasy: Production, Reproduc-  
tion and International Development*

### **Joycelin Massiah**

Inst. of Social and Economic Research,  
University of the West Indies, Barbados  
*Work in the Lives of Women: The Case  
of the Caribbean*

### **Teresa de Lauretis**

Dept. of French and Italian,  
University of Wisconsin, Madison  
*Reading/Writing (as) Women*

### **Jacques Derrida**

Ecole Internationale de Philosophie,  
Special Seminar

## BROWN STUDENTS

### GRADUATE STUDENTS

#### **Linda Alcoff**

Ph.D. Candidate, Philosophy  
*Feminist Epistemology*

#### **Nancy Kavanagh**

Ph.D. Candidate, Anthropology  
*Caribbean Households: Women's  
Networks and Economic Strategies*

#### **Suzanne Kolm**

Ph.D. Candidate, History  
*Methodological Issues in Women's  
History: A Politics of Discourse Theory  
and Historical Materialism*

### UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

#### **Susan Gibbs**

Development Studies  
*Gender and Technological Change: The  
Contrast between Early Industrial  
Britain and India*

#### **Laura Gotkowitz**

Semiotics  
*Socialist Cuba*

#### **Sharon Marcus**

Comparative Literature  
*The Lesson of the Master: The Female  
Roman d'Education*

### VISITING FACULTY AFFILIATES

#### **Christina Crosby**

English, Wesleyan University  
N.E.H. Fellow

#### **Harriet Whitehead**

N.E.H. Fellow

## Reflections on the Past, Questions for the Future

Joan Wallach Scott

This year's seminar and the conference in March marked the end of the first phase of the Pembroke Center's collaborative research project on "Cultural Constructions of Gender." At the end of an exhilarating and intense three years of work it seems useful to review what we have accomplished.

Accomplishments fall into three categories: institutional, individual, and collective. As a research institution, the Pembroke Center has established a national and international reputation for serious work on culture and gender. The papers and lectures of fellows and visiting scholars have drawn large audiences and spawned important discussion and debate. At Brown, the Center is known among faculty and students as a place to get helpful advice, try out new ideas, and discover new directions for research. The distinctive aspect of the Center's work has probably been its attention to critical analyses of the underlying theoretical assumptions of women's studies scholarship.

The number of individual accomplishments is great. The articles and books produced by post-doctoral and faculty fellows are too numerous to list here (some have been reported on in issues of this newsletter); most are marked by a theoretical self-consciousness developed or refined in the course of weekly seminar meetings. Despite differences of discipline (literature, semiotics, biology, sociology, political theory, anthropology, philosophy and history) and subject matter, a common preoccupation of seminar members has been the search for insight into *how* and under what conditions cultures have constructed systems of gender and the search for theories and methods of inquiry suitable to achieving such insight.

That common preoccupation was, in a sense, our collective achievement. It made possible discussions across disciplinary boundaries and the interrogation of the different theoretical assumptions with which we worked. What we initially defined as a quest for a feminist theory turned into an interrogation of theories feminists use. It seemed important to us to scrutinize the unexamined assumptions with which we work, to evaluate the limits and the strengths of our professed frameworks of analysis, to reassess the value of our most acclaimed and trustworthy tools.

The interrogation of assumptions and theories, of course, also created enormous difficulty. We often had to work hard to understand one another's frameworks and vocabulary. There were also important and sometimes troubling implications for feminist politics. If we could agree on the goals of feminism – or perhaps more specifically of academic feminism – it was by no means clear we agreed on how to achieve them. The goals of feminism seemed relatively straightforward: to improve and eventually change the position of women; to make women visible and legitimate as subjects and objects of academic inquiry; to use material by and about women to criticize and ultimately subvert or transform the traditional curriculum; to expose the gendered biases and power relationships inscribed in supposedly objective presentations – in the literary canon, in the descriptions of normal and deviant social "roles," in the great story of Western civilization. Discussion of how to achieve these goals revealed difficult and complicated problems. For some the documentation of women's experience was crucial; for others the point was to analyze *how* symbolic systems work; for others still the inquiry

had to lead to an understanding of origin and causality: when and why did sexual divisions of labor come into being? At stake are not only specific topics and interpretations, but strategies for women's studies programs, the boundaries of disciplines, the question of a scholar's presumed audience and the language she chooses to speak. In addition, there are contemporary feminist movements and the way one is involved in them. Is it wise in the heat of battle to ask the meaning of our cause? Can collective identity be built on uncertainty? Can we demand change without knowing for sure what has caused our current situation?

