the conclusion that the struggle to create economic equality between genderless humans of two different sexes resembles the efforts made to square the circle with ruler and straight edge. Eudoxus tried and learned how to compare irrational numbers. The problem remained unsolved until Lindemann, in the nineteenth century, showed that there could be no solution to it. He demonstrated that $\pi$ was not an algebraic number, and thus increased our awareness of the incommensurability among real numbers. Political economy is still in a state comparable to mathematics before Lindemann. Faced by the evidence of its consistent failure to create economic equality between the sexes, we might now entertain a long overlooked possibility: The paradigm of *Homo oeconomicus* does not square with what men and women actually are. Perhaps they cannot be reduced to humans, to economic neuters of either male or female sex. Economic existence and gender might be literally incomparable.

**III. Vernacular Gender**

Outside industrial societies, unisex work is the rare exception, if it exists at all. Few things can be done by women and also by men. The latter, as a rule, just cannot do women’s work. In early eighteenth-century Paris, you could recognize the bachelor from afar by his stench and gloomy looks. From notaries’ records, we know that solitary men left no sheets or shirts when they died. In the time of Louis XIV, a man without a woman to keep house could barely survive. Without wife, sister, mother, or daughter he had no way to make, wash, and mend his clothes; it was impossible for him to keep chickens or to milk a goat; if he was poor, he could not eat butter, milk, or eggs. He could not cook certain foods even if he had the ingredients. And today, in the rural Mexico I know so well, a woman would rather die of embarrassment than let a man cook the beans.

From afar, the native can tell whether women or men are at work, even if he cannot distinguish their figures. The time of year and day, the crop, and the tools reveal to him who they are. Whether they carry a load on their head or shoulder will tell him

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their gender. If he notices geese loose in the harvested field, he
knows a girl must be nearby to tend them. If he comes across
sheep, he knows he will find a boy. To belong means to know what
befits our kind of woman, our kind of man. If someone does what
we consider the other gender’s work, that person must be a stranger.
Or a slave, deprived of all dignity. Gender is in every
step, in every gesture, not just between the legs. Puerto Rico is
only three hours from New York. Two-thirds of its people have
been to the mainland. Yet even today, in the interior of the island,
there is no such thing as a Puerto Rican gait; women sail down a
path like sloops chopping in the tradewinds, and men swagger
and roll to the rhythm of the machete, but both in the
unmistakably jibaro fashion. One knows that they could not be
from nearby Santo Domingo, much less be gringos from the
States. In many Puerto Ricans, vernacular gender has survived
for decades, not only in the Harlem barrio but even when they
have lived mixed up with hillbillies and blacks in the South
Bronx.51

Gender is something other and much more than sex. It
bespeaks a social polarity that is fundamental and in no two
places the same. What a man cannot or must do is different from
valley to valley. But the social anthropologist has missed the
point, and his terminology has become a unisex mask for a

51 VERNACULAR

This is a technical term that comes from Roman law. It can be found
there from the earliest records up to the codification by Theodosius. It
designates the inverse of a commodity: “Vernaculum, quidquid domi
nascitur, domestici fructus; res quae aliqui nata est, et quam non emit”. Du
Cange, Glossarium Mediae et Infimae Latinitatis 8: 283. “Vernacular”
means those things that are homemade, homespun, home-grown, not
designed for the marketplace, but that are for home use only. The
term has come into English principally to refer to one’s native tongue. For
lack of a better term, I would like to breathe new life into the old word.
I will deal with its history in my forthcoming book Vernacular Values.
I will refer to the whole of any set that is made up of two gendered
subsets as “vernacular”. For example, I shall speak of a vernacular
language when I refer to the complement of male and female speech (FN
101), of a vernacular universe (FN 89) when I refer to the complementary
grasp of a social reality by that society’s men and women, or of ver-
nacular tools when I want to designate a group’s tool kit that is more or
less clearly divided by gender (FN 70).

52 COMPLEMENTARITY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE

Modern physics has learned to deal with the complementarity of two
perspectives. Light can be reduced neither to a wave phenomenon nor
to a particle phenomenon. In either case, too much is left out. To call it
both seems a paradox. The complementarity is meaningful only by
virtue of the mathematical form given to the theory in which it appears.
The underlying idea of epistemological complementarity is not new.

Following Euclid, who conceived of the eye as sending out rays whose
ends probed the object, Ptolemy and then the great scholastics distin-
guished lumen from lux. Lux is light when it is subjectively perceived;
lumen is a stream coming from the eye to light up the object. Vernacular
reality can be thought of as a huge quilt, each patch having at its own,
iridescent color, its lux. In the lumen of gender analysis, each culture
appears as a metaphor, a metaphoric complementarity (FNS 55-57)
relating two distinct sets of tools (FN 70), two types of space-time (FNS
78, 79), two domains (FNS 86, 87). These find expression in different
but related styles in which the world is understood or grasped (FN 89)
and spoken about (FNS 94-101). Science, both mono- and stereoscopic
(FN 46), is a filter that screens from the observer’s eye the ambiguity of
gendered light. But this same screen is permeable in both directions for
the genderless lumen the observer projects on his object and in which he
or she observes the object. The symbolic asymmetry that constitutes
the social reality of each vernacular is effaced by the central perspective
of cultural anthropology. The Eigen-value of each and every vernacular
reality cannot be seized in the monochromatic, genderless lumen of
such concepts as role (FNS 62, 63), exchange (FN 33), and structure (FNS
76, 77). What the scientific observer then sees through his diagnostic
spectacles are not men and women who really act in a gendered subs-
nistence society but sexual deviants from an abstract, genderless cultural
norm who have to be operationalized, measured, ranked, and structured
into hierarchies. Cultural anthropology that operates with genderless
concepts is inevitably sexist (see my comment on Rubin, FN 7). This
sexism is much more blinding than old-style ethnocentric arrogance.
Ambiguous Complementarity

