

Treating Me Like an Object: Reading Catharine MacKinnon's Feminism

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Man fucks woman; subject verb object.

Catharine MacKinnon,
'Feminism, marxism, method, and the state'

Men are strangely positioned in relation to feminism. Most feminist writing is written by women, addressed to other women; it enters and constitutes the circle of women's common concerns. Feminist discourse is not shaped for men's reception; they are the silenced problem in this situation. If they listen, they listen as eavesdroppers. When one has not been clearly and directly addressed, there are peculiar risks to speaking: one may be judged an obtuse and intrusive boor, who ventures where he is not invited, and speaks out of turn. In fact it is not clear that feminist discourse promises men a turn. Men may have always already had theirs. A turn for men to speak on the questions of feminism, without speaking out of turn, may be what the play space of *Feminism and Institutions* is all about. But if men are excluded in advance from speaking in the space of feminist discourse, this turn may be false or forced in some fundamental way, and then the play structure of this collection will not really change this fundamental fact.

However, there are reasons to believe that feminism's exclusion of men is not complete. That men are addressed by feminism, not directly, as partners in dialogue, but indirectly, may be opined from the fact that many feminists covertly expect men to 'get the message'. Only in this way could feminism redraw the social charter, by restructuring everything from housework to pleasure. Silenced in advance by a discourse which discusses social arrangements in which they have a vital interest, men are positioned to *overhear* language to which they are not invited to respond. Viewed from the standpoint of a democratic ideology of the 'free' trans-

mission of ideas, this collective silencing of men (whatever the difference of their politics) may seem unfair. But given the history of gender relations, it is strangely apposite. For men have been positioned in relation to feminist discourse in a fashion which seems to echo the way feminism has demonstrated women to have been positioned by masculinist discourse: they find themselves compelled to overhear in silence a language not addressed to them, but which is supposed to guide or change their behavior. The embarrassment which men may feel operates as a repetition of what men have made women feel many times before.

Offered the opportunity for a critical engagement with feminism, I find myself immediately distrusting two of the most readily available modes of response. The objective critical analysis presents itself as that which can be seen by any observer dispassionate enough to look. Such an analysis would stand apart from what feminism is trying to do at the many levels of its operation and work, so as to describe its value, and the limits of its value. This form of address assumes that I am speaking neither as a male nor a female, but as a rational being, an epistemological stance beneath which feminism finds a covert male bias under its overt neutrality. The drawbacks of an objective criticism of feminism should be all too evident. Such a way of writing obscures the several ways in which I find myself already thrown into a personal, social, and political relationship to feminism: the anger of feminist critique of the subordination of women to man in this culture is not just another 'idea' out there for me to consider, but is a critical discourse aimed at men in general, and all persons, whatever their/our differences, who have learned to be men, including me. This social and critical agon is already operating to shape my approach to feminism, throwing me into a hermeneutic relation to feminism which is prior to an abstract relation based on the claims of truth. The very cultural object with which I would begin dialogue - feminism - has itself put in question the possibility of anything like the 'dispassionate' neutrality and objectivity that traditional codes of academic analysis have idealized.

There is another pathway for engaging feminism which seems just as problematic as the methods of objective knowledge: the earnest sympathetic dialogue. Here I would begin by defining myself as self-present to an experience labeled in advance as 'male', so, from that 'male position' I might respond to what I understand feminism to be saying. Perhaps adopting an engagingly personal voice, I could begin by affirming my broad solidarity with feminism; this would entitle me to describe my

unease with various particular positions of feminism. A sincere tone would be requisite. The sympathy with which I would describe my understanding of struggles not my own might be paired with an acknowledgment of differences of gender viewpoint which could never be completely effaced. To legitimize such a mode of address, I could refer, in imitation of the personal mode familiar within feminism, to the contingencies of history which might make me less resistant to feminist criticism than many men. My earliest experience predisposed me to know women as equals. In growing up, I was closest to my twin sister. She and I were raised by a mother who was a successful writer, whose mother was in her turn a famous opera singer.

What makes such a mode of address impossible is its presumption. It presumes upon a shared social agenda which may no longer exist - or may never have existed. It assumes that the difference between men and women is of a fixed nature, and can be defined; that across such a distance, subjects self-present to each other in speech can engage in a dialogue, where men and women could, with good will and the right openness to each other, talk their way to some collective understanding and social truth. The feminist critique of our culture and society may be so fundamental and pervasive that it has thrown the agents, ground-rules and agenda of that social dialogue into question. After feminism, it appears less clear what women or men are or want, and if they were to know, how their differences and commonalities might be construed. Initiating a dialogue in such a situation would require that one understands one's desire in relation to feminism, and can name it without all the ruses of social masquerade; and that within the vertiginous whirl of the war now going on between masculinist and feminist positions, and within the various feminisms, one could assume the role of that diplomat in gender relations who could define the conditions for a peace settlement binding within the new heterosexual commonweal.

To respond to feminism personally and as a male would merely implicate this essay in what I take to be one of the abiding limitations of too much of current argumentation in and about feminism - speaking from the standpoint of one's gender. If it has become too facile to declare - as Plato, Freud, and Woolf in very different ways have done - that everyone is bisexual, then of late it has surely become too comforting to suppose that one's gender offers a pure and absolute place from which to speak. Instead, it may just lead to a charade in control of the subject, where the speaker assumes not only that she/he knows their diacritical difference

from the opposite sex, but that they comprehend, in the secure, chummy and unreflective way in which one might belong to a club, team, or party, what their own sex is, and/or 'has in common'. Speaking from the standpoint of gender has become a way not of investigating, but of erasing the necessity or full complexity of one's position, whatever the sources of that position are.

Feminism confronts its reader with the problem which has always challenged its own discursive formations: how to name, hear, or describe an other (in this instance, 'woman') so that that other does not, through the work of one's writing and thought, become a version of the same ('man' for example, or what 'man' has always known 'woman' to be). A dialogic response to feminism needs to come to terms with what Simone de Beauvoir emphasizes in the introduction to *The Second Sex*: the non-symmetrical, non-complementary aspect of woman's position as 'other', opposite man. The objective and personal responses to feminism seek to occlude the challenge of this other in two different ways: first through the absorption of the other into a comprehending scientific subject; and second through a settling of this otherness into a knowable difference-between-the-sexes. There is a third way to annul otherness, all the more subtle for the way it seems to be doing just the opposite: by staging a melodramatic encounter of man and woman, where the male speaker postulates as his interlocutor a romantically enigmatic Other. This myth of woman-as-sphinx turns out to be familiar and comforting enough; *she* quickly becomes a site for oedipal heroism. Thus my problem becomes, how can one begin an exchange in language with feminism where the otherness of the other would not be reduced by the form of the exchange, so that the variety and ambiguity of the differences between men and women, reader and text, myself and feminism, would not, as part of the game, have to be declared in advance in a clear and explicit way, but would be allowed to work themselves out over the course of that response?

That the question of men's relationship with feminism has become a timely issue for our intellectual culture is suggested by the publication, during the final revisions of this essay, of the collection *Men in Feminism*.¹ There male and female critics develop varied and subtle theoretical reflections on the same topic which I am exploring: what is the position of those men who have read and endorsed a good deal of the feminist critique of masculinist culture? The collection is compelling for the way each analysis of this question documents the cultural problem it would explore. If in psychoanalysis, dream analysis becomes a second secondary revision of

the dream, then in cultural analysis, the secondary revision of *Men in Feminism* offers a strangely new yet strangely familiar transposition of the social text of feminism. By describing my reservations about this collection, I can offer a clearer sense of my chosen point of departure for a critical engagement with feminism. *Men in Feminism* intentionally provokes us to think about those men who are or wish to be 'in' feminism. They might be 'in' feminism conceptually, through their endorsement of feminism's political positions, but they also may be, more problematically, 'in' feminism in another way: they desire to enter (violate, enjoy, experience) feminism in a fashion which is analogous with the way a male (lover?, seducer?, rapist?) might seek to enter woman. This analogy forces us to confront the necessity of a sexual element in men's relation to feminism. The metaphors of sexuality may write itself into every phrase of that relation. But just as feminism critiques the recurrent sexualizing of women by masculinist culture, the effort to analogize feminism with women can displace and attenuate the critical force of feminism. Because feminism is a discursive formation which develops a comprehensive critique of culture, it becomes limiting and partial to take feminism as a figure of women, and to reduce men's engagement with feminism to a sexual exchange, whether personal or collective, real or fantasmatic.

In this essay, I diverge from the implied ground rules of *Men in Feminism*. In order to debate the problem of men in feminism, a number of the essays in that volume assume or define a politically correct feminism for men. In the volume's exchanges, the issue of a prescriptive 'political correctness' becomes a matter for explicit debate.² It is this implied consensus, however tenuous and plural, which allows the critical gaze to pass over, through, and beyond the many issues raised by feminism. This sense of terrain already traveled allows that reflexive gesture by which men and women can join to debate men's proper (or improper) relation to feminism. Though the resulting articulation of positions is fascinating, it risks traveling too fast. By contrast, I would like to retrace several steps on this implied itinerary, so as to understand and even contest what I take to be some of the fundamental conceptual problems of feminism, as they express themselves in that specific form of feminism which Catharine MacKinnon develops. Thus, to re-engage the metaphors of *Men in Feminism*, my own critical engagement with feminism is neither launched from within feminism, nor from some hostile or antagonistic position outside feminism, but from the region of feminism's border with other discursive formations. This boundary position does not involve me in claims

to any special objectivity about feminism. Instead it suggests my sense that the critical issues raised by feminism are not yet resolved. By staying behind to read some of feminism's initial positions, I hope to be able to come to terms with the political rhetoric and cultural work of feminism.

It is the gambit of this essay that a critical exchange with feminism may best be attempted through a detailed reading of particular feminist texts. I have chosen selected writings of Catharine MacKinnon because her work brings the political task of feminism into the foreground of feminist intellectual work. But while MacKinnon's essays have been influential, and they attempt to summarize and reconcile many of the central concepts of feminism, her final positions are neither typical nor 'mainstream'. Her positions, and the assumptions about social relations out of which they emerge, are at odds with liberal humanist feminism, and with French feminism, which she explicitly criticizes. A brief description of MacKinnon's work will suggest why it offers a valuable test case of an effort to do theoretical criticism which is also politically engaged. In the early 1980s Catharine MacKinnon published a two-part essay in *Signs* entitled 'Feminism, marxism, method, and the state', which sought to bring together a broad range of feminist critical work of the 1960s and 1970s into a internally consistent synthesis. To do this MacKinnon carries out a strong reading of Marxism³ so that the resources of its critique of social and political domination can be put to work for feminism. She does not offer a theory about feminism, but about feminist theory - theory which aims to advance feminist goals. Thus Part I of her essay, subtitled 'An agenda for theory', is explicitly paired with the more practical sequel, subtitled 'Toward feminist jurisprudence'; and both these essays need to be read against the practice her theory is intended to explain, justify and advance. In her book, *Sexual Harassment of Working Women*, MacKinnon sought to define the legal context for interpreting sexual harassment as a form of sex discrimination. In 1985 she worked with city officials of Indianapolis to draft an ordinance against pornography, many of the terms of which were later endorsed in 1986 by the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography.