We cannot claim to have resolved these questions, but by raising them in an interdisciplinary setting, we learned to refuse simple categorical answers. The seminar developed a tolerance for complexity and contradiction; the ability to think outside traditional or commonly used antitheses such as mother/worker, public/private, production/reproduction. It also began to look for ways to bridge or mediate points in the various theoretical approaches to feminist scholarship.

The March conference on "Feminism/



Alice Jardine and Naomi Schor Feminism/Theory/Politics Conference

Theory/Politics" underscored the need for such mediation. The conference was framed as a critical examination of theories feminists use. It succeeded in identifying at least four areas in need of more cross-disciplinary work; indeed these areas seem to be *the* places for future elaborations of feminist theories. In one sense, they are part of a set of general philosophical and theoretical debates, but their substance and focus is specific to feminism. The first issue has to do with biology, specifically with the question of essentialism. To what extent must arguments about sexual difference ultimately accept (or ignore) an implicit essentialism? What have been the historical variations on this theme? The second issue stems from debates with post-structuralist theory about intentionality: to what extent are human subjects "culturally constructed," to what extent do they consciously determine the structure of their societies and cultures? Can we conceive of a reciprocal process of cultural determination and rationally motivated behavior? The third and fourth issues have to do with analyses of "the subject" and "the social": they often pit psychoanalysis against social science and they revolve around terms such as subjectivity, experience, and collective identity. What are the links between individual psyches and social interactions and organization? Can we read out of individual texts a collective female experience? Can we, in contrast, deduce from institutions and social "roles" the subjective meanings of women's identity? Is there a collective experience that women share? Can we theorize about how female collective identity is formed and transformed, given the diversity of "experiences" of race, ethnicity, class, religion, nation and the changing nature of these over time?

At the conference it became clear that critical, cross-disciplinary discussion was crucial to the formulation of these kinds of questions. Despite differences of emphasis and some heated refusals to entertain alternative approaches, most of the scholars who gave papers and joined discussions acknowledged this need. The conference publicly and dramatically pointed up what the seminar had concluded: interdisciplinary discussion works to push us to new insight in our individual inquiry and collectively. The result has been and will continue to be the opening of new frontiers of analysis and interpretation which inevitably move the field of women's studies forward even if differences of opinion and politics are never fully resolved.

*Joan W. Scott is Acting Director of the Pembroke Center in 1985-86.*

## Joan W. Scott joins Institute for Advanced Study

In July, Joan Wallach Scott took a position as Professor in the School of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study. Located in Princeton, New Jersey, but with no formal connection to the University, the Institute has a small permanent faculty organized in four schools (Mathematics, Natural Science, Historical Studies, and Social Science). Professor Scott will join three others in



the School of Social Science: anthropologist Clifford Geertz, political economist Albert Hirschman, and political theorist Michael Walzer. She is the second woman ever to hold a professorship in the Institute for Advanced Study; the first was Hettie Goldman, a classicist who was appointed in 1934.

The Institute is a research center; its purpose is to promote and support research and writing. In addition to its regular faculty, each school invites scholars to spend a year in residence pursuing their research and writing. (Scott was a year-long member in 1978-79.) Scholars meet in seminars and informally to discuss work and exchange ideas.

Joan Scott has several projects underway. One involves the compilation of a number of essays she has written during her years at the Pembroke Center on "Women's History as Women's Education." Her major project is the completion of a book on gender and class in the

nineteenth-century French labor movement.

The Institute for Advanced Study is the oldest research center in the country. (Others are the National Humanities Center in North Carolina, the Center for Research in Behavioral Sciences at Stanford, and the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, DC). Founded in the early 1930's, the Institute housed academics fleeing Nazi Germany including, most notably, Albert Einstein. The school of Social Science is the newest school, founded in the early 1970's.