Only the newcomer perceives culture. For the insider there are men and women and then a third reality: outsiders who might be foreigners, slaves, domestic animals, untouchables, or freaks. If the outsider is perceived as a sexed being, his sex or, more properly, gender is seen in some analogy to that of "our" men and women. Kinship is possible only between what we conceive as men and women; it only specifies the fit between gendered people. What we perceive as men and what we perceive as women can meet and fit not only because but in spite of the unique contrast between them. They fit like the right fits the left.⁵³ The analogy between male and female and the duality of right and left is useful at this point, principally because it allows me to explore some of the dangers of misunderstanding. In many cultures the left hand is the weak and powerless one; it has been subject to millennia of mutilation. Right-handedness is not just accepted or submitted to: It has become the inculcated norm. The child who would use the left hand is reprimanded, the hand slapped, tied behind the child's back, or crippled. Organic asymmetry has become the fact. A neurological preponderance that manifests itself in greater sensibility, strength, or aptitude has been turned into the ideal of right dominance. The left has become adaptive to the right as its ever needed and cherished assistant. The analogy can be and is constantly used to support the idea that the "female sex is sociobiologically male adaptive."⁵⁴

⁵³ Right and left have recently become labels for biological and neurological scientific research and for popular myth. For literature on this, see Hubbard, FN 58. The following literature deals with the use of "right" and "left" as shorthand terms referring not to biological but to symbolic dualism. For the assessment and history of ethnographic evidence on symbolic dualism, see Rodney Needham, ed., *Right and Left: Essays on Symbolic Classification* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973; Phoenix pbk., 1978). The author provides a major introduction to seventeen articles written by as many authors between 1909 and 1971. Of the many possible interpretations given to R/L sym-
However, this is precisely not the point I want to make. The analogy means something different. Each man and woman outside of a push-button society depends for survival on the interplay of two hands. In some societies, right-handedness is more pronounced than in others. In other societies, as in the Chinese, etiquette, good taste, and world view demand that the left and the right predominate alternately in a delicate, detailed orchestration. In some societies, as among the Nyoro of Africa, to be left-handed destines one to the sacred group of diviners dominated by a web of key words (FN 2). Moral sexism has been effectively challenged during the seventies. But this challenge to moral sexism in science has all too often only deepened the hold of epistemological sexism on the challengers themselves. For instance, an obvious instance of moral sexism consists in interpreting everything relating to sexual difference (e.g., Right/Left) that has a correlation to biology as innate. This tendency has become so dominant that it threatened in the late seventies to become trivial, and scientific language came to express the male scientists’ wish fulfillment about right/male dominance and left/female adaptation. This interpretation was challenged. For the literature, see FN 58. However, the challenge usually took either of two forms, both epistemologically sexist: (1) Typically, the criticism was explicitly fem-sexist on a moral level (the critic points out that the title of FN 53 should have read “Left/Right”); (2) more seriously, the critic points out that Right/Left does indeed stand for duality, but duality in the abstract, and then ranges male/female as just one more among many dualisms, differing via structuralism the non-existence of gender as a duality sui generis (see more on structuralism, FN 76). For recent trends in women’s studies that, in my opinion, tend toward the recognition of epistemological sexism in science, see Lynda M. Glennon (op. cit. FN 12). She distinguishes four often overlapping types of feminist endeavor to deal with the sexism implicit in the most common dualities used as analytic concepts by the social sciences.

55 YIN AND YANG

Marcel Granet, “‘Right and Left in China,’” trans. Rodney Needham, in Rodney Needham, ed., Right and Left (op. cit., pp. 43-58, FN 53). Never does one find absolute oppositions in China: a left-hander is not sinister and neither is a right-hander. A multitude of rules shows that left and right predominate alternatively. Diversity of time and place imposes, at any point, a delicate choice between left and right, but this choice is inspired by a very coherent system of representations. The alternative pre-eminence, however, does not alter the fact that the right hand is the more widely used. It is for this very reason, probably, that the left hand preponderates. This is shown by a number of important rules of etiquette. But, regardless of the greater power, skill, or dignity attributed to one hand, more often the right than the left, the two hands are used for complementary actions and gestures. Tradition rigorously instructs the left-handed shaman which hand he must use for the offering. The two hands always act together according to two programs that are never the other’s mirror image. Thus, this unique kind of duality is always ambiguous.