Though MacKinnon's final views - on everything from rape and pornography to civil liberties and the state - are not typical, the systematic radicality of MacKinnon's writing offers special advantages for my reading. MacKinnon often takes to their logical limit ideas which other feminists invoke in a more guarded and tentative way. Thus, when it comes to the use of a fundamental idea of feminism - like the idea that

masculinist culture makes woman the manipulated object of male subjectivity - MacKinnon's work allows us to read the metaphysical presuppositions, full tendency, and practical effects of this idea. But what is the value of my resorting to *close reading* of political texts? For MacKinnon's work has the tone of a manifesto, carrying the urgent intention that its ideas be understood 'as they are written'. The bold directness and chiseled concision of MacKinnon's style are indices of her clear purpose, polemical decision, and fixed determination. To take account of the pragmatic political tendency of MacKinnon's work it is essential not simply to bracket, but to make a detailed accounting of the theme, content, and intent of her feminism. But we must do more. Because this is a 'reading', in the sense used in literary studies, it will take seriously, and seek to interpret, the language-bound rhetorical turns of MacKinnon's text, everything from the *way* she frames her argument, to the *tone and coloring* of her language, and the *details* of her text. I assume that these are crucial aspects of what allows this text to do its political and conceptual work. To use modes of reading developed in the areas of literary analysis and psychoanalysis to analyze the latent logic of MacKinnon's essay, from within the language of its own argument, will be indispensable if we are to release some of the unconscious tendencies of MacKinnon's feminist writing. My reading will seek to overcome the separation between logic and rhetoric, content and form, concept and style through which the conventional discourses of social analysis occult their authority. Only then can we hope to come to terms with the divergence between what feminism says, states, sees, and what it expresses dialogically and performs discursively. This divergence within feminism's language, while often obscured or denied, is a constitutive part of what allows feminism to change the value of women in culture.⁴

The dialectical emergence of the feminist subject

MacKinnon's first *Signs* essay describes and enacts an event of central importance to feminism: the emergence of a feminist subject who can assume a newly empowered place on the stage of history. This event is presented indirectly through another story or scenario: an encounter between feminism and Marxism, whereby feminism becomes the revealed truth of the Marxist critique of domination, and through the feminist 'method' of 'consciousness raising', the instrument of a revolutionary

encounter with state power. MacKinnon first describes how feminist theory is weakened when it is not fortified by the encounter with Marxism she advocates. Too often feminism has been assumed to be nothing more than 'a loose collection of factors, complaints, and issues which, taken together, describe rather than explain the misfortunes of the female sex'.⁵ By contrast MacKinnon states the ambitious goal for feminist theory her article is to set the agenda for reaching: 'The challenge is to demonstrate that feminism systematically converges upon a central explanation of sex inequality through an approach distinctive to its subject yet applicable to the whole of social life, including class' (p. 14). By this argument, feminism is not to be a self-contained alternative to Marxism, simply another theory one chooses because, for example, one is a woman. Feminism, by MacKinnon's account, must encompass and complete, go through and beyond what Marxism does by explaining what Marxism can't explain (sex discrimination) as well as explaining what it does try to explain. Thus it is a global project, with explanatory power over the whole social field. Feminism, MacKinnon implies, is not just the next step in social theory; it is the next step in history. What are the conceptual and narrative means by which MacKinnon makes this surpassing of Marxism by feminism seem possible or likely?

MacKinnon takes the speculative dialectic first formalized by Hegel, and adopted for revolutionary social theory and practice by Marx, and makes it the instrument, engine, and plotting device of her own narrative of feminism's victory over Marxism. MacKinnon's use of a dialectic allows her to do several things: to take the critique of class domination developed by Marx and extend it to a feminist critique of the subordination of woman; and to describe, summarize, and critique the great variety of feminist work, with its divergent premises, so they become contributing moments in a newly unified and conceptually coherent feminism; finally, the dialectical form of her essay makes the progress from social transformation led by Marxism to that mounted by a radical feminism, seem logically, rhetorically, and historically inevitable. How is the dialectic able to serve MacKinnon in all these ways? While the word 'challenge' in the phrase 'the challenge is to demonstrate' may suggest the effort, whether individual or collective, necessary to launching a feminist theory, the conceptual and rhetorical appeal of the dialectic comes from the autonomy of motion it implies. Like a game, intense rivalry or a chemical reaction, once antagonists or agents or ideas are drawn into the ordered oppositional encounter of the dialectic, some sort of forward movement and meta-

morphosis to a higher form appears inevitable. It is like a perpetual motion machine, whose movement is periodic, but spirally advancing and forever new. Moments of transformation and overturning approach when there is a specular reciprocity between the terms which encounter one another, then, suddenly, a determinate negation of the differences between terms in preparation for a movement to a higher level. These changes of state are presumed to be efficient: everything that existed at the earlier stage is broken down (undergoes destruction), but then is raised up (to new forms and uses). The wonderful magic of the dialectic consists in its apparent autonomy: there is no manipulation of this sequence of change from outside the dialectic, and yet change is neither random, nor without direction: it unfolds in a logical direction through the unhindered encounter of the terms/antagonists of the dialectical narrative.⁶

MacKinnon begins the dialectical encounter of feminism and Marxism with an extended analogy, and develops it through a (mock) dialogue or debate. The first sentence of 'Feminism, marxism, method, and the state: an agenda for theory' defines the initial structuring analogy of the essay: 'Sexuality is to feminism what work is to marxism: that which is most one's own, yet most taken away' (p. 1). In the paragraphs which follow, MacKinnon aligns each basic term of the Marxist critique of capitalism with a term of feminism: sexuality is analogous with work, because both are made of mind and matter, both are expropriated for the use of others, and both are socially constructed and constructing. In a similar way desire is analogized with value, heterosexuality with class, gender and family with capital, reproduction with production. For both feminism and Marxism, control is declared to be the central political issue. This set of analogies serves to set Marxism and feminism opposite one another, so that, 'confronted on equal terms, these theories pose fundamental questions for each other' (p. 3).

MacKinnon next stages a dialogue, which will explore differences as well as similarities. In reading this fictional 'dialogue' one soon notices that the reference of the terms 'feminism' and 'marxism' is overdetermined. They are not just rival systems for choreographing social liberation; they also figure two gender positions - 'marxism' for men, and 'feminism' for women. MacKinnon rehearses the struggle between these two. Acting as fair-minded referee, she describes how Marxism and feminism have usually tried to reduce, accuse, subsume the other. The Marxist critique of feminism is rehearsed: analysis of society in terms of sex ignores class, divides the proletariat, is too often carried on in the

name of liberal and individualistic values, on behalf of privileged middle-class women. Feminism criticizes Marxism as a system which is male-defined, obscures woman's distinctive social experience and unity, and seeks a change in class relations that would leave women's inequality to men unchanged. Thus, MacKinnon finds that each accuses the other of reform, 'where (again in each one's terms) a fundamental overthrow is required' (p. 4).

MacKinnon assumes that women are not defined by any intrinsic factor like biology, but are a social construction produced by and for male power. This leads to the particularly extreme negation of woman which other feminists have noted in MacKinnon:

A woman is a being who identifies and is identified as one whose sexuality exists for someone else, who is socially male. . . . If . . . female sexuality cannot be lived or spoken or felt or even somatically sensed apart from its enforced definition, so that it is its own lack, then there is no such thing as a woman as such, there are only walking embodiments of men's projected needs. (pp. 19-20)

Donna Haraway remarks on the irony which besets this definition: 'MacKinnon's radical theory is totalizing in the extreme . . . producing what Western patriarchy itself never succeeded in doing - feminists' consciousness of the non-existence of women, except as products of men's desire.'⁷ MacKinnon's characterization of woman as a blank screen, given her only visible definition by male power, is not just historically descriptive; by the formal rules of the dialectic, a determinate negation of 'woman' will be essential for her emergence as a newly empowered subject, the woman (of the future) her essay heralds.

Woman can begin to exist in a new way through a process or method called 'consciousness raising', a pathway of inquiry grounded in what MacKinnon calls the 'feminist concept of the personal as political'. Consciousness raising has a special role to play in this dialectical progression: as 'a concept', in a more technical sense of the Hegelian *Begriff*, it functions as a hook to carry a term (in this case woman) in a movement which combines destruction, saving, and raising up (called 'sublation', or *aufheben*) on to a higher level of the dialectic. In this way woman goes from being the shattered and negated victim of male power to being someone who lays claim to a newly formed and raised consciousness. MacKinnon's account turns feminist 'consciousness raising' into a pun

on the Hegelian dialectic. The superiority to Marxism MacKinnon claims for this method on behalf of feminism is based upon its ability to allow women to confront the way domination operates both inside and outside the victim. The personal interiorizing tendency of this 'method' allows feminism to take the way man has objectified woman, and interiorize that 'woman' as part of a dialectical movement beyond masculinist cultural formations. Both inside and outside 'male paradigms', woman's subjectivity has grown more comprehensive than man's.

The emergence of the female subject of feminism is made possible by her overcoming of the status she has been given by masculinist culture - that of an object. This apparently happens dialectically, but if we look more closely at MacKinnon's analysis we shall find something else. Let's locate the precise steps by which MacKinnon argues for the possibility of woman's moving beyond subjection as object to male subjectivity, to becoming a Subject in her own right. According to MacKinnon, the male 'objectification' of woman is not just an attitudinal or ideological matter, but that which shapes sexuality into 'a material reality of women's lives' (p. 25). Borrowing from the Marxist analysis of the commodity fetish, MacKinnon describes the way woman is constructed and valued as a fetish object by the social relations tailored to male interest: 'Like the value of a commodity, women's sexual desirability is fetishized: it is made to appear a quality of the object itself, spontaneous and inherent, independent of the social relation which creates it, uncontrolled by the force that requires it' (p. 26). This leads, according to MacKinnon, to certain degraded kinds of sexual practice: 'it helps if the object cooperates: hence, the vaginal orgasm; hence faked orgasms altogether. Women's sexualness, like male prowess, is no less real for being mythic. It is embodied' (pp. 26-7). According to MacKinnon these objectifications of woman's sexuality are the 'primary process of the subjection of women' (p. 27). A couple of paragraphs later, MacKinnon will stage the decisive overcoming of woman's subjection. But before this can happen, and as part of this article's sustained analogical relationship with Marxism (and the relationship with man figured indirectly through Marxism), a crucial argument is launched: MacKinnon distinguishes feminism from Marxism on the issue of objectification and alienation. This apparently abstruse theoretical debate is the place where MacKinnon plots woman's victory over the object:

Objectification in marxist materialism is thought to be the founda-

tion of human freedom, the work process whereby a subject becomes embodied in products and relationships. Alienation is the socially contingent distortion of that process, a reification of products and relations which prevents them from being, and being seen as, dependent on human agency. But from the point of view of the object, objectification *is* alienation. For women, there is no distinction between objectification and alienation because women have not authored objectifications, we have been them. Women have been the nature, the matter, the acted upon, to be subdued by the acting subject seeking to embody himself in the social world. (pp. 27-8)

From within the narrative of the master/slave episode in Hegel, part of the slave's hidden power comes from his greater proximity to the object world through work; within Marx's translation of that story, the worker's power comes from the union of the revolutionary consciousness of his own alienation with the power which accrues to the workers because of their greater proximity to the material conditions of life. In this passage of MacKinnon's text, the crucial juncture in her argument comes when, after she has distinguished the Marxist concepts of 'objectification' and 'alienation', she then asserts the woman's point of view as not that of the slave/worker, that is the subject who is inferior to another subject (the master/the capitalist/man), but as 'the point of view of the object'. Woman *is* the object. Not only does this intensify woman's subjection to man, as placed below even the worker, who at least can work upon the objects of the world. It takes woman completely out of the world of subjects. This is important, for this also takes woman out of the pathway of mediations, by which she could, like the slave in Hegel's speculative dialectic, or the worker in Marx's materialist dialectic, ascend through the social world of subjects. Instead within MacKinnon's account, subject and object become two terms in a trope of antithesis, here coded to become a pure moral opposition. This moral condemnation of the object, and the position of the object, prepares not for a complex and imperfect dialectical progression, but rather for the reversal by which the woman ascends to a position of pure subjectivity (as Woman). This abolition of the object is most crucial, because without some un-sublated notion of the object and the material, MacKinnon has inadvertently given her argument over to a radical idealism. Below we shall try to gauge some of the effects of this idealism.