Joan Scott was Nancy Duke Lewis University Professor and Professor of History at Brown since 1980 and Director of the Pembroke Center since its founding in 1981. The University will certainly miss having her as a creative and generous member of the faculty. Happily for the Pembroke Center, however, close contact will continue. Joan Scott remains Acting Director of the Center during the current academic year and will then become Chair of the Center's Advisory Board. We look forward to many years of exciting collaboration with her.

*(Continued from page 1)*

**ships between gender and religious fundamentalism by looking at fundamentalism cross-culturally?**

### Post-Doctoral Fellowships

Two post-doctoral fellowships are available to scholars with research interests related to the 1986-87 topic of "Gender in Popular Culture and Popular Religion." The fellowships are open to anyone in the humanities or the social sciences whose research has a strong humanistic component. Recipients may not hold a tenured position in an American college or university. The stipend is \$20,000.

### Post-Doctoral Fellowships for Third World and Minority Scholars

Two post-doctoral fellowships are available to scholars who meet all the above criteria and who are Third World or minority scholars. The stipend is \$20,000. Supplementary funds are available for assistance with travel expenses from abroad.

Applications are due on December 20; selection will be announced by March 1. For application forms, write to:

Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women  
Box 1958  
Brown University  
Providence, RI 02912

## Dreaming Dissymmetry: Barthes, Foucault, and Sexual Difference

Naomi Schor

*Feminist theorists and critics have contributed much to the cultural criticism of the last two decades. In turn, much feminist work has been influenced by other recent intellectual developments. One of the goals of the Pembroke Center conference on "Feminism/Theory/Politics" was to look at how various theoretical developments intersect with feminist theory and how theoretical work (including feminist theory) helps or hinders feminist intellectual and political goals.*

*The following is a condensed version of a paper delivered at the conference by Naomi Schor. The speakers on Professor Schor's panel, "Feminism and the Discourses of Sexuality," were asked to address these issues: "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 these discourses? What are the implications for feminist theory and politics?"*

*In her paper, Professor Schor discusses the work of two prominent theorists, Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, and through them offers an assessment of the "dominant male discourse on sexuality in post-structuralist France." Schor's perspective is an important one for the many critics whose work is informed by both feminist and post-structuralist theory. For on the one hand, post-structuralist theory offers necessary insights into sexuality and into the limitations of rationality, experience, and verifiability. On the other hand, as Schor's piece shows, the male post-structuralist discourse is not without problems for feminist theorists.*

One of the many differences between recent French and American feminist thought has been French feminist theoreticians' constant dialogue with the reigning masters of the intellectual scene, notably Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida. One figure almost never mentioned in this context is Roland Barthes. And yet it is perhaps in Barthes, who was in his own words a sort of "echo chamber"<sup>1</sup> of contemporary French thought, that we can most easily grasp the dominant male discourse on sexuality in post-structuralist France, what I will call the *discourse of in-difference* or *pure difference*, for they are in fact one and the same. In what follows I propose to answer the question of the feminist

critique of and complicity with what I take to be one of the dominant discourses on sexuality by undertaking to read from a feminist perspective texts first by Barthes and then by Michel Foucault, with particular emphasis on his more recent work, notably the second and third volumes of his *History of Sexuality*.

In a fragment of *Roland Barthes* by Roland Barthes, speaking of himself in the third person, Barthes writes:

He often resorts to a kind of philosophy labeled *pluralism*. Who knows if this insistence on the plural is not a way of denying sexual duality? The opposition of the sexes must not be a law of Nature; therefore, the confrontations and paradigms must be dissolved, both the meanings and the sexes must be pluralized (RB, p.69).