The oldest traditions place the fundamental trait of our existence into this singular kind of bifurcation. It constitutes an ambiguous complementarity, different from both a mirror image and a shadow. As duality, it is distinct from the positive copy of a negative and from the deterministic match of DNA's double helix. I assume it to be the foundation of metaphor and poetic speech – the only appropriate mode to express it. Twins, the navel/umbilical cord, yin/yang are among the mythological representations through which this duality seeks expression. One of the difficulties in the kind of opposition that exists

A classical and delicate description of this ambiguity in Africa can be found in Marcel Griaule, *Conversations with Ogotemmeli* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965). In various writings, R. Panikkar has explored the issue in respect to India. He interprets the Western “search for Christ” as a homeomorphic equivalent (a non-identical term that performs a similar function) to the brahminical search for poles that are fused without being intermingled. See R. Panikkar, The Unknown Christ of Hinduism (New York: Orbis, 1981). In recent literary criticism, “androgyne” is a key word under which the issue is touched upon. See N.T. Bazin, “The Concept of Androgyny: A Working Bibliography,” Women’s Studies 2 (1974): 217-35.

56 METAPHORS FOR THE OTHER

When I speak in metaphors, I engage in a deviant discourse; I am alert to my special, odd, and startling combination of words. I know that I cannot be understood unless he who listens to me is wide-awake to my intentional use of a term that carries other than literal meanings. Every vernacular language is the result of two different speech forms corresponding to two gender domains in each of which the world is grasped in a gender-specific way (see FN 101). Each gender is muted in relation to the other. When using common vernacular words to speak not into but about the opposite domain, the vernacular speaker intuitively uses a kind of metaphor. For ideas on metaphor, see Warren A. Shibles, Metaphor: An Annotated Bibliography and History (Whitewater, WI: Language Press, 1971): 10-17. For me, the most
between gender and sex should now be less obscure. It may be appropriate to consider vernacular gender as the foundation of ambiguous complementarity, and the sex of economic neutralizers as the modern experiment to deny or transcend this foundation. By reducing all interaction to exchange, the social sciences have laid the groundwork for this denial and for the legitimacy of an economic analysis of the relations between men and women. This

impressive modern texts exposing the near impossibility of using twentieth-century language to speak about gender (and what survives of it) is Luce Irigaray, "La tache aveugle d’un vieux rêve de symétrie," *Speculum de l’autre femme* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1974): 9-161. See "Women’s Exile," *Ideology and Consciousness* 1 (1977): 71-75, an interview with Irigaray that touches on *Speculum*; also see Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds., "This Sex Which Is Not One" and "When the Goods Get Together," *New French Feminism* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980): 99-106 and 107-10. For a masterly introduction, see William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (New York: New Directions, 1947). The metaphorical relationship itself can be expressed in a metaphor. This is what religious symbols frequently do. Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Bemerkungen über Frazer's *The Golden Bough*," *Synthèse* 17 (1967): 233-53 speaks about this: "... Putting magic into parenthesis in this case is the magic... Metaphysics becomes a kind of magic." The gorgone, for instance, is a metaphor of this kind. It is always facing you, with its neither-nor features swallowing your eyelight in its empty sockets: looking at yourself as the mask that fits your face. Jean-Pierre Vernant, "L’autre de l’homme: La face de Gorgo," *Le Racisme: Pour Leon Poliakov, sous la direction de Maurice Olender* (Brussels: Editions Complexe SPIRL, 1981): 141-56. By the same author, "Figuration de l’invisible et catégorie psychologique du double: le Colosso," *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs* (Paris: Maspero Petite Collection, 1971-74): 251-64. Twins are equally frightening. See, for instance, Aidan Southall, "Twinship and Symbolic Structure" in J.S. La Fontaine, ed., *The Interpretation of Ritual* (London: Tavistock, 1972): 73-114. When I use the term "gender" I am aware that I give meaning on three distinct levels: (1) Descriptively, I refer to one of the two strong subsets of any vernacular reality (speech forms, tools, spaces, symbols) that are more or less related to male or female genital characteristics; (2) I refer to the vernacular whole insofar as it is constituted by the complementarity of these two subsets; (3) and, on the level of epistemology, I am aware that "gender" in the second sense is a metaphor for the ambiguous symbolic complementarity that constitutes each of the two genders (in the first sense) as metaphors for each other. My thinking on this point is nourished by the scholastic concept of *relatio subsistens*.

is why I speak about economic sex. It should therefore be clear that two distinct types of language are required for speaking about what once existed and what now obtains.57

**Socio-Biological Sexism**

I have chosen to begin this introduction to gender and sex with a reference to the right and left hands because the analogy is effective. Further, the analogy immediately suggests a second

