Women (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), pp. 311–42; usage appears on, e.g., pp. 316, 317.

5 Heidi Hartmann, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union," in Lydia Sargent, *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), pp. 1–41. Quotation is from p. 14.

6 See, for example, Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women," in Rayna Reiter, ed., *Toward An Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 182–3.

7 Ibid., p. 180.

8 Louis Crompton, "Gay Suicide: From Leviticus to Hitler," in Louis Crew, eds, *The Gay Academic* (Palm Springs, CA: ETC Publications, 1978), pp. 67–91.

9 On this, see Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976).

10 K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (New York: Random House, 1980).

11 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958).

12 On the Bohemian Grove, an all-male summer camp for American ruling-class men, see G. William Domhoff, *The Bohemian Grove and Other Retreats: A Study in Ruling-Class Cohesiveness* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), and a more vivid, although homophobic account, van der Zee, *The Greatest Men's Party on Earth: Inside the Bohemian Grove* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974).

13 Catherine MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory," *Signs* 7, no. 3 (Spring 1982), pp. 515–44.

14 Margaret Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind* (New York: Avon, 1973), p.780. Further citations will be incorporated within the text and designated by chapter number.

15 For a discussion of these limitations, see Martha Vicinus, "Sexuality and Power: A Review of Current Work in the History of Sexuality," *Feminist Studies* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1982), pp. 133–56.

16 On this see Michael McKeon, "The 'Marxism' of Claude Lévi-Strauss," *Dialectical Anthropology* 6 (1981), pp. 123–50.

17 Juliet Mitchell discusses this aspect of *The German Ideology* in *Women's Estate* (New York: Random House, 1973), pp. 152–8.

18 Ibid., p. 154.

19 The best and clearest discussion of this aspect of Freud is Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), especially pp. 25–47.

20 Richard Klein, review of *Homosexualities in French Literature*, in *Modern Language Notes* 95, no. 4 (May 1980), p. 1077.

21 On this see Jane Gallop, *Daughter's Seduction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982). pp. 15–32.

22 Coppélia Kahn, *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

CHAPTER 6

"The Technology of Gender"

Teresa de Lauretis

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

With its emphasis on the sexual, "sexual difference" is in the first and last instance a difference of women from men, female from male; and even the more abstract notion of "sexual differences" resulting not from biology or socialization but from signification and discursive effects (the emphasis here being less on the sexual than on differences as *différance*), ends up being in the last instance a difference (of woman) from man – or better, the very instance of difference in man. To continue to pose the question of gender in either of these terms, once the critique of patriarchy has been fully outlined, keeps feminist thinking bound to the terms of Western patriarchy itself, contained within the frame of a conceptual opposition that is "always already" inscribed in what Fredric Jameson would call "the political unconscious" of dominant cultural discourses and their underlying "master narratives" – be they biological, medical, legal, philosophical, or literary – and so will tend to reproduce itself, to retextualize itself, as we shall see, even in feminist rewritings of cultural narratives.

The first limit of "sexual difference(s)," then, is that it constrains feminist critical thought within the conceptual frame of a universal sex opposition (woman as the difference from man, both universalized; or woman as difference *tout court*, and

hence equally universalized), which makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to articulate the differences of women from Woman, that is to say, the differences among women or, perhaps more exactly, the differences within women. For example, the differences among women who wear the veil, women who "wear the mask" (in the words of Paul Laurence Dunbar, often quoted by black American women writers), and women who "masquerade" (the word is Joan Rivière's) cannot be understood as sexual differences.[1] From that point of view, they would not be differences at all, and all women would but render either different embodiments of some archetypal essence of woman, or more or less sophisticated impersonations of a metaphysical-discursive femininity.

A second limitation of the notion of sexual difference(s) is that it tends to contain or recuperate the radical epistemological potential of feminist thought inside the walls of the master's house, to borrow Audre Lorde's metaphor rather than Nietzsche's "prison-house of language," for reasons that will presently become apparent. By radical epistemological potential I mean the possibility, already emergent in feminist writings of the 1980s, to conceive of the social subject and of the relations of subjectivity to sociality in another way: a subject constituted in gender, to be sure, though not by sexual difference alone, but rather across languages and cultural representations; a subject en-gendered in the experiencing of race and class, as well as sexual, relations; a subject, therefore, not unified but rather multiple, and not so much divided as contradicted.