However seductive Barthes's pluralistic philosophy, promising as it does an escape from what he calls the "binary prison" (RB, p. 133) and the flowering of multiple sexualities, a close study of Barthes's texts reveals that the denial of sexual duality – a move feminists can only applaud – inevitably entails the erasure of femininity, the denial of the very feminine specificity so ardently sought after by many feminists, particularly the French. In order to trace out Barthes's slippage from the denial of sexual difference to sexual indifference, let us consider, however briefly, two passages from Barthes. The first and most famous is located in *S/Z*, Barthes's brilliant and highly influential reading of a bizarre tale by Balzac which tells of the ill-starred love of Sarrasine for la Zambinella, a Roman castrato whom Sarrasine willfully persists in mistaking for a woman despite the many warning signs he receives. Barthes's choice of this formerly obscure tale by Balzac seems motivated in part by a desire to dramatize the dangers of essentialism – a constant preoccupation of his – and no text could better serve his purpose than *Sarrasine*, for in the case of Sarrasine, essentialism is fatal. Having observed that in this novella the female characters are split by a difference *internal* to femininity – some are active (castrating), some, passive (castrated) –, Barthes concludes: "... the symbolic field is not that of the biological sexes; it is that of castration: of castrating/castrated, active/passive. It is in this field, and not that of the biological sexes, that the characters in the story are pertinently distributed."<sup>2</sup> By unhooking man and activity, woman and passivity, Barthes contributes here in exemplary fashion to the breakdown of the assignation of

fixed sexual roles to biological men and women long fought for by feminists.

When, however, one turns to an earlier work of Barthes's, *The Fashion System*, one is forced to recognize that Barthes's displacement of sexual difference masks a more radical move, or swerve.<sup>3</sup> Barthes's shift away from sexual difference, and ultimately, sex itself, occurs perhaps not surprisingly in the section of *The Fashion System* entitled "Femininity." Fashion, according to Barthes, "understands the opposition between masculine and feminine quite well; reality requires that it do so."<sup>4</sup> And yet for women at least a certain degree of crossdressing is permissible; it takes the form of the "boyish look" (FS, p. 257) which is "the complementary sign of an ideal age ... the *junior*" (ibid). Now what is most remarkable about the *junior* is "that it effaces sex to the advantage of age; this is, it seems, a profound process of Fashion: it is age which is important, not sex ..." (p. 258).

The discourse of sexual indifferentiation is accompanied in Barthes not merely by the erasure of femininity, but also by what Foucault terms "desexualization," a trend Foucault sees as constituting "the real strength of the women's liberation movements."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, it is feminists' departure from the "discourse conducted within the apparatuses of sexuality" and not their "having layed claim to their sexual specificity"<sup>6</sup> that makes the women's movement exemplary in Foucault's eyes. These remarks are drawn from an interview contemporaneous with the publication of the initial volume of *The History of Sexuality*, when Foucault's entire project was ruled by the dream of escaping the "austere" binarisms of the sexual order. However, in the course of working on his *History*, as he explains in the preface to his first volume of what we might call the *new history* of sexuality, Foucault found himself obliged to revise completely his original plan, to return to the classical foundations of Western civilization to understand how the modern subject of sexuality had emerged from the earlier classical discourse of desire, what Foucault calls the *aphrodisia*. In what follows I should like simply to indicate three aspects of Foucault's curiously restrained and limpid final works that are of particular interest to feminist analyses of sexuality, in that they signal a going beyond the discourse of indifference: they are first, the scrupulous attention Foucault pays to the gender of the enunciating subject; second, the subtle ways in which he decenters the woman question, and third, the pride of place he accords a model of heterosexual desire based on reciprocity and mutual respect.

1. Woman as object of discourse and subject to history is, of course, spectac-

ularly in evidence in *The Will to Power*. But the question of gender cannot be said to inform Foucault's project. In *The Will to Power* a single universal history of sexuality is presumed to cover both sexes, as though the History and, more important, the Historian of sexuality himself had no sex. In reconstructing the classical discourse on desire, Foucault is, on the other hand, at great pains to emphasize how strictly that discourse is informed by gender: "It is a masculine morality: a morality thought, written, taught by men and addressed to men, free men of course."<sup>7</sup> Though Foucault can never write from the place of enunciation of a woman – nor does he attempt to – by his relentless focus on the "phallogentrism" of the *aphrodisia*, he makes it very clear that he is not complicitous with the "homosexual" (Lacan and Irigaray) communication circuit he so insistently lays bare.