57 **AMBIGUOUS COMPLEMENTARITY**

The complementarity between genders is both asymmetric and ambiguous. Asymmetry implies a disproportion of size or value or power or weight; ambiguity does not. Asymmetry indicates a relative position; ambiguity, the fact that the two do not congruously fit. Explicit reference to the asymmetry of genders is made in the footnotes on patriarchy (FN 21), on relative power (FN 84), and throughout the entire text. Here I deal with ambiguity. The ambiguity that characterizes gender is unique. It is two-sided: Men symbolize the mutual relationship differently than do women (see FN 56). Robert Hertz, "The Pre-Eminence of the Right Hand: A Study in Religious Polarity," now in Rodney Needham, ed. (op. cit., pp. 3-31, FN 53), tried to incorporate this notion of complementarity into the social sciences at a time when the concept had begun to be fruitful in the physical sciences. He was a genius and recognized that in the social sciences the fundamental polarity implied both asymmetry and ambiguity. He died in the trenches of World War I and since then has been misinterpreted. First, his editor, Marcel Mauss, domesticated the disconcerting asymmetry and ambiguity contained in Hertz's idea of complementarity harnessing the unfamiliar and anomalous duality by defining it as the foundation of all "exchange." See M. Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (New York: Norton, pbk., 1967). (The original French version was published in 1925.) Then Levi-Strauss proclaimed Mauss the first to have treated the total social fact as a symbolic system of exchanges between individuals and groups, and identified Hertz as Mauss's teacher. The fuzzy, partly incongruous complementarity that can be understood only by means of metaphors, which Hertz had begun to recognize as the root of culture, was repressed in the social sciences in favor of operational concepts such as role, class, exchange, and ultimately, "system" (see FN 76). Here I want to compare the complementarity that constitutes the relationship between the genders to the process of exchange between constituted partners. The former tends, ideally, toward "subsistent relations": meanings
difficulty that, unlike the first, is not fundamental but contingent on current academic fads. In the United States, it is now almost impossible to analyze gender related to behavior without provoking a response from two quarters—feminist Marxists and socio-biologists. I want to keep my argument free from both these distorting repercussions. A discussion of gender with feminist Marxists is impossible. Their sex-conscious use of political economies eliminates the ambiguities of gender by means of a double filter. However, I want even more carefully to avoid stooping to engage in any argument with those who are taken in by the fashionable rhetoric of Lionel Tiger, E.O. Wilson, A. de Benoist, and their like. They start from the postulate of biological determinism and assume that culture is built on it; for me, what is unique about Homo sapiens as a human phenomenon is the constant incarnation of the symbolic duality of gender. I do not quarrel with the observations made by the new ethnologists; however, the fact that genderless modern humans behave almost as apes confirms my thesis that the regime of sex is inhumane. Further, biological determinists need not be answered by me; that task I can leave to what, in the USA, is called the liberal establishment. The legitimacy of social planning and the management of care within a liberal society depends on the credibility of the expert’s claim that he is anti-fascist and anti-racist. It is for him to point out that the new socio-biology of sex is replacing the socio-biology of race launched by Count Gobineau. When one sees what sexism reveals, racism then seems more like an early homologous groping. As nineteenth-century racist theories served to buttress European colonial pretensions, so contemporary sexist thought ministers to a worldwide regime of latter-day unisex humbug. The new sexism fits the colorful elites who govern post-colonial economies today.

The contention of all socio-biologists is the same. And the metaphorically and not antithetically related. Exchange, in contrast, implies a relationship between social actors, and a common bond that is independent of their actual interchange. Exchange drives partners toward an ever clearer fit (homogeneity and not ambiguity) whose asymmetry therefore tends toward hierarchy and dependence. Where exchange structures relationships, a common denominator defines the fit. Where ambiguity constitutes the two entities that it also relates, ambiguity engenders new partial incongruities between men and women, constantly upsetting any tendency toward hierarchy and dependence.

structure of their argument is ingeniously simple, the source of its seductive strength. Most readers of their books are not prepared to see that behind the complex discussions woven of mathematical algorithms and risky statistics nothing more lies.

58 SOCI-BIOLOGICAL MYTHOLOGY

In part, at least, science is a gusty and faddish intellectual enterprise that focuses on issues that trouble scientists emotionally or politically. This is particularly clear in the scientific attempts to link human, intraspecific, organic differences to behavior. Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: Norton, 1981) deals directly with the history of the scientific attempt to abstract intelligence as a single quantifiable entity, located within the brain, that permits the ranking of people. The book, however, can also serve as an introduction to the ups and downs of the ideology of biological determinism from craniometry to Peter J. Wilson. Already, in 1944, Gunnar Myrdal spoke of the “tendency to assume biological causation without question, and to accept social explanation only under the duress of a siege,” as an ideology that allows one to take the current status of groups as a measure of the position in which its normal individuals should be. Gould focuses on this bio-determinism, which is rising in popularity again as it regularly has in times of political retrenchment. Since the mid-seventies, millions of people have learned to suspect that their social prejudice and their inferiority are after all scientific facts, that they fit politically into the ranks intraspecific specialization has assigned them. For criticisms of the attempt to reduce the social and human sciences to subdisciplines of socio-biology by magnifying the effects of heredity on human behavior, see William M. Dugger, “Sociobiology for Social Scientists: A Critical Introduction to E.O. Wilson’s Evolutionary Paradigm,” *Social Science Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (June 1981): 221-46, and Clifford Geertz’s critique of D. Symons’s *The Evolution of Human Sexuality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) in *The New York Review of Books* (January 24, 1980): 3-4. For specific literature on the issue discussed here, see: Helen H. Lambert, “Biological and Equality: A Perspective on Sex Differences,” *Signs* 4, no. 1 (Autumn 1978): 97-117, and the major, thorough, and many-faceted analysis of the sexist perspective on scholarship in human biology: M.S.H. Hubbard and Barbara Friend, eds., *Women Look at Biology Looking at Women* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1979). Note, however, that there are some very articulate feminists who now argue that males and females are like separate subspecies of humanity whose behavioral style is inherently different, irrespective of their cultures: Alice Rossi, “A Biosocial Perspective on Parenting,” *Daedalus* 106, no. 2 (Spring 1977): 1-31. The well-intentioned profession of feminist egalitarianism may camouflage the trick of racism that is implied in bio-social determinism—no good intentions can expunge it.
hidden. The argument runs as follows: Among primates, the female is already male-adaptive.\textsuperscript{59} Primitive men dominate their women; high culture institutionalizes this dominance; hence, it is scientifically legitimate to speculate that genes must account for the regularity of this pattern of primacy in men and submissiveness in women. Genetic male dominance accounts for sex roles then and now.