In the course of MacKinnon's account the meaning of the terms 'subject' and 'object' have undergone significant change. They no longer

seem to have the positional and relational status which allows subjects and objects in a sentence to reverse places, or one human subject to take another as its object, who is in *its* turn then capable, as a second human subject, of taking the first as its object. This is the sort of morally neutral usage which Freud draws upon when he describes the infant's relation to the mother's body as 'object-relations theory'. Instead, MacKinnon's analysis draws upon the semantic resources of the word 'object' as found in the phrase 'treating me like an object'. This, as we have seen, is what MacKinnon says masculinist culture has done to women since its beginnings. But MacKinnon radicalizes this accusation by moving from the term denoting a simile or comparison - male subjects have treated women subjects 'like', in the same unfeeling and inhuman way, one might treat an object - to a condition of being: within the system of male power woman *is* an object.

The counter-movement MacKinnon's essay describes - woman's oscillation from the abject position of object to being a subject - is justified by the assertion of what might be called a philosophic or interpretive voluntarism. Through MacKinnon's account, the opposition subject/object is no longer a fundamental distinction of philosophy or grammar, but instead becomes a notion which is dispensable by fiat. She writes: 'Having been objectified as sexual beings while stigmatized as ruled by subjective passions, women reject the distinction between knowing subject and known object - the division between subject and objective postures - as the means to comprehend social life. . . . woman's interest lies in overthrowing the distinction itself' (p. 22). Notice that in these sentences the opposition passes from being the agent and object of knowledge to being two 'postures' a single subject might assume, to finally being a distinction which can be 'overthrown'. One sees what is problematic about this gesture, if one asks: what is it that in this sentence calls, from the authority of their experience as sufferers, for the 'overthrowing' of the distinction between subject and object? It can't be anything but a subject. There is no way for the subject or *cogito* (a person defined as subject by her practice of self-consciousness) to stand outside her being as subject, simply because she wishes to do so. It seems to be this two-sidedness claimed for consciousness raising - 'it is at once common sense expression and critical articulation of concepts' (p. 22) which allows MacKinnon to think feminism has gone beyond what she labels disapprovingly as the 'subject/object split'. But this does not mean that MacKinnon's *own* ways of thinking and writing have gone beyond such an opposition. Thus right up to the

last sentence of her essay, Marxism and man still lie outside the compass of woman's subjectivity, and are made the objects of her analysis. The positional and oppositional status of subject and object has reasserted itself beneath the voluntaristic interdiction against their use.

If one were to state the plot of MacKinnon's 'agenda for theory' in one sentence it would have the pure oppositional rhythm of a revenge fiction: woman goes from being the object of male power to being a subject in her own right. By becoming heir to the subjectivity once reserved for the male subject, the raising of woman's consciousness would be the story of woman's ascension from victim to victor, from object to subjecthood. Directed by a rational analysis of power, and enabled by the morally justified abolition of objects, MacKinnon's projection of woman toward the condition of pure subject is readable in two ways. First, MacKinnon concludes Part One of her essay with this climactic image of reversal:

Compared with marxism, the place of thought and things in method and reality are reversed in a seizure of power that penetrates subject with object and theory with practice. In a dual motion, feminism turns marxism inside out and on its head. . . . feminism revolutionizes politics. (p. 30)

Revolution happens through reversal. Feminism can take charge from her inferior brother, Marxism, and turn him 'inside out and on [his] head' because of the claim that she has overcome the split between subject and object, theory and practice. This superiority as method allows feminism to carry out another kind of reversal: the 'seizure of power' by which power can be taken out of male hands. Thus part two of this article characterizes the state as male, and begins to frame the 'feminist jurisprudence' which can work to open the power traditionally focused in the state to manipulation by feminism. MacKinnon's adoption of this strategy in framing her ordinance against pornography in Indianapolis necessitated forming alliances with the Right. In debate with feminists at a conference on 'Feminist discourse, moral values and the law', sponsored by the Buffalo Law School, on 19 October 1984, MacKinnon defends this strategy. The language she uses offers an example of the masterful female subject, making calculations of advantage to women from the position of a rational transparency of conceptual operations:

We are looking to empower women. We have the audacity to think

that we might be able to use the state to help do it. It is either going to do something real for us or it is not. We can decide that the state is not an arena to use; we can also decide that it is not an arena to use in this case.⁸

Feminism's newly empowered position in relation to Marxism suggests what has been the deeper rhetorical tendency of MacKinnon's analysis. The ascension of the Woman to the position of Subject is presented as a dialectical progress; but beneath the dialectic MacKinnon explicitly invokes, her text is determined by the trope of antithesis, no longer understood as a single moment in a dialectical progression, but rather as an operation which takes two terms and (as implied by the etymology from the Greek) 'place[s] [them] against' one another, as opposing terms. This means there is to be nothing of subject in object, object in subject, man in woman, woman in man. Antithesis is the trope which facilitates the chiasmic turn by which purely oppositional terms undergo a pure reversal of priority. The woman/object (of masculinist discourse) becomes subject; the man/subject becomes object (of a feminist discourse). Objects had only apparently been abolished, for this argument does not move us into a purely rational domain of spirit or absolute knowledge. Instead the new objects are Marxism - 'turned upside down and inside out' - and 'man', now objectified as the Objectifier of woman - rapist, pornographer, and wielder of victimizing, illegitimate forms of state power. There is an irony about the 'audacious' feminist manipulation of state power MacKinnon advocates: such a manipulation seems to confer upon the feminist subject those qualities of mastery which seemed the properties of the male subject from the perspective of woman-as-object.

MacKinnon's narrative of the encounter of Marxism and feminism, man and woman, issues, four paragraphs from the end of her essay, in a description of the climactic overturning of the masculinist system as we know it. In this culmination of the reading-lesson this essay has been, MacKinnon describes what her ideal reader will have learned to do to the powerful structures of male domination which have encircled her - a demystification of the 'reality'-effect of male power as it has constructed woman as nothing:

Male power is real; it is just not what it claims to be, namely, the only reality. Male power is myth that makes itself true. What it is to raise consciousness is to confront male power in this duality: as total

on one side and a delusion on the other. In consciousness raising, women learn they have *learned* that men are everything, women their negation, but that the sexes are equal. The content of the message is revealed true and false at the same time; in fact, each part reflects the other transvalued. If 'men are all, women their negation' is taken as social criticism rather than simple description, it becomes clear for the first time that women *are* men's equals, everywhere in chains. (p. 28)

This moment *sounds* dialectical: we have the moment of contradiction (woman negated, but actually equal), then the revolution of terms which enables the overthrow of a prior system. In the process a chain of opposing terms (male power, woman; the real, myth; total, a delusion; everything, their negation) reflect and negate one another, as different levels of knowledge collide and conflict, so there can emerge a radically new self-consciousness for Woman. But that this account is non-dialectical is suggested by the way nothing is extracted from the secondary term 'man' by and for the elevated term 'woman.' MacKinnon's essay began with a quite overt, partially dialectical encounter between feminism and Marxism, which enabled MacKinnon to take a good deal from Marxism for feminism: a critique of domination, the idea of commodity fetish, the revolutionary consciousness of the oppressed, a critique of an insidious system of cultural oppression, and a scenario of liberation. But here, by essay's end, the oscillation between antithetical terms of this set of Manichaean oppositions issues in an epiphany about the mythic and delusional quality of what has been taken as real (male power, woman's negation). The stark polarities of this argument seem justified, at an affective and rhetorical level of the argument, by the all too real abuses of women by empowered men. But the conceptual career of this argument, with its realignment of men and women in terms of abstract and idealized categories (like myth and reality), helps guide MacKinnon toward antithetical representations of sex - as falsely controlling woman or conceptually void - and feminism - as either authentically unmodified or fatally compromised.

In following MacKinnon's staging of the emergence of the feminist subject, we have found MacKinnon's writing sustaining a strangely contradictory relation to the dialectic as developed by Marxism. On the one hand her argument depends upon that dialectic - its naturalness, the way it allows a borrowing from Marxism, its general evocation of the progressive movement of history, the way it allows her to narrate a summary

totalization of the feminist position. But, on the other hand, MacKinnon's writing is non-dialectical in the way it depends upon the tropes of antithesis and analogy, and becomes Manichaeian in its bifurcation of subject and object. This diverges from the terms of both Marx's and Hegel's use of the dialectic, where the 'object' will be crucial and valued, not demolished. I do not call attention to these tendencies of MacKinnon's writing so as to call her back to a correctly dialectical thought. In the light of the work of Foucault, Derrida, de Man, and Deleuze, and the whole turn from Hegel toward Nietzsche their work has fostered, the critique of the totalizing and homogenizing tendencies of dialectical thinking has become widely appreciated.⁹

MacKinnon's revisionary use of the dialectic in conjunction with the tropes of analogy and antithesis is an essential aspect of her political rhetoric, and of the polemical force it achieves. But what may seem like a minor and abstruse matter - the *way* in which the feminist subject emerges to subject the object to itself as the prevailing subject - ends up having decisive conceptual consequences in the design of MacKinnon's programmatic position. The remainder of my essay will explore two effects of this pattern of thought: the difficulty of imagining sex on the grounds of her argument, and the particularly radical separation of her strain of feminism from its 'others' - not just men, but black women, black men, and other feminists. It will be my claim that in both these ways MacKinnon reduces the plurality and heterogeneity of the social and cultural terrain.

The central analogy of feminist discourse

The idea that in masculinist culture woman is positioned as the object of man's subjectivity is one of the central, perhaps the most ubiquitous, themes of feminist cultural criticism. We find this idea receiving varied but compatible development in feminist writing from Simone de Beauvoir to Laura Mulvey. Consider this passage from *The Second Sex*: 'with penis, hands, mouth, with his whole body, a man reaches out toward his partner, but he himself remains at the center of this activity, being, on the whole, the *subject* as opposed to *objects* that he perceives and *instruments* that he manipulates; . . . the feminine flesh is for him a prey, and through it he gains access to the qualities he desires, as with any object.'¹⁰ By contrast with the behavior of this primitive male, we are told that '[w]oman's eroticism is much more complex, and it reflects the com-

plexity of the feminine situation.’¹¹ The most influential studies of the bifurcation of subject and object by gender have focused upon film and advertising, and the way these media train the male gaze to objectify women. In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger illustrates how woman is composed as having internalized a desire to receive the male gaze she invites. In her enormously influential essay on Hollywood cinema, ‘Visual pleasure and narrative cinema’, Laura Mulvey shows how the female film star is given a ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’ which makes her available to several modalities of a gaze coded as male: that of the male protagonist, the camera, and the film spectator.¹² Both these analyses expose the gender dissymmetry in the media representations they analyze. But the ethos which orients each critique suggests an extreme position which is, strictly speaking, impossible: that one can imagine social life without humans being the objects of the gaze of others. Even the most radical cultural forms for controlling the gaze – the monastery, the harem, and purdah – restructure rather than annul the relation of gazing subject and gazed-at object. Let’s analyze MacKinnon’s particularly rich development of this familiar feminist topos.

Man is to woman as subject is to object. MacKinnon’s essay makes this idea, condensed into the six-word sentence – ‘Man fucks woman; subject verb object’ (p. 27) – a description, an accusation, and, as we have seen above in following the course of her dialectical narrative, that which prepares the pure reversal by which man becomes the object of an emergent feminist subject. MacKinnon’s vivid six-word rendering of the bifurcation of subject and object by gender allows us to see the way this idea is founded upon an analogy. Here, the parallel construction of the two clauses establishes an analogy between sex and grammar, between the relation between man and woman fucking and the subject and object joined by a transitive verb. From the context within which the sentence appears, it is apparent that both these ways of relating are in turn aligned with the insidious epistemological system ordained by male power – ‘objectivity: the ostensibly noninvolved stance . . . [knowing] from no particular perspective, apparently transparent to reality’ (pp. 23–4). Woman, according to MacKinnon, becomes the matter and medium of man’s knowing: ‘Woman through male eyes is sex object, that by which man knows himself at once as man and as subject’ (p. 24). This relation between two modes of knowing is expressed through another analogy: ‘Objectivity is the methodological stance of which objectification is the social process’ (p. 27). Finally sex, grammar, and epistemology are linked

to politics by the initial analogy of this essay - that between Marxism and feminism: '[Marxism and feminism] exist to argue, respectively, that the relations in which many work and few gain, in which some fuck and others get fucked, are the prime moment of politics' (p. 3). It will be useful for us to consider the term 'analogy', because the basic interpretive work and social analysis of MacKinnon's essays rest upon a chain of analogies between the antithetical relation of subject and object in sex, politics, knowledge, and language.