2. The archaeological move backward beyond the nineteenth-century regime of sexuality and the Church doctrine of the "flesh" that constituted Foucault's earlier historical horizon, provokes a shift in perspective with important consequences for the "woman question." Because what is problematic in the conceptual framework of the *aphrodisia* is not female passivity – which is viewed as so natural as to be non-problematic – but rather masculine passivity, the line of demarcation passes here not so much between men and women, or even homosexuals and heterosexuals, as between active and passive men. Consequently the opposition between men and women and the concomitant obsessive focus on the enigma of femininity is decentered, even as the myth of a happy pederasty is exploded. In the ethic of sex elaborated by the classical philosophers, the boy occupies the central position the young girl or the married woman was to occupy in later European culture.

3. But the *aphrodisia* is not a monolithic discourse; in the course of its passage from Greece to Rome, a subtle and gradual shift takes place and eventually the fascination with boys is displaced by a preoccupation with woman, who assumes a new centrality in the context of a reconceptualization of marriage: "The intensification of the concern with the self goes hand in hand here with the valorization of the other."<sup>8</sup> The model of conjugal relations posited by the Stoics is radically opposed to the model that prevailed in Athens; if under both

regimes woman has no existence outside of the marital couple, under this new ethos, the couple becomes a privileged unit, bound together by mutual respect and obligations.

Foucault's tone throughout these two books is remarkably dispassionate; he exposes the interlocking discourses on pederasty and conjugality without ever suggesting the superiority of the one to the other, and yet despite or perhaps because of the impersonality of the voice, a system of values is established, and a model of human sexual relations which is both heterosexual and conjugal is promoted, precisely because it recognizes the alterity of woman. There are from a feminist perspective at least two problems with Foucault's eerily timely reconstruction of the Stoic ethics of sexuality – an ethics of sexual austerity fueled by a preoccupation with what we might call anachronistically physical fitness: the woman who becomes in Foucault's words, "the other par excellence" is "the wife-woman [la femme-épouse]" (p. 192) and, furthermore, alterity is, of course, not specificity. And therein lies the clearest and most persistent dissymmetry between men and women in feminism today: whereas many theoreticians, some of them women, have eagerly seized upon and used the tools of deconstruction to dismantle Woman with a capital W, no feminist theoretician *who is not also a woman* has ever fully espoused the claims to a feminine specificity, an irreducible difference. Even the most enlightened among the male feminists condone claims to feminine specificity *only* as a temporary tactical necessity for pressing political claims. The rhetorical figure the chiasmus best represents the cross-purposes of those who currently maintain, respectively, masculine and feminine positions on difference: whereas those who adopt the masculine position press for an end to sexual difference and only grudgingly acknowledge claims for feminine specificity, those who adopt the feminine position concede the strategic efficacy of undoing sexual oppositions and positionalities, all the while pursuing the construction of difference.

If one lends an ear to what some of the most sophisticated feminist theoreticians are writing these days, the resistance to the hegemony of the discourse of indifference is powerful and growing. The most active site of resistance to that discourse is a certain insistence on doubling. Whether as producers or consumers of cultural artifacts and theories, the claim these feminists make is that in modern Western culture women occupy a *specific liminal cultural position* which is through a tangled skein of mediations somehow connected to their anatomical

difference. Women are bilingual, bifocal, bitextual. Possibly these differences are superficial and destined to wither away. But, as Hélène Cixous writes in *La Jeune née*, "we are still floundering about . . . in the Old order."<sup>9</sup> Before tearing down the cultural ghetto where the feminine has been confined and demeaned, we need to map its boundaries and excavate its foundations in order to salvage the usable relics of patriarchy, for to do so is perhaps the only chance we have to construct a post-deconstructionist society which will not simply reduplicate our own.