It is not, however, because of the weakness of the argument that I consider a controversy with academic sexism out of place, but rather because of the style in which the claims of the theoretical “biocrats” are presented. This style has much in common with racism from Gobineau to Rosenberg – “scientific” argumentation that addresses itself only to the true believer. Racism and sexism are alike not only in argument and style; their image of men is woven out of the same stuff. For both racist and sexist suppositions, humans can be scientifically put into categories and then arranged according to rank. Dark skin, low IQ, female sex, and other genetic deficiencies fall close to the bottom. Both the racist and the service professional presume the existence of an objective perspective by which they can operationally rank people’s claims to scarce privileges. Both rankings are based on the assumption of genderless individuals acting under conditions of growing scarcity. Therefore, the perspective of the racist or that of the modern educator fits only into modern Western culture. However, the legitimacy of the service professional depends on a believable rhetoric that effectively obfuscates the racism hidden in professional diagnosis. The task of arguing with the new, crude socio-biocrats I can therefore leave to those of my colleagues whose professional spectacles

direct them to impute “needs” rather than to measure “inferiorities,” to those teachers, medical men, gynecologists, and social workers who are trained to degrade others into consumers of their services through their scientific diagnoses. Their self-interest combined with their optimism impels them to see that their careers, based on much more subtle ranking, are threatened should they be publicly identified with the cruder sociobiological sexists.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{60} THE RACIST AND THE PROFESSIONAL

The comparison between racists and service-oriented professionals is intentional, although I know that many of my readers identify themselves as professionals, and few as racists. I cannot, however, avoid the comparison. Those interested in my reasons should read Ivan Illich, \textit{The Right to Useful Unemployment} (London: Marion Boyars, 1978), especially the second part. A growing number of historical studies of the nineteenth century show that the service professions invented their diagnosis of needs to create demands for the therapies they then came to monopolize. Burton S. Bledstein, \textit{“The Culture of Professionalism} (New York: Norton, 1976) is well documented. Within the framework of the nation state, which tended to monopolize service production even where the production and commerce of goods was left in private hands, the professionals “played on public fears of disorder and disease, adopted deliberately mystifying jargon, ridiculed popular traditions of self-help as backward and unscientific, and in this way created . . . a demand for their services,” Christopher Lasch, \textit{The New York Review of Books} (November 24, 1977): 15-18. In this context, the professional establishments acquired the ability to define “deficiencies” by scientific opinion; to conduct research that would confirm this opinion; to impute these deficiencies to concrete individuals by “diagnosis”; to subject entire population groups to compulsory testing; to impose therapy on those found to be in need of correction, cure, or upgrading. The logic of this process has been described with inimitable incisiveness by John L. McKnight, \textit{“The Mask of Love: Professional Care in the Service Economy} (New York, London: Marion Boyars, 1983). The professional and the racist ethos converge. They are both based, albeit with different subtleties, on the same assumption: Biological diagnosis entitles the biocracy to social grading. Nowhere can this convergence of professional ethos with biological discrimination be seen more clearly than through the history of gynecology (see FNs 80, 87). Maurice Olender, ed., \textit{Le Racisme: Pour Léon Poliakov} (op. cit. FN 56) contains several contributions that link the anti-feminine to the anti-Judaic prejudice in the tradition of the Enlightenment.

\textsuperscript{59} ANIMAL SOCIOLGY

Animal sociology is a kind of science fiction in reverse. While SF attributes meaningful and purposeful behavior to constructs of the fantasy, AS, animal sociology, attributes society to sub-humans. Both have in common with SS, social science, the fact that they operate with genderless terms. The occasional predictive value of SF scenarios or the confirmation of behaviorist theories by animal experiment simply demonstrate that SS categories are blind to what is characteristically and exclusively human: gendered culture. For critical access to the literature, see Donna Haraway, \textit{“Animal Sociology and a Natural Economy of the Body Politic}, Signs 4, no. 1 (1978): 21-60, and other contributions in the same issue.
Social-Science Sexism

A notion called the sex role has become very popular during the last fifteen years. Games people play, scientific treatises, pedagogical methods, and political rhetoric are all built on the assumption of its existence. Concern with sex roles seems to rise with GNP. In rich countries, how to choose, assume, and transmit sex roles has become a major worry for many people. Sociological role theory is a much more stubborn obstacle to the analysis of gender than the newly fabricated concepts of sociobiology. However, any recourse to role concepts will blind one to the perception of gender in speech as well as in action.