What is an analogy? An analogy establishes a relation, correspondence, or resemblance between two terms, spheres, objects. Often, as with a metaphor, the force of the analogy depends not upon the proximity of the two terms, and thus the exactness of the analogy, but upon the difference between the two terms which this analogical yoking holds together. The difference between two terms that the analogy would mendaciously elide establishes the resistance to the current of meaning passing through the analogy. If two phenomena are simply the same, there is no interest or purpose in likening them through analogy; it does not allow you to see either term in a new way. This is why the dictionary defines an analogy as a 'correspondence in some respects, especially in function or position, between things otherwise dissimilar'.¹³ What is correspondent in MacKinnon's chain of analogized terms is the drastic non-reciprocity and power imbalance between two fixed positions: the (male) subject who fucks, objectifies, knows, and the (female) object that gets known, objectified, and fucked. By aligning, through analogy, the personal sphere (of sex) with the political sphere (of work), the culture's official way of knowing (objectivity) with its way of subordinating women (objectification), the power imbalance this chain of analogies works to establish is made to seem as ironclad as the grammatical one between the subject which predicates and the object predicated. If antithesis is MacKinnon's trope for expressing difference, analogy is the trope she uses to express convergence. Since an analogy allows two to be seen as one, it helps orchestrate the convergence of a series of antithetically opposed terms into a narrative of feminist unity. Both are at work in the sentence 'Man fucks woman; subject verb object.'

The use of the word 'fucks' is part of a carefully calculated strategy to critique male uses of power. The vulgarity of her usage disrupts academic decorum by parodying in her analysis what men have commonly done to women - used a vulgar language of sex and power to shock women into silenced subordination. Only here this gesture is repeated in reverse, so

the object of MacKinnon's critical analysis (violence, power) gets repeated and reinscribed in her own use of language. But there is another more important reason why MacKinnon describes gendered social exchanges in terms of sexuality. According to her, one of the chief failures of Marxism arises from the weakness of its analysis of sexuality. To develop the idea of the centrality of sexuality for a radical feminism, MacKinnon relies upon the premises of a determinist sociological explanation of the origin of gender roles. Sexuality becomes an insidious means by which a woman 'becomes a woman' in the double sense of identifying with the stereotype and having sex with a man: 'Sex as gender and sex as sexuality are thus defined in terms of each other . . . what women learn in order to "have sex," in order to "become women" - woman as gender - comes through the experience of, and is a condition for, "having sex" - woman as sexual object for man, the use of women's sexuality by men' (p. 17). Here 'having sex' means being sexed (gendered), means being subordinated. Like so much of MacKinnon's analysis of the social, we get an encircling wall of reciprocally supporting processes.

By MacKinnon's account, sex (at least heterosexual sex) becomes the original and continuing sin, which determines woman's social construction as subordinate to male power. From here it is a short step to characterizing most of the forms of lived heterosexuality as essentially analogous with rape. Thus in the second part of the essay MacKinnon disputes Susan Brownmiller's attempt to separate sexuality and rape, and then demonstrates the way the many forms of heterosexual practice (from violent rape to apparently complicit desire) may be analogized through the most crucial fact about these practices - woman's loss of control. But by making 'sexuality' the main instrument of men's domination of women, what she calls the very 'linchpin of gender inequality', sexuality as a general phenomenon of human and animal life remains untheorized in this feminist 'agenda for theory'. Sexuality becomes abstract because the seven specific social forms through which sex dominates woman - rape, incest, sexual harassment, pornography, contraception/abortion, prostitution, and lesbianism - are said to take their shape from the exercise of male power. The force of male power does not modify or displace female sexuality; it invents those forms of sexuality she calls her reader to join in abolishing. What sex 'is' aside from these false practices becomes a blank cipher in MacKinnon's text. Sex is not a forceful locus of legitimate experience which subsists, in the past or present, beneath its appropriation by male power in some sort of disturbed but ongoing relationship to

pleasure or reproduction, or that ambivalent social bonding called love. Instead, MacKinnon makes sex the functional equivalent to those cranial implants used in some science fiction movies by aliens from outer space (here Man) to turn humans (here Woman) into robots under their control. Operating with magical efficacy within the subjectivity of the victim, sex makes 'woman', her body and inner self, a function of male power.

Sex Minus Zero

Although MacKinnon has much to say about what sex should *not* be, she does not suggest any positive theory of sexuality, whether framed by a man or a woman, which she could accept, in however revised a form. In fact she works to defend her own treatment of sexuality from incursions from male theorists like Freud, Lacan and Foucault.¹⁴ Freud and Lacan do not frame their work upon sexuality so that one can grapple conceptually or politically with social practices like rape and pornography. So let's pose this question: what would two male theorists of sexuality, Freud and Lacan, say on the question MacKinnon presses us to consider - the matter of sexuality and control? I am not here imposing psychoanalysis as the only way to conceptualize sexuality; instead it is an influential model of sexuality which offers a counterpoint to a political analysis like MacKinnon's which divests sexuality of any conceptual content.

In psychoanalysis, sex is precisely that which one does not control, have, or possess as a subject, in the mode of conscious mastery. There are many reasons for this. For Freud, the mind is an energy system, constantly negotiating its relationship to other energy systems, moved by drives which seek a pleasurable release of energy, structured by a complex set of conscious and unconscious intra-psychic traces of memory and fantasy, which shape the particular ways a given person lives his or her desire. Within this psychology, sexuality is not something one merely does; it is a pervasive factor, which will not submit to the rule of some presiding conscious subject. Lacan translates Freud's interpretation of psychic life so as to emphasize the way language 'insists' in the unconscious, thereby structuring human desire in alienating and unexpected fashions. For Lacan, the detours of desire are errant, perverse, and witty. Thus within a psychoanalytic frame, human sexuality is always going out beyond itself, is itself a kind of lack, hole, or need, which points toward the other in the mode of wishing. There seems to be no acknowledging, in MacKinnon's

discourse, of this dispersed and lost quality of a desire and sexuality which both is and is not one's own.¹⁵

Sexuality in the psychoanalytic frame is not theorized as an exchange between statically conceived subjects and objects, or polemicized around the issue of who *controls* sexuality.¹⁶ The zero-sum game, where one wins and the other loses, a social pattern which is deeply ingrained in contemporary capitalism, and which MacKinnon sees everywhere in the social exchange between the sexes, may be antipathetical to the way psychoanalysis imagines sexuality. If MacKinnon's work construes sexuality as a problem for woman (her domination by male power), to which she can then postulate a rather simple solution (control for woman), then to complicate her representation of sexuality would depend upon reintroducing terms she has subordinated to the imperatives of the emergent feminist subject - pleasure, the object, and language.

To come to terms with that which is uncontrollable, excessive and fundamental about sexuality in human culture, one would need to conceptualize sexuality as a non-idealist exchange between two positions - persons who can participate as both a subject which never gains a total and abstract control of the exchange, and an object of the subjectivity of the other and themselves, an object not anathematized or abolished on moral grounds as anti-human.¹⁷ Then the sexuality which could pass between and among the positions of subject and object would depend upon mobilizing these concepts for an interpretation of this encounter:

1 An understanding of the *centrality of pleasure*, as part of the interior experience of the subject, that which motivates sex, and is one of its issues. Pleasure can be conceived on a physiological or physical model (as for example Freud's definition of it as the movement of a living system from greater to lesser entropy and 'unpleasure'), or in terms of a personal psychology which can inscribe it into a life narrative. Because pleasure involves an energy relation, the pleasure of the subject disrupts the idealist impulse in Western thought; it disturbs the effort to conceptualize sex as a social form (marriage), an ideal (love), the law of biology (reproduction), or the nexus of personal value (in relationships). What this active role for pleasure in sexuality would suppose is . . .

2 . . . the *persistence of a role for the object* in sexuality. There is no way to think sexuality apart from the object, for sex and its pleasures are experienced by the subject through an object - the subject's sensate body. The object is not just the medium, it is also the focal point of sexual

pleasure. Lovers - to know each other erotically, to feel desire for each other's bodies - probably need to objectify the other, perhaps as beautiful, or as possessor of this or that part or quality. Within a psychoanalysis of sexuality, the concept of the fetish suggests the instability of the opposition between subject and object: the fetish is not a dead object, and fetishizing is not a perverse behavior one could do without (nor is it morally equivalent to 'treating a person like an object'). Instead, the fetish is a constitutive aspect of human desire, and does not respect the neat subject/object oppositions of traditional epistemology and ethics.¹⁸ We need a more patient, and ethically dispassionate, understanding of how objects - whether a flag, a face, or a tune - become endowed by a desiring subject with energy and allure. By what process do they cease to be mere things, instead becoming (with art, and like art) the bearers of pleasure, value, and culture? As such, objects would then be seen as participating in . . .

3 . . . the *constitutive role of language* in the formations of human sexuality. Because the subject must operate in the world through the objectifying medium of language, and we only know the object through the subjectifying medium of language, language becomes the term which blurs the relation between the subject and object. Thus exchange in the social sphere - as in hiring, marriage, sex, gossip, etc. - is predicated upon knowing persons through those material aspects of the person which can circulate, and in doing so become more than insensate objects, become the immaterial signs of some intended [or mistaken] social meaning. Subjects know others through vows, gifts and stories; the sight of nakedness, and the exchange of body fluids - saliva, sperm, vaginal fluid, blood. These sign/things of persons become media of exchange which are susceptible to all the usual lapses and detours of language. We do not control, with our original intention, the way a sign we produce will be read.

Decapitalizing m(M)arxism; capitalizing B(b)lacks

Through its summary analysis and critical condensation of other feminist work, MacKinnon's essay enacts the emergence of a feminist subject who writes, reads, and interprets in order to invent a new kind of discourse - radical feminism. If we look more closely at MacKinnon's essay, especially in the footnotes where she often swerves from passive constructions and third-person narrative to make direct first-person comments to her reader about her own writing practice, we can trace the means by which the

writing subject works in the political subject. There, a 'value positing I' operates behind the apparently impersonal narrative with which MacKinnon describes the emergence of the feminist subject of feminism. Since her diagnosis of the social makes *taking control* (of woman's life and sex from men) her most urgent task, all her writing labors to empower the feminist subject as the favored term of an ethically charged antithesis. This is achieved through a series of inclusions and exclusions, a defining of boundaries, and an assertion of hierarchical valuations, which totalize the terrain of culture through a series of conceptual operations: MacKinnon construes every term as impeding or advancing the forward movement of feminism, negates all that stands in its way (like old styles of sex), thereby reducing much of what is plural, different, and heterogeneous in the social and cultural terrain. The value-positing which motivates these efforts is readable through the textual practices by which she decapitalizes M(m)arxism, capitalizes b(B)lacks, and subordinates other feminisms to the advance of her own. By following these compositional efforts, we can take note of the ironies which attend her project. MacKinnon gives the term 'feminist' a rigorous, proper and 'unmodified' meaning which would begin to build community by being intolerant of difference. Her manner of debating Marxists and other feminists offers a version of exchange about what the social is which is anti-social.