#### NOTES

1. Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 74. All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in the body of the text by the letters *RB*.
2. Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 36.
4. In the conference paper this move is figured by what I call, borrowing from Lucretius, a *clinamen*. Whereas displacement connotes a *shift*, a *clinamen*, as I am using it here, denotes a *shift away from*.
4. Barthes, *The Fashion System*, trans. Matthew Ward and Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), p. 257.
5. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, Gordon, Colin, ed., trans. Colin Gordon et al. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p. 219.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 220.
7. Foucault, *L'Usage des plaisirs* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), p. 29. All translations are mine.
8. Foucault, *Le souci de soi* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), p. 175.
9. Hélène Cixous, "Sorties," trans. Ann Liddle in *New French Feminisms*, Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds. (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), p. 97.

*Naomi Schor is Professor of French Studies at Brown. She is the author of books on Zola and Flaubert and has a forthcoming book on "The Sublime Detail: from Reynolds to Barthes." Her important collection of feminist essays, Breaking the Chain: Women, Theory and French Realist Fiction, appeared earlier this year (Columbia University Press, 1985). She is an active member of the women's studies faculty at Brown and was a Faculty Fellow with the Pembroke Seminar in 1983–84.*

## **Myths of Gender: Biological Theories about Women and Men** by Anne Fausto-Sterling

Heather Findlay

Anne Fausto-Sterling is on the faculty of the division of Biology and Medicine at Brown. She has done extensive research in developmental genetics and her work on *Drosophila* is widely published. In addition, she has explored the ways race, class, and gender function in seemingly neutral scientific research and has studied, in particular, biological understandings of gender. Her book, *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories about Women and Men*, has been published by Basic Books and will soon be available. Professor Fausto-Sterling was one of the original group of faculty who introduced women's studies at Brown. In 1982–83 she pursued her work on biology and gender as a Faculty Fellow with the Pembroke Seminar.

Science, and the medical-biological sciences in particular, have never been immune to the critical analyses of women and feminist scientists. Feminist criticism has succeeded in uncovering historical biases against women as scientific subjects and practitioners, and in uncovering biases even in the basic methodological structures that produce the body of scientific knowledge as we know it. The voices of feminist critics in the sciences seem as multifarious as the discipline itself, and each branch of science seems to carry an accompanying set of feminist questions. Moreover, each critic brings her own political perspective into her research, and works with her own theoretical project in mind.

Some feminists argue that increased participation by women in the sciences will eventually bring about the end of sexism in both research and application. This approach sees abstract scientific thought as neutral, the sexism occurring when the (male) practitioner picks up his originally "pure" tools. Other feminists have rallied for the total rejection of science's claims of any sort of unbiased objectivity, arguing that "pure science" has been a cloak for a masculine, misogynous project since Newton. For them, the underlying foundations of medical science, and all its claims to primacy in the healing arts, have to be thrown into question.

A third critical perspective argues for a different type of feminist project. While acknowledging that the privilege of scientific objectivity has often been used at women's expense, these feminists propose that some characteristics of traditional, empirical, "rational"



research, are in fact necessary to both scientists and feminists. Without these traditional modes of scientific inquiry, women scientists would face technological illiteracy in a predominantly technological world. As Evelyn Fox Keller writes, "... by rejecting objectivity as a masculine ideal," (feminism) simultaneously lends its voice to an enemy chorus and dooms women to residing outside the realpolitik of modern culture."

Anne Fausto-Sterling's *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories about Women and Men* marks an important development along the general lines of this third approach. Writing from within the boundaries of her discipline, Fausto-Sterling unfolds a critical examination of the tools and methodology that make up those very boundaries. And her topic is one of foremost interest today: the biological bases of sexual difference and the myths that surround this question. Fausto-Sterling disassembles what she sees as the reductionist and dualist debate between "nature or nurture" on the subject of sexual difference. Her theoretical vision goes beyond the either/or dualism of biological or social determinism: "This new vision," she writes, "challenges the hunt for fundamental biological causes at its very heart, stating unequivocally that the search itself is based on a false understanding of biology." For Fausto-Sterling, a different view of science might be one in which "the scientists themselves emerge as cultural products, their activities structured, often unconsciously, by the great social issues of the day ..." Only with this knowledge of themselves as cultural products can scientific researchers move beyond the biases now inherent in the traditional notions of objectivity without rejecting rational scientific discourse altogether.