Gender is substantive. This is not true with sex in the economic neuter. In the perspective of the neuter, sex is a secondary attribute, a property of an individual, an adjective characteristic of a human being. The concept of sex role could not come into being until society’s institutions were structured to meet the genderless needs of genderless clients with genderless commodities produced in a genderless world. The sex role builds on the existence of genderless man. One’s sex, however, is not

61 ROLE

"Role" is a concept by which, since Ralph Linton, The Study of Man: An Introduction (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1938), sociology links the social order to the characteristic behavior of the individuals who comprise it. Role is the device by which people become part of a plural that can be analyzed by genderless concepts. Further, the use of role as a category of the social sciences precludes the possibility of introducing gender into the discussion. Gender relates two persons to each other who are more profoundly other than role-playing individuals ever could be. Sociology has borrowed the concept of role from the theater, where it first appeared as a technical term when European actors began to perform on an elevated stage that made scenes a sequence of “entrance,” “performance,” and “exit,” on a “set.” Thus, as a concept, role was as new to the sixteenth-century theater as it is to twentieth-century sociology. See Richard Southern, “Fourth Phase: The Organized Stage,” The Seven Ages of the Theater (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963): 155-215. On the impact of the role concept on methodology, consult W.H. Dray, “Holism and Individualism in History and Social Science,” Encyclopedia of Philosophy 4, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967): 53-58.

perceived as just one more role, one more outfit to don, one more well-fitting or ill-tailored suit for special occasions, like the role of parent, academic, or plumber. Most people consider the sex role less changeable; women know that they are stuck with it in an oppressive way. But, like it or not, to have a sex role – be it assumed, imposed, or resented – is something other than belonging to a gender. It is one thing to say that you are a man or a woman, and something quite different that you are a human being of male or female sex. Unlike gender, which means that you are either a square or a circle, the sex role is like a foundation on which other roles can be built. Some people wear their own skin as if it were chosen like either lingerie or skivvies, and beneath it feel skinned, plastic selves. Others view their sex role as a corset into which their genderless libido was forced by their parents, a foundation onto which they can layer any uniform or dress and then change or occasionally discard it. As with the vernacular, one is born and bred into gender; the sex role is something acquired. One can blame parents or society for an “assigned” sex role or a taught mother tongue; there is no way to complain about vernacular speech or gender.

The distinction between vernacular gender and sex role is comparable to that between vernacular speech and taught mother tongue, between subsistence and economic existence. Therefore, the fundamental assumptions about the one and the other are distinct. Vernacular speech, gender, and subsistence are characteristics of a morphological closure of community life on the assumption, implicit and often ritually expressed and mythologically represented, that a community like a body cannot outgrow its size. Taught mother tongue, sex, and a life-style based on the consumption of commodities all rest on the assumption of an open universe in which scarcity underlies all correlations between needs and means. Gender implies a complementarity within the world that is fundamental and closes the world in on “us,” however ambiguous and fragile this closure might be. Sex, on the contrary, implies unlimited openness, a universe in which there is always more.

Strictly speaking, discourse about gender must therefore be expressed in metaphorical language; in no two worlds does it mean univocally the same thing. And the dual, specific whole that the complementarity of concrete genders brings into being –
a "world," a "society," a "community" - is both shaped and limited, asymmetrically, by its components. Gender can be grasped only by means of morphology; its existence depends in turn on the size and shape of the dual world it structures. A snail, after adding a number of widening rings to the delicate structure of its shell, suddenly brings its accustomed building activities to a stop. A single additional ring would increase the size of the shell sixteen times. Instead of contributing to the welfare of the snail, it would burden the creature with such an excess of weight that any increase in its productivity would henceforth be literally outweighed by the task of coping with the difficulties created by enlarging the shell beyond the limits set by its purpose. At that point, the problems of overgrowth begin to multiply geometrically, while the snail's biological capacity can at best be extended arithmetically. So gender sets limits to the social structure it forms, a structure expressed in every aspect of life-style, but first of all in kinship.

62 SOCIAL MORPHOLOGY

I believe that in each vernacular milieu gender is the source of a social form that can take its shape only within limited parameters. In biology a characteristic form can exist only within a narrow range of size. Mouselike beings range from an inch in length to the size of a rat; an elephant with mouselike feet cannot exist. Some of the most beautiful pages on this are in J.B.S. Haldane, "On Being the Right Size," in James R. Newman, The World of Mathematics: A Small Library of the Literature of Mathematics from A'h-mose the Scribe to Albert Einstein 2 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956): 952-57. D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, "On Growth and Form," an abridged edition edited by J.T. Bonner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), concentrated his attention on the morphological relationship of anatomical form and size. Leopold Kohr, *The Breakdown of Nations* (London: 1941; reprint ed. available) has pioneered social morphology, correlating social form and size. E.F. Schumacher, Kohr's pupil, summed up his teacher's axiom to his satisfaction in *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (New York: Harper and Row, Torchbooks, 1973). I argue that social beauty appears when the material elements of a culture are of the size that is appropriate to its concrete, gendered complementarity. Maintaining this "milieu" within parameters of size that correspond to the form (in Greek, "morphe") is necessary for the existence and preservation of a gendered relationship between men's and women's domains.