As a precondition for narrating their (apparently) dialectical transformation, Marxism and feminism must be presented so that there is a balanced and specular relation between them. But this requires a prior, at least proximate, *equality* between the two terms of the dialectic. Indeed a *making equal* will be crucial not only in the dialectical narrative between male theory (marxism) and female theory (feminism), but to the explicit content of most feminisms. Sometimes making equal requires contravening convention, and an exercise of the most direct kind of authorial assertion. There is a symptomatic instance of this kind of writerly assertion in the headnote to the article, where MacKinnon explains and justifies her de-capitalization of the 'M' in Marxism:

I have rendered 'marxism' in lower case and 'Black' in upper case and have been asked by the publisher to explain these choices. It is conventional to capitalize terms that derive from a proper name. Since I wish to place marxism and feminism in equipoise, the disparate typography would weigh against my analytic structure. Capitalizing both would germanize the text. I also hope feminism, a

politics authored by those it works in the name of, is never named after an individual. (p. 2)

The conventions for capitalizing English are tied to more than the proper name; capitalization also becomes a very graphic and typographical index of importance, as when we capitalize the first letters of God, Queen Elizabeth, President Reagan. The question of importance and equality seem to weigh upon MacKinnon when she designs her 'analytic structure' - the structure of the dialectic - so that it has the 'equipoise' to take her to the proper destination, where a strong feminist theory emerges on the other side of its encounter with Marxism. By decapitalizing the 'M' in Marxism, MacKinnon decreases the importance and prestige of that system of thought: shifts (intellectual) capital from M(m)arxism to feminism, and decapitates Marxism. This small change in typographical usage becomes a telling sign of the interpretive force operating, behind the apparent autonomy and 'naturalness' of its dialectic narrative, to change what might be called the ratio of value between Marxism and feminism, man and woman.

In the dialectical narrative which MacKinnon constructs, and we have summarized, a good deal of the social persuasiveness of the analysis will come from the degree to which MacKinnon seems to succeed in representing and incorporating the different positions of the social sphere into her narrative. Since one of the most important differences in contemporary American culture is that between white and black, and since that difference of race cuts across difference of gender, her way of handling the difference white/black is one of the symptomatic stress points of her narrative. Blacks, both male and female, become the non-recuperable other of her dialectical narrative. In the same headnote where MacKinnon explains her decapitalization of Marxism, she justifies her decision to capitalize the 'B' in blacks. Let's gauge the meaning of this gesture.

Black is conventionally (I am told) regarded as a color rather than a racial or national designation, hence is not usually capitalized. I do not regard Black as merely a color of skin pigmentation, but as a heritage, an experience, a cultural and personal identity, the meaning of which becomes specifically stigmatic, and/or glorious and/or ordinary under specific social conditions. It is as much socially created as, and at least in the American context no less specifically meaningful or definitive than, any linguistic, tribal, or religious

ethnicity, all of which are conventionally recognized by capitalization. (p. 2)

This passage suggests the reasons blacks have a special importance in MacKinnon's essay. As inheritors of the effects of slavery, no group is more obviously the victim of a social system which constructs them as subordinate. Also, and perhaps more importantly for MacKinnon, the racism of this culture makes blacks appear a group which, in spite of their manifold differences, is essentially one. Thus blacks become a kind of model for the sort of unity MacKinnon wishes to establish for women. But blacks are also a problem for this feminist analysis. Because blacks cut across the gender line, they threaten the integrity of the terms 'woman' and 'man' in MacKinnon's text. Blacks must be kept apart, an apartness which, as the laudatory tone of MacKinnon's headnote implies, is a privilege: this special apartness is expressed by the 'recognition' by 'capitalization' MacKinnon confirms on them. But that this apartness could become a dubious advantage is suggested at a formal level of the essay, for the black with the special (capitalized) position above and apart will be kept outside of the (lower-case) dialectic between M(m)arxism and feminism, which brings advantageous social transformation. This double imperative for the use of blacks - to be brought into the story, but be kept outside the story as a special case - means MacKinnon must carefully control the way blacks enter her story. There are two readable instances of the discrete and privileged marginality conferred upon blacks in MacKinnon's narrative.

When MacKinnon is describing what can divide women of different social level and status, she acknowledges that the sort of gender oppression discovered by middle-class women can seem comparatively abstract to those who are less advantaged:

But the pain, isolation, and thingification of women who have been pampered and pacified into nonpersonhood - women 'grown ugly and dangerous from being nobody for so long' (note 7) - is difficult for the materially deprived to see as a form of oppression, particularly for women whom no man has ever put on a pedestal. (p. 6)

A reader of this sentence might assume that the interpolated quotation - 'grown ugly and dangerous . . .' - was written by one of these middle-class women who have lived and critiqued the process by which they have been

pampered into 'nonpersonhood'. But, as note 7 explains, the quote is from a quite different social and literary context: 'Toni Cade (now Bambara) thus describes a desperate Black woman who has too many children and too little means to care for them or herself.' By the transfer of meaning through citation into a new context, the language written to describe 'a desperate Black woman' can speak to and for the 'pampered' white woman. This use of citation is shaped to enable the term 'women' to go through a dialectical augmentation so that it can stand for 'all women'. MacKinnon explains the logic behind her strategy:

By using her phrase in altered context, I do not want to distort her meaning but to extend it. Throughout this essay, I have tried to see if women's condition is shared, even when contexts or magnitudes differ. (Thus, it is very different to be 'nobody' as a Black woman than as a white lady, but neither is 'somebody' by male standards.) This is the approach to race and ethnicity attempted throughout. I aspire to include all women in the term 'women' in some way, without violating the particularity of any woman's experience. Whenever this fails, the statement is simply wrong and will have to be qualified or the aspiration (or the theory) abandoned. (p. 6 n. 7)

What is most remarkable about this passage is the special sensitivity MacKinnon extends to black women on a problem which she does not acknowledge at those other moments in her dialectical narrative when she incorporates the perspective, knowledge, or experience of a particular author or group into the progress of her dialectic. The problem as stated by her is how to include 'all women' in the term 'women', 'without violating the particularity of any woman's experience'. Here, she makes the sincerity of that aspiration convincing by speaking in a mode which confesses her most genuine authorial desire ('I do not want to distort . . . I aspire to include . . .'); describes her writing as a tentative effort ('I have tried to see if . . . Whenever this fails, the statement is simply wrong . . .'); and shows sensitivity to the offensiveness this kind of merging of two very different social experiences - those of 'desperate' Black and 'pampered' white - even to the extent of promising to abandon her own 'aspiration' or 'theory' if the effort fails. In writing this remarkable (and very uncharacteristic) qualification to her theory, for and to black women, MacKinnon indirectly acknowledges the violence of the dialectical effort to overcome (destroy, conserve, and raise up) the difference of the other,

here the difference between women and races. But, ironically enough, after the scrupulousness demonstrated here, MacKinnon seems all the more justified in negating, through a totalizing dialectic, the particularity of other terms negated, for example feminists of different persuasions, or black men, or white men.

What finally justifies the occlusion of the difference between black and white woman is their common subordinate position opposite man: 'neither is "somebody" by male standards.' But at the very point in her argument when MacKinnon is giving a definition of that male power which defines woman's commonality, the black as the marginal but essential supplemental term in her analysis returns again, again in a footnote. Here is MacKinnon's definition of the 'closed system' of 'male power': '*Power to create the world from one's point of view is power in its male form*' (p. 23 n. 54; MacKinnon's emphasis). Since power to create reality from one's point of view is not described as contingent, but is in its very 'form' essentially tied to the 'male' gender, this act of definition raises the question of the black men. Few have accused *them* of having much power. So MacKinnon adds a note which protects her definition of power as male from contamination by this special instance:

This does not mean all men *have* male power equally. American Black men, for instance, have substantially less of it. But to the extent that they cannot create the world from their point of view, they find themselves unmanned, castrated, literally or figuratively. This supports rather than qualifies the sex specificity of the argument. (p. 23 n. 54)

Note the efficacy here of the circular definition: since women equal victims lacking power; and men equal power; if black men have no power, then, to that extent, they become like women. This argument is not designed to deal with vexing pragmatic social questions, such as the extent to which black men might be both powerless in relation to white men, and dominating and exploitative toward women in general, or toward one group of women in particular - black women. Rather, this aside overlooks these problems because of the special (capital) position given to blacks apart. Instead, MacKinnon's note works to use black men to protect the original definition (women = victims lacking power; men = power), in a particular way - through a circular definition of black men which metaphorizes gender. Black men, placed opposite white male

power, and 'unmanned,' and therefore not-men, but ones who (in the terms of masculinist psychology) are 'castrated', and thus like 'women'. The use of this circular definition of black-man-as-woman to 'defend' black men produces its own ironic effects. Black men's particularity and difference (from white men, from black women, from white women) is reduced, at the very moment, and with the very conceptual terms (the idea of their lack of power), mobilized to protect that difference (from white men). Though black men are not favored by MacKinnon with a promise in the form of a direct address extended to black women, both serve the forward movement of the overcoming of (white) male power by women.

Feminism unmodified

Nowhere does the problem of how to incorporate difference and otherness into the advance of her argument become more vexing than in MacKinnon's relationship to those other feminists who have thought through a different feminist practice. One of the central compositional strategies of Part I of the essay consisted in writing a synthetic 'agenda for theory' which would include generous reference to an extraordinary range of the major feminist writing of the last two decades so as to help unify feminism for political action. MacKinnon writes footnotes which develop wonderfully concise critical responses to that work. MacKinnon's essay then can function as an annotated bibliography which values the variety and difference of other feminisms, at the same time that MacKinnon incorporates and moves beyond that work. The relegation of most reference to other feminist work to the footnotes allows it to be given a decidedly supporting role in the unfolding of the unifying dialectical design only her own essay will grasp and figure.

Perhaps because of debates and resistances occasioned by the publishing of Part I in the Spring of 1982, the question of the differences within feminism becomes an explicitly thematized problem in Part II of the essay, a year and a quarter later. In two long footnotes near the beginning of Part II, MacKinnon explores the correct conceptual and political response by feminism to the failure of 'all women' to develop the consensus that 'life as we have known it . . . is not all, not enough, not ours, not just' (II, p. 637). While she expresses sympathy with 'the unwillingness, central to feminism, to dismiss some women as simply deluded while granting other

women: the ability to see the truth', MacKinnon is dismissive when she distinguishes her own critical articulation between the radical feminism she advocates and all other feminisms. Here is how she institutes a hierarchy among feminisms:

But just as socialist feminism has often amounted to marxism applied to women, liberal feminism has often amounted to liberalism applied to women. Radical feminism is feminism. Radical feminism - after this, feminism unmodified - is methodologically post-marxist. (II, p. 439 n. 8)

Part of the task of MacKinnon's writing is to take those feminisms whose indebtedness to something extrinsic to feminism is marked by their modifier, and subdue them to a form of feminism which has the conceptual power to unify women and feminism in their differences. Since only radical feminism has shed its earlier conceptual debts (by becoming 'methodologically post-marxist'), only it can become a feminism which is unmodified, uncompromised, and unalloyed.¹⁹ MacKinnon's willingness to develop criticism of other feminisms shows an iconoclasm before what might be called the easy pluralism of American academic thought, especially as that pluralism manifests itself as feminist celebrations of its own variety. But there is something more than vigorous criticism in MacKinnon's reading of other feminisms. There is a refusal to let the position of the other stand, as the locus of an otherness which is non-recuperable, and may entail a history or way of knowing which must be given a separate authority, to which she might relate dialogically.

In the same footnote where others fall short of true feminism, the work of Andrea Dworkin and Adrienne Rich is singled out for their deep affiliation with MacKinnon's own project. In the language which describes the project of (radical) feminism, we can trace the sources of MacKinnon's intolerance. Dworkin and Rich (and MacKinnon):

exemplify feminism as a methodological departure. This feminism seeks to define and pursue women's interest as the fate of all women bound together. It seeks to extract the truth of women's commonalities out of the lie that all women are the same. . . . This politics is struggling for a practice of unity that does not depend upon sameness without dissolving into empty tolerance, including tolerance of

all it exists to change whenever that appears embodied in one of us.
A new community begins here. (pp. 639-40 n. 8)

Here MacKinnon presents the vanguard position that every other feminism should follow. Her refusal to tolerate other feminisms is not merely a matter of tone, style, or personal disposition; it is a structural and conceptual result of her project: forging a feminism which can bind women who are not the 'same' within the single unified body of (radical) feminism. To accomplish this end, other feminisms must be demolished as 'other' so their set of terms and pathways of investigation are extracted and incorporated into the larger movement MacKinnon's writing would guide.