In order to begin to specify this other kind of subject and to articulate its relations to a heterogeneous social field, we need a notion of gender that is not so bound up with sexual difference as to be virtually coterminous with it and such that, on the one hand, gender is assumed to derive unproblematically from sexual difference while, on the other, gender can be subsumed in sexual differences as an effect of language, or as pure imaginary – nothing to do with the real. This bind, this mutual containment of gender and sexual difference(s), needs to be unraveled and deconstructed. A starting point may be to think of gender along the lines of Michel Foucault's theory of sexuality as a "technology of sex" and to propose that gender, too, both as representation and as self-representation, is the product of various social technologies, such as cinema, and of institutionalized discourses, epistemologies, and critical practices, as well as practices of daily life.

Like sexuality, we might then say, gender is not a property of bodies or something originally existent in human beings, but "the set of effects produced in bodies, behaviors, and social relations," in Foucault's words, by the deployment of "a complex political technology."[2] But it must be said first off, and hence the title of this essay, that to think of gender as the product and the process of a number of social technologies, of technosocial or bio-medical apparati, is to have already gone beyond Foucault, for his critical understanding of the technology of sex did not take into account its differential solicitation of male and female subjects, and by ignoring the conflicting investments of men and women in the discourses and practices of sexuality, Foucault's theory, in fact, excludes, though it does not preclude, the consideration of gender.

I will proceed by stating a series of four propositions in decreasing order of self-evidence and subsequently will go back to elaborate on each in more detail.

1 Gender is (a) representation – which is not to say that it does not have concrete or real implications, both social and subjective, for the material life of individuals. On the contrary,
2 The representation of gender is its construction – and in the simplest sense it can be said that all of Western Art and high culture is the engraving of the history of that construction.
3 The construction of gender goes on as busily today as it did in earlier times, say the Victorian era. And it goes on not only where one might expect it to – in the media, the private and public schools, the courts, the family, nuclear or extended or single-parented – in short, in what Louis Althusser has called the "ideological state apparati." The construction of gender also goes on, if less obviously, in the academy, in the intellectual community, in avant-garde artistic practices and radical theories, even, and indeed especially, in feminism.
4 Paradoxically, therefore, the construction of gender is also effected by its deconstruction; that is to say, by any discourse, feminist or otherwise, that would discard it as ideological misrepresentation. For gender, like the real, is not only the effect of representation but also its excess, what remains outside discourse as a potential trauma which can rupture or destabilize, if not contained, any representation.

We look up gender in the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* and find that it is primarily a classificatory term. In grammar, it is a category by which words and grammatical forms are classified according to not only sex or the absence of sex (which is one particular category, called "natural gender" and typical of the English language, for example) but also other characteristics, such as morphological characteristics in what is called "grammatical gender," found in Romance languages, for example. (I recall a paper by Roman Jakobson entitled "The Sex of the Heavenly Bodies" which, after analyzing the gender of the words for sun and moon in a great variety of languages, came to the refreshing conclusion that no pattern could be detected to support the idea of a universal law determining the masculinity or the femininity of either the sun or the moon. Thank heaven for that!)

The second meaning of gender given in the dictionary is "classification of sex; sex." This proximity of grammar and sex, interestingly enough, is not here in Romance languages (which, it is commonly believed, are spoken by people rather more romantic than Anglo-Saxons). The Spanish *genero*, the Italian *genere*, and the French *genre* do not carry even the connotation of a person's gender; that is conveyed instead by the word for sex. And for this reason, it would seem, the word genre, adopted from French to refer to the specific classification of artistic and literary forms (in the first place, painting), is also devoid of any sexual denotation, as is the word *genus*, the Latin etymology of gender, used in English as a classificatory term in biology and logic. An interesting corollary of this linguistic

peculiarity of English, i.e., the acceptation of gender which refers to sex, is that the notion of gender I am discussing, and thus the whole tangled question of the relationship of human gender to representation, are totally untranslatable in any Romance language, a sobering thought for anyone who might be still tempted to espouse an internationalist, not to say universal, view of the project of theorizing gender.