*Myths of Gender's* cogent mixture of exhaustive scientific research and insightful feminist criticism reflects the fusion of Fausto-Sterling's research and her continued involvement with social movements (ranging from civil rights to feminism.) During her 19 years at Brown University, beginning with her Ph.D. candidacy and extending into the present, she has published extensively in journals as various as *Developmental Biology*, *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, *Radical Teacher*, and *Bioscience*. Her main topic of research is developmental genetics, and her devoted laboratory companion is the *Drosophila melanogaster*, commonly known as the fruitfly. At Brown, Fausto-Sterling teaches genetics and embryology to undergraduates, and offers courses on various topics concerning women and minorities in the sciences. It seems only natural that her first book be addressed to the subject of biology and gender.

In reading *Myths of Gender*, however, one realizes quickly that there is nothing "natural" about the relationship between these two categories of analysis. Whether the debate centers around "A Question of Genius: Are Men Really Smarter than Women?" (her second chapter) or "Hormonal Hurricanes: Menstruation, Menopause and Female Behavior", (chapter four) the author demonstrates the fallibility of the assumptions underlying these topics. Fausto-Sterling re-presents each of the most influential studies on gender and visual-spatial acuity, right-left brain coordination, mathematical aptitude, the effects of menstruation and menopause on female behavior, and the relationship between testosterone and aggression – to name a few – consistently exposing bias and calling for renewed scientific research.

The most exciting aspect of *Myths of Gender* is the author's attention to analytical blindspots on the level of method, and the unquestioned assumptions that enter into the methodology of science, even before scientists arrive at any hypothetical pronouncements. For example, in her discussion of the well-established myth purporting that men have better visual-spatial capabilities than women, she engages critically with studies cited by Macoby and Jacklin that use the "rod and frame test," the standardized examination for measuring human spatial perception. The test runs as follows:

the subject sits in a totally dark room in a chair facing a large (forty inches on a side), vertically held luminiscent frame. Bisecting the frame is a lighted rod. In one version the experimenter tilts the frame in various ways and the subject adjusts the rod to the vertical of the room, ignoring the context of the tilted frame ...



Not only does Fausto-Sterling point out the gender-connotative designations of "field independent" and "field dependent" for those who do and do not perform well on the test, she claims "it is clear that these . . . tests, at best, record some aspect of visual skill, but have nothing to do with analytical ability." She argues that Macoby and Jacklin's explanations regarding a subject's analytical ability and conformity and passivity are hypothetical leaps, unjustified by the limited utility of the rod and frame test. Furthermore, she questions the neutrality of the test itself: "Picture the following," she writes, "a pitch dark room, a male experimenter, a female subject. What female would not feel just a little vulnerable in that situation?"

Fausto-Sterling's response to the current unbalanced dialog between biology and gender is double-edged. On the one hand, she calls for renewed and responsible research, with the aim of augmenting the present discourse on biology and sexual difference. *Myths of Gender* presents a convincing argument for the validity and the utility of a working bond between feminism and biology. On the other hand, she warns her fellow scientists of the limitations inherent in their field. For example, on the subject of researchers' persistent pursuit of a biological cause behind men's higher achievements in mathematical aptitude tests, she writes:

at best, their call to consider "natural" causes for the sex differences in math is premature. If, once we have reformed our informal and formal systems of mathematics training and career counseling, there remain significant sex differences in mathematics ability, then might be the time to wonder about innate sex differences.

"Clearly," Fausto-Sterling claims, "sex and math is a hot topic," but in no way do the biological sciences hold exclusive rights to the terms of the debate. In fact, the author challenges biology's hold on the "answers" to any problem posed by sexual difference. As the jacket cover of her new book boldly proclaims, "never again will biologists argue that women are anatomically destined to be homebodies or that men's chromosomes doom them to be philanderers or even rapists." In the face of the timeless dilemma of nature versus nurture, *Myths of Gender* holds forth the brave and uncompromising proposition: neither and both!