What MacKinnon's language implies but can never clearly acknowledge is the presence of that censorious juridical critical eye/I which has the power to scan the body of feminism, decide upon that 'all it exists to change', and repudiate any form of anti-feminism, even when it appears 'embodied in one of us'. Here, as in our discussion of MacKinnon's revisionary use of the dialectic, we can see that beneath and inside an apparently dialectical critical process, MacKinnon breaks the terms of her analysis into a pure atemporal antithesis: in this case, between the authentic 'unmodified' body of feminism, and those opposing elements within feminism which challenge its advance and must be opposed.²⁰

In the construction of her essays, MacKinnon's indignation and intolerance are carefully controlled by the structure of the argument; they can even seem like 'the highest kind of love'. But in an open debate, like the one sponsored by the Buffalo Law School, the antagonistic quality of her thought becomes socially readable. Thus in responding to Carol Gilligan's work, MacKinnon praises the 'strong and elegant sensitivity in the work', and the 'deeply feminist' 'impulse to listen to women', to hear the 'different voice' with which women have learned to speak. But she then announces her 'political infuriation' with Gilligan's refusal to see that this 'different voice' Gilligan so values (what MacKinnon describes as its 'relatedness, responsibility, and care virtues') embodies the virtues of women victimized by their subordination to male power. MacKinnon is also 'troubled' that Gilligan's analysis may even get women 'identifying with what is a positively valued feminine stereotype'. MacKinnon would turn this analysis toward the more fundamental question of power. When MacKinnon and Gilligan break into open debate on the issue of the contaminating effects of power, the crucial issue - what constitutes the

authentic voice of women - pivots on the question of whether one should accept the voices of existing women as what woman's voice should be.

Gilligan: Your definition of power is his definition.

MacKinnon: That is because the society *is* that way, it operates on his definition, and I am trying to change it.

Gilligan: To have her definition come in?

MacKinnon: That would be part of it, but more to have a definition that she would articulate that she cannot now, because his foot is on her.

Gilligan: She's saying it.

MacKinnon: I know, but she is articulating the feminine. And you are calling it hers. That's what I find infuriating.

Gilligan: No, I am saying she is articulating a set of values which are very positive.

Dunlap: I am speaking out of turn.²¹

This dialogue/debate develops into an impasse because MacKinnon's message - woman *is* the effect of male power - renders hollow in advance the tone of any living woman's voice, including those Gilligan studies and values. Such studies are 'infuriating' and intolerable because they threaten to arrest feminism in an absorption in woman's present condition, instead of striving to blaze a pathway toward an as yet unrealized 'world'. MacKinnon's project, like other feminist or non-feminist radical projects, operates according to the Enlightenment assumption (which goes back to Rousseau) that the present social order is in some very fundamental sense false, corrupt, and unjust. By this argument, the ultimate authority of feminism arises from its claim to articulate a 'woman's perspective' which does not yet exist: 'The claim that a sexual politics exists and is socially fundamental is grounded in the claim of feminism *to* women's perspective, not from it' (p. 22). This future-oriented axiom of MacKinnon's feminism explains why Part I of MacKinnon's essay is not presented as feminist theory, but as an 'agenda' for one. Rather than being a sign of the intellectual modesty of this project, it is a sign of its ambition. To set the agenda always implies one assumes the authority to speak for a group by defining, out of the whole range of possibilities, what will be the topics, terms and goals which will shape the collective discussion. Thus, in diplomacy, as in this exchange between MacKinnon and Gilligan, the most tenacious battles will unfold around setting the agenda.

There is a final irony about this exchange between MacKinnon and Gilligan: this debate performs what it thematizes, the impossibility of finding a (single) authentic voice, not so much for women, but for the women's movement called feminism. MacKinnon would make her feminism the form and forum for a new feminist unity - 'A new community begins here.' But the absoluteness of the categories embodied in her feminism, and her intolerance for feminisms spoken in 'a different voice', has meant that her work has become a catalyst for the expression of a plurality within feminism which resists any totalizing unity. But I do not think we should measure MacKinnon's feminism against the consensus it seeks. To construe sex as essentially equivalent to rape, to further the bifurcation of subject and object by gender, and to assume the whole antipathetical stance of an 'unmodified' and uncompromising feminism opposite its 'others' - all these positions open her writing to the criticism I have offered it in this essay. But it may be precisely these positions - however problematic their conceptual content - which carry the greatest efficacy in changing social practice. Elsewhere I have sought to show that it is the very extremity of MacKinnon's analysis, and the hyperbole of her political rhetoric which bear the force that helps change the value of women in culture.

It is no easy matter for MacKinnon, or her reader, to gauge the contexts for calculating the effects of this intellectual and political practice. Thus from the vantage point of Foucault's analysis of sexuality, both MacKinnon and her theoretical antagonists (like psychoanalysis) are too uncritical in accepting the idea that sexuality is the person's central defining essence. By this Foucauldian analysis, MacKinnon's efforts to limit pornography, redefine sexual harassment, and align sex with rape, involve less a radical break with the social discourses on sexuality she would control than a new feminist episode in the modern deployment of sexuality.²² The changes MacKinnon's feminism helps to initiate may be different than those intended; her feminism is probably operating within unsuspected cultural economies, helping to move us toward destinations quite unforeseen.

NOTES

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- 1 Jardine and Smith 1987.
- 2 See Alice Jardine, 'Men in feminism: *odor di uomo or compagnons de route?*', and Andrew Ross, 'No question of silence', both in Jardine and Smith 1987.
- 3 MacKinnon 1982; 1983. The use in this chapter of a capital M for Marxism is further discussed on pp. 112-15.
- 4 This latter idea is the focal theme of another as yet unpublished essay entitled: 'Force, value and feminism: a reading of Catharine Anne MacKinnon.' There I use the concept of cultural value developed by Nietzsche and Heidegger to read the political rhetoric of MacKinnon's writing.
- 5 MacKinnon 1982: 14. Citations in parentheses to MacKinnon's essay are to Part I, except where a roman numeral II, followed by the page number, indicates a citation to Part II.
- 6 Dialectical thinking, whether speculative and conceptual or materialist and historical, is one of the most influential and pervasive kinds of thought developed by the Western tradition. It is at work when a country or people tell its story, in the Bildungsroman and the confessional; and it does not turn out to be so easy to elude as some of the avant-garde would have us think. Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida never tire of telling us that it is not so easy to elude dialectical thinking as many assume. But MacKinnon's essay makes use of a particularly pure concept of this way of thinking, brought to the service of theorizing feminism, and I hope to show that this has far-reaching and sometimes rather unexpected consequences for MacKinnon's argument in particular, and for other feminisms as well.
- 7 Haraway 1985: 78.
- 8 *Buffalo Law Review*, 34: 72.
- 9 See Foucault 1977; Derrida 1978; de Man 1979; Deleuze 1983. Derrida has developed a criticism of feminism for its programmatic reliance upon that dialectical conception of history which homogenizes the 'flow' of history, and the use of a speculative dialectic which may inadvertently end up making 'woman' the same as 'man'. See Derrida 1982.
- 10 de Beauvoir: 414-15.
- 11 *Ibid.*: 415.
- 12 Berger 1972; Mulvey 1975.
- 13 *The American Heritage Dictionary*, ed. William Morris. New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., 1969.
- 14 MacKinnon writes that Foucault does 'not systematically comprehend the specificity of gender - women's and men's relation to these factors - as a primary category for comprehending them . . . Lacan notwithstanding, none of these theorists grasps sexuality (including desire itself) as social, nor the content of its determination as a sexist social order that eroticizes potency (as male) and victimization (as female).' (p. 22 n. 12)
- 15 MacKinnon's discourse is, in the best Anglo-American fashion, profoundly anti-psychoanalytic in all of its impulses. This is so at several different levels: at the level of her asserted positions, her writing does not allow us to envision any positive collective social practice of sexuality; at a more personal level, there is an embarrassed reticence about any inscription of her own life into some sexuality. By contrast, one branch of contemporary feminism, by contesting psychoanalytic ways of theorizing, and

refusing to theorize gender, has developed psychoanalytic theory into a powerful instrument for feminist readings of everything from film and popular culture to philosophy and literature. Here I am thinking of the work of feminist critics as various as Laura Mulvey, Juliet Mitchell, Kaja Silverman, Naomi Shor, Luce Irigaray, and Jane Gallop.

- 16 This is not to say however that other social goals of feminism, such as equality, may not be a fundamental aspect of a valuable sexuality. This is an idea explored in Roy Roussel's readings of the 'conversation of the sexes' in literary texts: Roussel 1982.
- 17 I do not, of course, offer this as a fully grounded theory of sexuality, but rather as the sketch of an alternative to MacKinnon, which allows me to bring into relief those aspects of sexuality which her text puts out of play. It is intended as a polemical antidote to the anti-sexual tendency of an analysis of all relations between men and women under the sign of power.
- 18 Although Freud theorized the fetish as an aspect of male desire, feminist theorists have begun to contest that specification by gender. See Schor 1985.
- 19 In note 8 to this passage MacKinnon uses this simple typology to rank feminist writing under radical feminism. Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* 'is formally liberal no matter how extreme or insightful'; since Shulamith Firestone's analysis 'rests on a naturalist definition of gender . . . her radicalism, hence her feminism, is qualified'; a work by Susan Griffin is 'classically liberal in all formal respects.' Sometimes MacKinnon's criticisms of other feminists are more nuanced. She borrows what she takes to be the strongest insight of Millett's *Sexual Politics* - that 'it is sexuality that determines gender, not the other way around' - but then qualifies this attribution in a note, where she acknowledges that Millett's 'explicit discussion, however, vacillates between clear glimpses of that argument and statements nearly to the contrary.' (p. 17 n. 37)
- 20 Again an analogy with Marxism seems apt: MacKinnon seems Leninist in the way she would purge those 'counter-revolutionary elements' that threaten the revolution.
- 21 *Buffalo Law Review*, 34 (1985): 74-5.
- 22 MacKinnon's emphasis upon the way sex is the means for men to subordinate and violate women is sometimes heard by other feminists as foreclosing possibilities to make sex a positive factor in the woman's movement. A speaker from the floor after one lecture questioned her on why issues of gender hierarchy should be 'narrowed' to 'issues of sex': 'It seems to me that sexuality is and are of both power for, as well as victimization of, women.' (*Buffalo Law Review*, 34 (1985): 11-87.)