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

The neuter gender in English, a language that relies on natural gender (we note, in passing, that "nature" is ever-present in our culture, from the very beginning, which is, precisely, language), is assigned to words referring to sexless or asexual entities, objects or individuals marked by the absence of sex. The exceptions to this rule show the popular wisdom of usage: a child is neuter in gender, and its correct possessive modifier is its, as I was taught in learning English many years ago, though most people use his, and some, quite recently and rarely, and even then inconsistently, use his or her. Although a child does have a sex from "nature," it isn't until it becomes (i.e., until it is signified as) a boy or a girl that it acquires a gender.[3] What the popular wisdom knows, then, is that gender is not sex, a state of nature, but the representation of each individual in terms of a particular social relation which pre-exists the individual and is predicated on the conceptual and rigid (structural) opposition of two biological sexes. This conceptual structure is what feminist social scientists have designated "the sex-gender system."

The cultural conceptions of male and female as two complementary yet mutually exclusive categories into which all human beings are placed constitute within each culture a gender system, a symbolic system or system of meanings, that correlates sex to cultural contents according to social values and hierarchies. Although the meanings vary with each culture, a sex-gender system is always intimately interconnected with political and economic factors in each society.[4] In this light, the cultural construction of sex into gender and the asymmetry that characterizes all gender systems cross-culturally (though each in its particular ways) are understood as "systematically linked to the organization of social inequality."[5]

The sex-gender system, in short, is both a sociocultural construct and a semiotic apparatus, a system of representation which assigns meaning (identity, value, prestige, location in kinship, status in the social hierarchy, etc.) to individuals within the society. If gender representations are social positions which carry differential meanings, then for someone to be represented and to represent oneself as male or as female implies the assumption of the whole of those meaning effects. Thus, the proposition that the representation of gender is its construction, each term being at once the product and the process of the other, can be restated more accurately: The construction of gender is both the product and the process of its representation.

When Althusser wrote that ideology represents "not the system of the relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live" and which govern their existence, he was also describing, to my mind exactly, the functioning of gender.[6] . . .

Michèle Barrett, for one, argues that not only is ideology a primary site of the construction of gender, but "the ideology of gender . . . has played an important part in the historical construction of the capitalist division of labour and in the reproduction of labour power," and therefore is an accurate demonstration of "the integral connection between ideology and the relations of production."[7]

The context of Barrett's argument (originally made in her 1980 book *Women's Oppression Today*) is the debate elicited in England by "discourse theory" and other post-Althusserian developments in the theory of ideology, and more specifically the critique of ideology promoted by the British feminist journal *m/f* on the basis of notions of representation and difference drawn from Lacan and Derrida. She quotes Parveen Adams's "A Note on the Distinction between Sexual Division and Sexual Difference," where sexual division refers to the two mutually exclusive categories of men and women as given in reality: "In terms of sexual differences, on the other hand, what has to be grasped is, precisely, the production of differences through systems of representation; the work of representation produces differences that cannot be known in advance."[8]

Adams's critique of a feminist (Marxist) theory of ideology that relies on the notion of patriarchy as a given in social reality (in other words, a theory based on the fact of women's oppression by men) is that such a theory is based on an essentialism, whether biological or sociological, which crops up again even in the work of those, such as Juliet Mitchell, who would insist that gender is an effect of representation. "In feminist analyses," Adams maintains, the concept of a feminine subject "relies on a homogeneous oppression of women in a state, reality, given prior to representational practices" (p. 56). By stressing that gender construction is nothing but the effect of a variety of representations and discursive practices which produce sexual differences "not known in advance" (or, in my own paraphrase, gender is nothing but the variable configuration of sexual-discursive positionalities), Adams believes she can avoid "the simplicities of an always already antagonistic relation" between the sexes, which is an obstacle, in her eyes, to both feminist analysis and feminist political practice (p. 57). . . .