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*Heather Findlay is a student at Brown concentrating in Women's Studies. She is currently working on a thesis on Monique Wittig, Adrienne Rich and feminist theory, which she will present for a B.A. with departmental honors in the spring.*

## Affiliated Programs: 1984-85

The Pembroke Center and the Sarah Doyle Women's Center sponsored a varied selection of programs in the 1984-85 academic year at Brown, complementing the research activities of the Pembroke Seminar. In November, both centers helped sponsor Sarah Kofman's lecture on "Les Fins phallogocentriques de Rousseau." The Sarah Doyle Center co-sponsored a presentation by British artist Mary Kelly, whose most controversial work "Parturition" has won international acclaim; Kelly's talk was entitled "Difference: On Representation and Sexuality." Sarah Doyle also helped bring Bela Feldman-Bianco, an anthropologist and Fulbright scholar to speak on "Class and Gender in Latin American Political Development: A Brazilian Case Study." Alice Kessler-Harris, Professor of History at Hofstra University, presented a lecture entitled: "Women's Culture at Work: The Meaning of Difference Among Early Twentieth Century Industrial Workers."

Other lectures co-sponsored by the Sarah Doyle Center included "Problems of Soviet Women Today," by Russian feminist Tatyana Mamonova, and "The Strength of the Struggle: South African Women's Work against Apartheid," a presentation by Themba Zilakazi and Tony Van Der Meer, members of the African National Congress of South Africa. Dr. Lena Edwards, a Black physician and winner of the Medal of Freedom, delivered a talk entitled "Medicine, Motherhood and Mercy." Author of *Sandino's Daughters and Cuban Workers Now*, Margaret Randall came to campus in April.

In September, both Centers sponsored a series titled "Women and Work," featuring lectures by Karen B. Sacks on "Women's Leadership Strategies: Organizing Southern Hospital Workers;" Ardis Cameron, from the Department of History, Suffolk University, who spoke on "Neighborhoods in Revolt: Wage Earning Women and Worker Militancy;" and Jacqueline Dowd Hall, Associate Professor of History at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, who delivered a paper on "Women, Kin and Collective Action: The Elizabeth, Tennessee, Strike of 1929."

In cooperation with the Chaplain's Office, Sarah Doyle sponsored a "Women of Faith and Wisdom" series, which brought three eminent feminist theologians to Brown. Judith Plaskow, Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Manhattan College, presented a lecture entitled "Toward a Jewish Feminist Spirituality." In the spring two lecturers from the Episcopal Divinity School in

Cambridge, Assistant Professor of Christian Ethics Kate Cannon, and Talbot Professor of New Testament Elizabeth Fiorenza Schussler, spoke respectively on "The Emergence of the Black Religious Feminist Consciousness: 1619-1984" and "Quilting Women's Early Christian History." This series proved to be particularly rich in its cultural and denominational diversity.

In honor of Women's History Week, Sarah Doyle sponsored films about women and the labor movement: "Union Maids," "Blow by Blow," and "Wilmar 8." Friday Forums continued as a successful series of noontime lectures with topics ranging from "Hispanic Women Writers in the U.S. and Latin America," by Professor Stephanie Merrim, Department of Hispanic and Italian Studies, and Robert Fernandez, Office of the Dean of the College; to "Men, Women and Chromosomes: Is Anatomy Destiny?" by Anne Fausto-Sterling, Associate Professor of Biology and Medicine.

In April, the Women's Political Task Force, a student organization, brought together a series of lectures, films, and performances entitled "The Politics of Women's Body Images." Programs ranged from a lecture on "The Politics of Eating Disorders," by Dr. Robin Rose, Brown Psychological Services, to an evening of avant-garde performance and film by Leslie Thornton, a filmmaker in the Semiotics Department at Brown, and by Ellen Zweig, an artist from the Department of Interdisciplinary and Experimental Arts at the University of California at San Francisco.

The Sarah Doyle and Pembroke Centers helped sponsor a number of cultural events in 1984-85. Among these were readings by Pembroke Center Post-Doctoral Fellow and poet Denise Riley, by the novelist Angela Carter, and by poet Sharon Dubiago. The Sarah Doyle Gallery mounted a number of very successful shows including two invitational shows in the fall and spring. As always, the Sarah Doyle Gallery welcomes slide submissions from artists. Juries are normally twice a year; write to Box 1929 for more information.

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