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Treating Him Like an Object: William Beatty Warner's 'Di(va)lution'

Donna Landry

William Beatty Warner wishes to 'release' (p. 96) some of the unconscious tendencies of Catharine MacKinnon's writing: he would liberate the Iron MacMaiden from her tower of feminist certainty, from her fortress within a 'feminism unmodified',¹ by revealing that, deconstructively speaking, she can never fully control her own discourse, that it does some of its work without her will or desire. The walled city of an unmodified feminism, unthreatened by men's hostility or scorn, must be shown as fissured from within. A white man attempts to release a white woman from fixed principles, lest she remain symbolically, as Jane Gallop might put it, 'a rigid virgin - phallicized'.² At various points in his essay, Warner attempts to rescue from MacKinnon's tyranny, from her willful abuse of discursive power, at least five classes of prisoner: dialectical thinking, (hetero)sexuality, 'm(M)arxism', 'B(b)lack' men, and finally feminism itself. Warner wishes to imply that MacKinnon's authoritative tone and sense of feminism as 'radical feminism' purely, uncoupled from any master discourse, renders her theory authoritarian and exclusionist as well as, in its failure to articulate any possibility for feminist (hetero)sexual pleasure, joyless and puritanical:

'Sex as gender and sex as sexuality are thus defined in terms of each other . . . what women learn in order to "have sex," in order to "become women" - woman as gender - comes through the experience of, and is a condition for, "having sex" - woman as sexual object for man, the use of women's sexuality by men' (p. 17). Here 'having sex' means being sexed (gendered), means being subordinated. Like so much of MacKinnon's analysis of the social, we get an encircling wall of reciprocally supporting processes. (p. 109)

And that encircling wall is what Warner finds so maddening; he must find

ways of breaking it down or overcoming it, climbing in through the sorority's windows, trying to get at feminism without being 'in' it, without participating in any of the tense encounters that mark *Men in Feminism*.³

Turning one of the most problematical moments in that collection into a paradigm for its presentation of men's relation to feminism generally - Paul Smith's 'desperate irony' about men attempting to 'penetrate' feminism, 'a more or less illegal act of breaking and entering, entering and breaking, for which these men must finally be held to account'⁴ - Warner tries to distance his approach to feminism from 'their' playfully rapacious one:

But just as feminism critiques the recurrent sexualizing of women by masculinist culture, the effort to analogize feminism with women can displace and attenuate the critical force of feminism. Because feminism is a discursive formation which develops a comprehensive critique of culture, it becomes limiting and partial to take feminism as a figure of women, and to reduce men's engagement with feminism to a sexual exchange, whether personal or collective, real or fantasmatic. (p. 94)

For a man who has himself made a career out of the sexual tropology of various discourses, and the ways in which women are both 'responsible' for rape and incapable of understanding it, this may seem a curious agenda - much more curious than Warner's other quarrel with *Men in Feminism*, that these male feminists move ahead too quickly, too eager to be 'correctly' feminist. In *Reading Clarissa: The Struggles of Interpretation*,⁵ Warner struggles to establish a strategy of reading by which Clarissa ought to be *grateful* for her rape by Lovelace because it gives her something exciting to write about: 'For since something genuinely arresting has happened to Clarissa, a skillful presentation of her drugging and rape allows her to dominate Lovelace and his allies in the pen-knife scene. Clarissa finds the story of her whole life has taken on new vividness and form. The magnitude of her fall imbues all the details of her past with new interest' (p. 94). With new interest, that is, for the playfully rapacious discourse of the deconstructive critic insensitive to sexual politics, who finds that Lovelace's 'way of operating engenders something shared and mutual', while by contrast, 'Clarissa seems irreducibly self-centred, and her friendship with Anna Howe chill and uninteresting' (pp. 38-9). In

responding to books on *Clarissa* by Terry Castle and Terry Eagleton, Warner releases a trace of his own interests as a critic by seeming to resent that Clarissa's narrative and Castle's book work in feminist ways 'so as to increase [Clarissa's] value'.⁶

Fascinated but fearful, Warner claims to have chosen to write about MacKinnon precisely because 'the very extremity' of her analysis and 'the hyperbole of her political rhetoric . . . bear the force that helps change the value of women in culture' (p. 122), a project about which he would seem to be ambivalent at best. Writing as a female feminist respondent to Warner, I am not 'free' to 'choose' my tactics without taking certain considerations into account, if I wish to respond responsibly; rather, I am compelled to do at least two things: to defend MacKinnon against what in Warner's critique might constitute a contribution to the anti-feminist backlash many of us have been experiencing within as well as outside the academy, and, where necessary, to distinguish my position from hers. For I know that from the beginning of my encounter with MacKinnon, and with Warner's rewriting of MacKinnon, what I might object to in MacKinnon's 'unmodification' of feminism - her desire for purity and homogeneity within a post-marxist feminist practice - is not really the same as what makes Warner uncomfortable. Even where Warner and I might appear to draw upon the same intellectual lineages, our investment is different. As a female feminist, one has reason to be suspicious of Warner; his reputation precedes him.

'*Odor di uomo or compagni di route?*' Alice Jardine has asked regarding men in feminism.⁷ Perhaps there is an '*odor di femminismo*', a hint of bad faith in my turning on Warner something resembling his own diagnostic gaze. In that case perhaps my own text will not be immediately recuperable as either 'ladylike',⁸ moralist, totalist, or liberal-pluralist. At least one male reader of an earlier version of this response has found my attitude towards Warner's attempt to engage with feminism self-defeatingly severe, with the consequence that said reader emerged feeling 'oddly and self-protectively complacent', claiming that 'if the choice is between attempting an inevitably failing feminist fellow-traveling and a confessed sexism, I'll take the latter.' I can only hope that other male readers will reach very different conclusions.

While making certain ostensibly post-psychoanalytic, deconstructive objections to MacKinnon's position, Warner fails to read his own text deconstructively, to subject his own analysis to the same politico-theoretical scrutiny he turns upon (MacKinnon's) feminism. And by failing to

do so, he lands himself, tropologically speaking, back in that same 'melodramatic encounter of man and woman' he wishes to avoid, that romantic scenario of male postulator and enigmatic female Other, which he characterizes as the third unacceptable approach available to men engaging with feminism, along with 'objective critical analysis' (p. 91) and 'earnest sympathetic dialogue' (p. 91):

There is a third way to annul otherness, all the more subtle for the way it seems to be doing just the opposite: by staging a melodramatic encounter of man and woman, where the male speaker postulates as his interlocutor a romantically enigmatic Other. This myth of woman-as-sphinx turns out to be familiar and comforting enough; *she* quickly becomes a site for oedipal heroism. (p. 93)

At the level of tropes, this banished scenario re-emerges within his own discourse, disrupting and rhetorically undermining his ostensible arguments in a devolutionary way, intractably devolving from them and undercutting their persuasiveness. These arguments, his critique of MacKinnon's homogenizing impulses and totalizing view of ideology, her prematurely willed subsumption of marxist dialectics within feminism, her effacement of sexual pleasure, her problematical enlistment of black people as mere counters in her analysis, and her undialogical intolerance regarding other feminisms, remain arguments which, I think, many feminists might otherwise feel inclined to accept. 'Otherwise' because Warner's tropes to a damaging degree betray another agenda from the comradely criticism for which he would appear to be toiling. It is not a matter of expecting a text, however self-critically 'conscious', to dispel its unconscious subtexts, figurations, and symptomatic stress-points. Rather, with Pierre Macherey, we might wish to argue that a text's gaps and contradictions signify 'the unconscious which is history, the play of history beyond its edges, encroaching on those edges' and that 'this is why it is possible to trace the path which leads from the haunted work to that which haunts it'.⁹ Nevertheless, Warner's silence on the tropology of his own discourse indicates an absence of that self-reflection which both feminists and men in feminism should be accustomed to practising in a moment when we can no longer ignore the lessons of the marxist critique of ideology or the deconstructive recognition of the subject's irreducible complicity with its objects of investigation.

Though Warner specifically repudiates the spurious use of an engage-

ment with feminism as a site for 'oedipal heroism', his reading of MacKinnon-as-ArchFeminist is rooted in oedipal struggle. As a Derridian commenting on feminism, Warner writes in the wake of Derrida's interview, 'Choreographies'.¹⁰ In the first two versions of his essay,¹¹ this relation to Derrida's pronouncements on feminism was explicit, with Warner drawing upon the father's astute criticisms of contemporary feminism yet reproving him for failing to 'practice . . . the arduous double task he suggests for a deconstructive feminist politics' (II, p. 7). Ironically, Warner finds Derrida subject to 'Oedipal anxieties' (II, p. 6), at the very moment when he, Warner, reveals his own in trying to distinguish his project from Derrida's, to supersede it, to be more lovable than his father, his methodological maker and master. The implicit question in Derrida's interview - Now, after feminism, will she love me? - haunts Warner's reading of MacKinnon as well. If Derrida puts himself in the position of what Warner calls 'a paternal choreographer of the (feminist) dance', while insisting on its spontaneity (II, p. 6), Warner plays impresario to a (feminist) diva, while pointing out that the aria she sings is painfully forceful, violent, ambitious, demeaning to men, exclusionist regarding black men and other feminisms, insufficiently dialectical, and only partly aware of its relation to representation and value - in other words, nothing much to do with *him* really, though he has arranged the performance. Warner tries to efface himself from the stage of his reading of MacKinnon just as surely as Derrida would disappear into the feminist dance, that 'history of absolutely heterogeneous pockets, irreducible particularities, of unheard of and incalculable sexual differences'.¹² In both cases, the dance and the diva function erotically and spectacularly for their male producers.

Like a Lovelace in Parisian clothing, or the Paul Smith given to desperate ironies, Warner operates a metaphoric of rapacious desire in relation to Woman/Feminism. The first such metaphor emerges in a passage playfully legitimating, through a mock-naive autobiographism, Warner's status as a feminist fellow-traveler. Warner cites as 'the contingencies of history' which might make him less resistant to feminist criticism than many men the fact that this earliest experience predisposed him to know women as equals. These crucial women are a twin sister, a mother who was a 'successful writer', and a maternal grandmother who was a 'famous opera singer' (p. 92). The move from merely 'successful' to 'famous' is significant: Warner's essay is haunted by a phantom Diva of Feminism to whose siren song he wishes to harken in order to be rapt, disarmed, transfigured. But the fame that such a powerful figure would acquire is also

threatening to the professionally-minded academic, whose modicum of 'fame' is always in jeopardy, always imperiled by the latest critical fashion, and not least by feminism, with its potential to change cultural values and to disable even male feminist fellow-travelers from speaking out or talking back as freely as they might wish.

The diva is one of those rare figures of power in Anglo-European culture with a female body, whose voice commands the center of the operatic action, whose presence on stage elicits and orchestrates the diffuse libidinal energies of the audience. As Jean-Jacques Beineix's film *Diva* obsessively insists, the diva's fans are compelled to fetishize her, hoping to steal her voice, her dress, in acts of homage that she can only perceive as rape, and that feed all too easily into the circuitry of commercial recording which a 'true' diva, who thrives on live audiences, will abhor. In performance the diva holds her audience in thrall through the sheer erotic power of herself as spectacle, her voice as instrument of theatrical self-presentation. In *Diva*, the performance which the young fan illicitly records and which 'becomes' the diva throughout the film, is a performance of Catalani's 'La Wally' in which the heroine sings that she will go far, far away and be seen no more. The young fan, rapt by the erotic power of the diva's song of willed absence and abstinence, of eternal deferral, of a passion that can never be consummated, says in response simply: 'It's tragic. In the end she throws herself into a gorge.' The end of so much female erotic force so theatrically displayed must be a tragic ending, according to the operatic script. In the film, the fan wins the diva's affections, an almost unthinkable victory for the young postal worker, by giving her the tape he has made without her knowledge in defiance of her public pronouncements on illicit recording. (By giving her the tape he also contravenes the plans of two sinister stereotypes from the multinational recording business who have threatened the diva with marketing a pirated version of the tape.) What has been taken from her against her will can now be restored by the male fan in a blaze of generosity. What once constituted 'rape' can now be seen as 'true' homage/hommage:¹³ the young fan becomes a man in relation to the diva by returning his fetish-objects (her dress, her voice) to her one by one. The diva only sings about suicide as an historical fiction; in the cinematic 'real' she accepts her 'symbolic' rapist as a 'true' lover.

Warner's characterization of MacKinnon as ArchFeminist turns on her partial appropriation of the diva's role. She is, and is not, the voice of a feminism he can (re)produce as powerful and be rapt by, spectatorily. For MacKinnon is also the Iron Maiden of feminism: refusing homage/

homage; distrusting, as culturally prefabricated and subversive of feminist ends, the 'Woman's Voice' celebrated by Carol Gilligan; using argumentative force, not erotic suasion, to change cultural values; refusing to throw herself into any of the available gorges of nihilism, defeatism, or polite compromise.

A kind of stylistic transference emerges in Warner's essay: how often he refers to MacKinnon's analytical voice as if she were an operatic performer, while relying on musical metaphors in the production of his own discourse: 'the *tone and coloring* of her language' [original emphasis] (p. 96); 'The relegation of most reference to other feminist work to the footnotes allows it to be given a decidedly supporting role' (p. 118); 'orchestrate' (p. 108); 'We need a more patient, and ethically dispassionate, understanding of how objects - whether a flag, a face, or a tune - become endowed by a desiring subject with energy and allure' (p. 112).