The point I am trying to make . . . is that to theorize as positive the "relative" power of those oppressed by current social relations necessitates something more radical, or perhaps more drastic, than [Hollway] seems willing to stake. The problem is compounded by the fact that the investments studied by Hollway[9] are secured and bonded by a heterosexual contract; that is to say, her object of study is the very site in which the social relations of gender and thus gender ideology are reproduced in everyday life. Any changes that may result therein, however they may occur, are likely to be changes in "gender difference," precisely, rather than changes in the social relations of gender: changes, in short, in the direction of more or less "equality" of women to men.

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

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

> If the discourse of modern theoretical systems and social science exert[s] a power upon us, it is because it works with concepts which closely touch us. . . . They function like primitive concepts in a conglomerate of all kinds of disciplines, theories, and current ideas that I will call the straight mind. (See *The Savage Mind* by Claude Lévi-Strauss.) They concern "woman," "man," "sex," "difference," and all of the series of concepts which bear this mark, including such concepts as "history," "culture," and the "real." And although it has been accepted in recent years that there is no such thing as nature, that everything is culture, there remains within that culture a core of nature which resists examination, a relationship excluded from the social in the analysis – a relationship whose characteristic is ineluctability in culture, as well as in nature, and which is the heterosexual relationship. I will call it the obligatory social relationship between "man" and "woman."[10]

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

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

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

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

I want to be very clear about this movement back and forth across the boundaries of sexual difference. I do not mean a movement from one space to another beyond it, or outside: say, from the space of a representation, the image produced by representation in a discursive or visual field, to the space outside the representation, the space outside discourse, which would then be thought of as "real"; or, as Althusser would say, from the space of ideology to the space of scientific and real

knowledge; or again, from the symbolic space constructed by the sex/gender system to a "reality" external to it. For, clearly, no social reality exists for a given society outside of its particular sex/gender system (the mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories of male and female). What I mean, instead, is a movement from the space represented by/in a representation, by/in a discourse, by/in a sex/gender system, to the space not represented yet implied (unseen) in them.

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

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

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

Notes

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

2 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Rob Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p. 127.

3 I need not detail other well-known exceptions in English usage, such as "ships and automobiles" and countries' being feminine. See Dale Spender, *Man Made Language* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), for a very useful survey of the issues raised in Anglo-American feminist sociolinguistic research. On the philosophical issue of gender in language, and especially its subversion in practices of writing by the strategic employ of personal pronouns, see Monique Wittig, "The Mark of Gender," *Feminist Issues* 5, no. 2 (Fall 1985), pp. 3–12.

4 See Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead, eds, *Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). The term sex/gender system was first used by Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes toward a Political Economy of Sex," in Rayna Reiter, ed., *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 157–210.

5 Jane E. Collier and Michelle Z. Rosaldo, "Politics and Gender in Simple Societies," in Ortner and Whitehead, eds, *Sexual Meanings*, p. 275. In the same volume see also Sherry B. Ortner, "Gender and Sexuality in Hierarchical Societies," pp. 359–409.

6 Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: (Notes Towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p. 165. Subsequent references to this work are included in the text.

7 Michèle Barrett, "Ideology and the Cultural Production of Gender," in Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt, eds, *Feminist Criticism and Social Change* (New York: Methuen, 1985), p. 74.

8 Parveen Adams, "A Note on the Distinction between Sexual Division and Sexual Difference," *m/f*, no. 3 (1979): 52 [quoted in Barrett, "Ideology," p. 67].

9 Julian Henriques, Wendy Hollway, Cathy Urwin, Couze Venn, and Valerie Walkerdine, *Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity* (London: Methuen, 1984). Subsequent references to this work are included in the text.

10 Monique Wittig, "The Straight Mind," *Feminist Issues*, no. 1 (Summer 1990), pp. 106–7. Subsequent references to this work are included in the text.