The idea behind the term "sex role," as this term is generally used, implies exactly the opposite. The carrier of the sex role is tacitly assumed to be a plastic individual having a genderless existence that is more or less shaped by "sex." Most studies that have been done during the last hundred years on the differences in men's and women's activities all over the world were carried out by observers interested in primitive, traditional, exotic sex roles, even at a time when the term was still unknown. Thus, where gender was observed it was reported as some kind of sex.

The confusion is nicely illustrated in a 1947 statement by M. Herskovits: "No phase of the economic life of non-literate people has attracted more attention than has the sex division of labor, and many attempts have been made to explain it." The

63/64 SEX ROLE

On the term "sex" see FN 7; on "role," FN 61. The term "sex role," in ordinary speech, is of post-World War II origin. Sex differences fascinated the Victorians (see FN 67). During the first two decades of the twentieth century, scientific interest fastened particularly on the difference in measurable intelligence between men and women (see Gould, FN 58). In the late twenties, the creation of scales for the measurement of femininity and masculinity that manifest themselves in non-intellectual characteristics became good business. For orientation to the literature, see Julia Ann Sherman, *On the Psychology of Women: A Survey of Empirical Studies* (Springfield, MA: C. Thomas, 1971) and a critical complement to Sherman's work: Joyce J. Walstedt, *The Psychology of Women: A Partially Annotated Bibliography* (Pittsburgh: KNOW, 1972); this also lists non-professional studies. Under the influence of psychoanalysis in the thirties, differential emotional needs were scientifically identified and operationalized for use by therapists, social workers, and educators. By the fifties, it was particularly the differential tendency toward homosexuality that seemed important to researchers. For the historiography of sex differences, see Eleanor E. Maccoby and Carol N. Jacklin, *The Psychology of Sex Differences* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974). To get a perspective on the importance that the sex role has acquired in the social sciences, see H.A.D. Astin, *Sex Roles: A Research Bibliography* (Rockville, MD: National Institute of Mental Health, 1975).

64 Melville J. Herskovits, *Economic Anthropology* (New York: Norton, pbk., 1965). The original title was *Economic Life of Primitive Peoples*, 1935. For the thirty succeeding years, most quotations on the sexual division of labor in handbooks of sociology written in English and other languages were nothing but passages lifted from the seventh chapter of this book.
sentence abounds with assumptions: The frontier dividing them from us is our literacy; all people live an economic life—Homo sapiens is always Homo oeconomicus—and thus act under the assumption of scarcity; the author knows what “work” is; finally, the pre-rational sex division of labor is the great mystery modern anthropology must attempt to explain. In the meantime, the vast literature Herskovits mentions has grown tremendously, but only a tiny fraction of it clarifies the distinction between gender and sex.

How the study of sex roles has muddled the issue of gender can be easily understood by looking at the literature of three periods during which “women’s work” was in vogue: Victorian ethnography, New Deal cultural anthropology, and recent feminist studies. The Victorians believed in social evolution, and they hunted for data in the writings of travelers and missionaries. Strange, unexpected behavior fascinated them as much as the extraordinary life forms that Darwin discovered on the Galapagos Islands. But, unlike their informants, they had an urge to classify what they found. Like bones, behavior had to be fitted into categories that could be arranged according to evolutionary steps, and whose culmination was England’s Victorian middle class, the ultimate civilization, the fittest to survive. In the United States, an alliance of women and clergymen read into these reports proof for the timeless quality of woman’s role as a homemaker, of woman’s nature as a gift to the menfolk, who must venture out into a rough life to subdue nature for their sake. Anthropology of the sex role began as a scientific proof for what Ann Douglas has called “the sentimental lie.” In this context, women’s work could now be understood as a mark of the harsh treatment inflicted on the weaker sex by primitive cultures. Progress could be seen as the enclosure of women into genteel domesticity, and a progressive specialization of status and vocation between the hardworking provider and his woman, liberated from the burdens of production.65

For the next two generations, interest in women’s work was

65 VICTORIAN FEMINISM

Victorian feminism succeeded in making the relations between men and women in primitive societies a fascinating topic of conversation. But the evidence they found of a great variety of savage behavior was construed by Victorian anthropologists as proof of an evolutionary pattern that led to the universal norm of the bourgeois family. See Elizabeth Fee, low, but between 1935 and 1937 it exploded again. Within less than two years three classic studies were published. Margaret Mead stressed that biological sex alone cannot possibly account for the socio-cultural differences in personality structure between male and female that we observe everywhere.66 She sought to


66 SEX AND TEMPERAMENT

Margaret Mead, Sex & Temperament in Three Primitive Societies (New York: Morrow, pbk., 1963) and Erich Fromm and Michael Macoby,
elucidate these differences by recourse to the psychological con-
cepts of her time, all ultimately founded on a Freudian reading of
American family life. In the same year Ralph Linton focused on
the contrast between male and female behavior. He was the first
to use the term role (in 1932) and described the almost limitless
plasticity of the sex roles that a culture can provide for its
members. Behavior rather than personality was his interest.
Finally, George Murdock\(^\text{67}\) began to publish his Ethnog

\(^\text{67}\) Social Character in a Mexican Village (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice
Hall, 1970) mark the beginning and probably the end of the attempt to
use the genderless categories of psychoanalysis (from in conjunction
with Marx) to explain how temperament or social character shape the
relationship between men and women under very different social condi-
tions.