Warner claims that he has chosen MacKinnon to sing the feminist aria because her work 'takes to its logical limit ideas which other feminists invoke in a more guarded and tentative way' (p. 95). Thus her 'extremism' is made to seem both representative of and superior to feminism as a whole. Warner finds MacKinnon especially admirable because she breaks up that threatening collectivity of militant women who celebrate their own variety through their solidarity against men:

MacKinnon's willingness to develop criticism of other feminisms shows an iconoclasm before what might be called the easy pluralism of American academic thought, especially as that pluralism manifests itself as feminist celebrations of its own variety. (p. 119)

The critique of 'easy pluralism' in American academia is potentially productive, but in this context it seems misplaced. The praise of 'gutsy' (II, p. 28) iconoclasm here smacks of the 'woman I'd hire' trope - the trope of power as selection and possession, with the feminine object of exchange desirable precisely because she too is powerful and has a distinctive voice, not a 'collective' one: *my* diva. Not like all those other girls. And - to my relief - she doesn't like all those other girls. She only likes some of them passionately, the committed ones, a possibility that Warner refuses to address responsibly, with the result that his continual return to the problem of *heterosexuality* reads like homophobic occlusion, a distorting bias which suggests that MacKinnon's radical feminist analysis, and its logical extension into a lesbian if not a separatist praxis, have failed

fully to communicate themselves over and above Warner's prejudices. Not to address lesbianism more directly, since MacKinnon herself does not in these essays, may be a sign of 'discretion' on Warner's part, but there is no excuse for his banishing of all sexual possibilities except heterosexuality from his analysis.¹⁴

Throughout his essay, Warner keeps coming back to the fascination exerted upon him by female fame, by individuality of voice, but he also appears to be threatened by it. So long as we remain safely within the exchange of women by men, a trope most prominently displayed in the concatenation of 'exchange in the social sphere - as in hiring, marriage, sex, gossip, etc.' (p. 112), Warner is not threatened. But when it becomes a matter of 'successful', even 'famous' professional academic women displacing him and his right to speak - and exchange (women, ideas) - then a plaintive tone emerges. The diva will not be won over after all.¹⁵

Embattled thus as an arbiter of the new whose purchase on cultural innovation has been limited by feminism, Warner must also use MacKinnon's operative power against her, and implicitly against 'feminism', since MacKinnon as ArchFeminist has come to stand for the cultural work done by feminism as a whole. MacKinnon's refreshing iconoclasm is also totalizing intolerance. By means of analogy, her work makes the present non-reciprocity and power imbalance between men and women seem 'ironclad' (p. 108); with 'systematic radicality' she carries out a 'strong' reading of marxism (p. 95); 'The bold directness and chiseled concision of MacKinnon's style are indices of her clear purpose, polemical decision, and fixed determination' (p. 96); MacKinnon's proposing of an agenda for feminism is 'Rather than being a sign of the intellectual modesty of this project . . . a sign of its ambition' (p. 121). Ostensibly, this is not dispraise on Warner's part, merely another form of admiration. Yet MacKinnon's rigor becomes antagonistic intolerance in Warner's reading of the Buffalo debate between MacKinnon and Carol Gilligan, in which MacKinnon annihilates the grounds for any future authentic feminist diva-ism by rendering 'hollow in advance the tone of any living woman's voice' (p. 121). Tropologically, 'MacKinnon' takes on a bifurcated role easily recuperable by anti-feminist traditionalism: caught between the seductive, sexually powerful Diva and the rigorous, uncompromising Iron Maiden, where are the voices and bodies of the heterogeneous, unreified, but not 'easy pluralist' feminists - dauntingly promiscuous feminists? - whom Warner endorses to perform their culturally iconoclastic work?

As is apparent from his prose as well as his schema for an alternative to MacKinnon's treatment of sexuality as a 'zero-sum game' (p. 111), Warner values 'dispense', spending, Bataillean transgression. In his eagerness to 'save' sex as 'uncontrollable, excessive and fundamental' (p. 111), Warner overstates his case and underestimates the microtechnologies of power that produce our knowledge of sexuality, rendering it not totally 'controllable', perhaps, but certainly 'manipulable' within the circuits of capital and exploitable commercially and politically. Warner's rigid adherence to the uncontrollable excessiveness and fundamentality of 'sex' is at odds with his brief invocation of the Foucault of *The History of Sexuality*, for whom 'sexuality' is neither transgressive, knowable outside the discursive inscription of it in particular cultures and historical moments, nor possessable as 'one's own', as MacKinnon would have it, a means to truth.

Warner uses Foucault's argument to undermine MacKinnon's claim that sexuality is the 'linchpin of gender inequality' (p. 109), but silently abandons Foucault for psychoanalysis when (hetero)sexuality needs to be rescued. To do otherwise would be to jeopardize that 'new heterosexual commonweal' (p. 92) that Warner insists upon positing as his vision of a utopian future, substituting for Derrida's 'unheard of and incalculable sexual differences' a vision of a re-vamped heterosexuality. There is a reason for Warner's slippage in and out of a Foucauldian problematic, for his defensiveness regarding (hetero)sexuality. Something has happened, historically, to jeopardize his argumentative, discursive, Bataillean-transgressive flow.

MacKinnon, intent upon empowering women, those who have been cast historically as 'objects' *par excellence*, has attempted to go beyond the 'subject/object split' (p. 102) characteristic of male metaphysics, thus 'inadvertently' risking 'a radical idealism' (p. 101). Apparently more terrifyingly for Warner, she has failed to 'abolish' the object in fact, for the coming into being of women as subjects seems to involve the objectification of *men*, 'now objectified as the Objectifier of woman - rapist, pornographer, and wielder of victimizing, illegitimate forms of state power' (p. 104). One might think that Warner ought to find this dialectical process of reversal and transformation, this sublation of men's previously unchallenged power in women's newfound mastery, this subjection of men to women's objectifying gaze, both inevitable and defensible. He even insists on the 'crucial and valued' (p. 106) and necessary and 'pleasurable' (p. 110) status of the 'object' within dialectics and the psychoanalytical

schema of desire. But in Warner's analysis these objects are never men. Somehow, the pleasures of the object vanish when the objectification of men is brought into play; Warner remains hostile to feminism's investment in women's struggle towards subjectivity: 'If one were to state the plot of MacKinnon's "agenda for theory" in one sentence it would have the pure oppositional rhythm of a revenge fiction: woman goes from being the object of male power to being a subject in her own right' (p. 103). *Revenge fiction?* Warner would apparently deny the political efficacy of women's struggling for self-determination and the consequently radical reconstruction of subjectivity, gender, and sexuality that political struggle entails. His satirical swipe at MacKinnon for protesting the male investment in objectification - 'They're treating me like an object!' - becomes his own implicit shriek at the thought of MacKinnon's 'audacious' (p. 104) female seizure of power. What, then, has Warner to do with feminism, we may well ask. Perhaps there was more to his determination to stay behind (p. 95) reading MacKinnon rather than fellow-traveling 'too fast' with *Men in Feminism* (p. 92) than met the eye.

Warner's essay may not be 'totalizingly' antifeminist, but it remains more than a little hostile to feminism and more than a little rapt by the spectacle of its own textual production, its own self-regarding discursive prowess that can be called upon to 'release' the MacMaiden's discursive unconscious. This forcing of feminist (and female) 'issues' *once again* by a rapacious male critic preoccupied with the threatened increase of 'the value of women in culture' suggests that Warner has not reflected sufficiently upon his own subject position nor upon the historically specifiable connections between male violence, (hetero)sexuality, and women's oppression in all cultural spheres, so brutally epitomized by rape.¹⁶ Apparently unable to imagine materially a gendered perspective different from his own, and the oppressive and exploitable consequences of this privileged unknowing, Warner sees in the women who have been subject to him not so much those women, their desires and disfigurements, but rather yet another image of his *own* subjection, to the repressively disciplinary culture of late capitalism, a culture which he is writing to resist.

His resistance would be more thoroughgoing, and of more use to feminism, if he would subject his own extremely problematical desires to a feminist political critique and reject the playful rapacity to which men no longer have any theoretically or politically defensible right in the present moment, and for the moment. Perhaps such moves might be envisageable if Warner were to work against his exploitatively spectatorial, antagon-

istically rapt relation to feminism. He could think again about that 'earnest sympathetic dialogue' which his anti-humanist training has led him to reject prematurely and cavalierly - if only he weren't so 'musical'.

NOTES

- 1 Warner makes much of this formula, which is also the title of MacKinnon's new book, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987). His playing on the phrase, while neglecting to mention the book's existence, strikes me as capricious to say the least.
- 2 This is what Gallop says of Luce Irigaray's relation to Lacan: 'Irigaray is afraid of being trapped by her debt, but in her militant refusal she becomes a rigid virgin - phallicized. She believes there must be a way out of the Freudian/Lacanian Oedipal closed circuit, but revolt against the Father is no way out': Gallop 1982: 91.
- 3 Jardine and Smith 1987.
- 4 See Paul Smith, 'Men in feminism: men and feminist theory', in Jardine and Smith 1987: 33; and Cary Nelson's reporting of Smith's own description of this strategy as 'desperate irony' in Nelson's useful essay, 'Men, feminism: the materiality of discourse', *ibid.*: 171.
- 5 Warner 1979.
- 6 Warner 1983: 20.
- 7 '*Odor di uomo or compagnons de route?*' in Jardine and Smith 1987: 54-61.
- 8 I am troping here on Nancy Armstrong's review of Poovey 1984. Armstrong writes: '*The Proper Lady* cannot critique the discourse of sexuality since it observes the proprieties of traditional criticism. Thus today's literary institution places us in something of a double-bind situation which makes it virtually impossible to speak politically and also politely.' Armstrong 1984: 1257.
- 9 Macherey 1978: 94.
- 10 Derrida 1982.
- 11 I will refer hereafter to the two earlier versions of Warner's essay as 'I' and 'II', respectively.
- 12 Derrida 1982: 68.
- 13 See Gallop 1982: 91, for this turn upon the term.
- 14 In the first two versions of his essay, Warner had merely banished them to the margins (and the footnotes) of his text - when he was not explicitly dismissing them, as in 'although her radical feminist positions often seem impossible (to imagine living)' (II, p. 9). He also explicitly marginalizes specific practices like lesbianism in such dismissive allusions as 'right-wing women or lesbian sadomasochistics [*sic*]' (II, p. 27).
- 15 In the first and second versions of his essay, a note of nostalgia emerged more clearly as Warner assessed some of the cultural contradictions that the feminist aria has produced: 'The competitiveness endemic to most "male" professions is criticized, but the achievement of women in these same professions is often celebrated' (II, p. 54);

'Woman can be revalued by making her the one who is read because she counts as one who is carrying something new into culture' (II, p. 55). Not, one might add, the something new that 'women' have always 'carried' into culture - in the shape of the next generation.

- 16 In this respect, Warner's blindness to his blindness on the subject of rape and its gender specificity parallels Foucault's own, as illuminated so effectively by Monique Plaza. Plaza reminds Foucault of how his sweepingly theoretical pronouncements on rape effectively contradict his earlier theorization in *The History of Sexuality* of the need for a politics of heterogeneous local interventions and situationally specific forms of resistance (1981: 34; the quotations are from p. 96 of Foucault 1978):

Michel Foucault, you have not clearly analyzed the place of the 'enunciative modality,' which you adopt when you talk about rape. If you had, when the Magistrates' Association asked you to give your opinion about rape, you would not have launched right away into a completely preemptive 'theoretical' explanation. You would have first 'turned toward the women' who are currently struggling. And you would not at any time have tried to convince us that *we* are mistaken. You would not have lost a certain political memory, and you would have remembered that insofar as we are exposed in the front lines in the strategic field of patriarchal power relations, we are in the best position to structure 'resistances, each of them a special case: . . . possible, necessary, improbable; . . . spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, . . . violent,' [irreconcilable] . . .

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