67 ROLE COMPLEMENTARITY

Whereas Victorians focused their attention on the opposite spheres for
which nature has destined masculine and feminine humans (FN 65),
Americans during the Great Depression were particularly concerned
about the division of productive labor by sex. True to form, many
thousands of societal traits from many hundreds of societies were
tabulated and tested for cross-associations, erecting structures of con-
jecture upon the foundation of significance tests that produced invalid
hypotheses despite the fact that all data presented were, statistically,
significant; see A.D. Coulit and R. Haberstein, Cross-Tabulations of Murdock’s
Ethnographic Sample (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press,
1965). For a simple introduction to the data collected, see George P.
Murdock, “Comparative Data on the Division of Labor by Sex,” Social
Forces 15 (1937): 551-553; and, for quick reference to the opus, the same
author’s, “Ethnographic Atlas: A Summary,” Ethnology 6, no. 2 (1967):
109-236. Dry, shredded, but sometimes useful information on who does
what, where, can be found in his epigones, Joel Aronoff and William D.
Crano, “A Re-examination of the Cross-Cultural Principles of Task
Segregation and Sex-Role Differentiation in the Family,” American
Sociological Review 40 (February 1975): 12-20; Alain Lomax and Conrad
M. Arensberg, “A Worldwide Evolutionary Classification of Cultures
by Subsistence Systems,” Current Anthropology 18, no. 4 (December
1977): 659-708; and William D. Crano and Joel Aronoff, “A Cross-
Cultural Study of Expressive and Instrumental Role Complementarit
461-71. The attempt to discover universal tendencies to associate
certain types of tasks with one or the other sex, cross-culturally, has led
to invalid or to trivial results as often as it has been attempted. Women
are associated statistically with work the anthropologists perceive as

Atlas. He was primarily concerned with “work” and how it is
divided between men and women. Glancing at his charts, you can
learn that Okinawans of both sexes participate in the making of
pots, but males do appreciably more than females; among
Druzes, only women are potters; and among the Koreans, only
men. For eleven types of activity among hundreds of different
cultures, nine different degrees of male-female participation are
given. But Mead’s insistence on personality, Linton’s on
behavior, and Murdock’s on work only blur the distinction
between gender and sex role, which must be made intelligible.

Around the middle of the century, interest in women’s distinct-
ive activities fell dormant again. Modernization was on the
agenda. For the first time, anthropologists were on the payroll
of policy makers, employed to identify obstacles to progress.
Precisely during those decades when participant observation was
refined as a method for reporting in detail and with delicacy on
who does what in a village or hut, gender-bound behavior was
treated mostly as a barrier to development, a sex-role stereotype,
a cause of low productivity and an essential ingredient of poverty.
Anglo-American women’s studies of the early seventies
thoroughly altered this situation and organized a third wave of
interest in women, this time from a feminist perspective.\(^\text{68}\)

\(^\text{68}\) “repetitive, interruptible, non-dangerous, and based on simple techni-
quies,” “tasks implying low risk and performed close to home,” “of low
social value,” “tasks whose relative values are more resistant to change
than the techniques used in their performance.” Finally, the search for
statistical associations has led to the “discovery” of exceptions. Where
Murdock arrived at a “world equal interchangeability rate” of tasks
between men and women of 16 percent, this rate rises to 81 percent
among two sub-groups of the Western Bontoc Igorot in Luzon: Albert
S. Bacadayan, “Mechanistic Cooperation and Sexual Equality Among
the Western Bontoc,” in Alice Schlegel, ed., *Sexual Stratification* (New
York: Columbia University Press, 1977): 270-91. Still the most readable
and lively critique of the myths generating these hypotheses is Ann

68 FEMININE SUBORDINATION

Many of the studies on differences between men and women outside
industrial society made during the first half of the seventies infer that
the lack of publicly recognized power and authority for women is a sign
the male bias in women’s contribution to the first two bodies of research became a field of study. Soon, the work of several generations of anthropologists provided abundant evidence of an almost grotesque inability even to suspect what women do. But so far, most of these new studies have only reinforced, albeit from


a female perspective, the same fundamental assumptions about gender as a primitive form of sex role, an assumption that, at first implicitly and then explicitly, had guided the earlier anthropologists. For the most part then, women’s studies have acted as a further camouflage of gender.

household, the power that counts seems to be the power in the house. My distinction between gender and sex, and their relative dominance in different societies, could dispel much of the confusion so far inevitable when the “subordination of women” is discussed. See especially the literature in FN 21, 84.