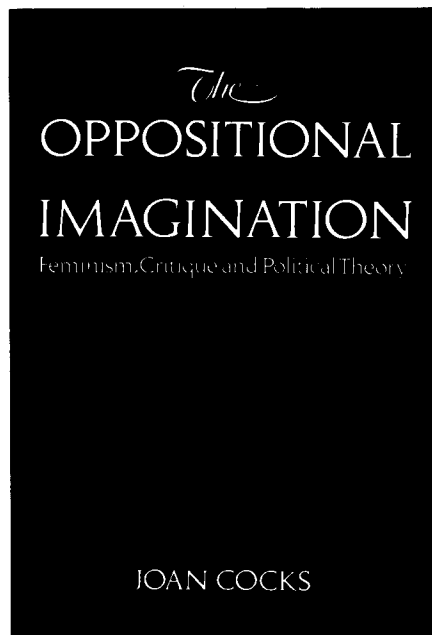


and possibilities within itself. Sixth, there is no conscious author behind the construction of a power system. Seventh, power flows from the micro to the macro and vice versa. All of these assumptions are important in that they underpin the examination of the regime of masculine/feminine, perceptions of opposition and liberation, and the critique of radical feminism.

The importance of culture is stressed in Cocks' analysis of the development of the patriarchal right as a traditional form of power to phallic right as a contemporary manifestation. Economic and cultural development, with the concomitant increase of opportunities for women and children outside the home, are primarily used to explain the erosion of the family and a fixed hierarchical order which underpinned patriarchal right. Ideas of individual freedom and satisfaction of desire combined with capitalism's interest in commodification are seen as the prerequisites for the triumph of phallic right, that is, an order which is concerned with the satisfaction of masculine desire (based upon assumptions about bodily difference) and which transmits its message through mass communications. However, for Cocks, the possession of a male or female body carries no additional meaning. This, combined with the argument that power has to engage in a partial representation of reality, prepares the ground for the claim that: "men's domination over women... does not issue out of... essential male and female identities fixed in male and female bodies... but on the harsh, systematic fashioning of brute bodies into masculine and feminine selves."

The combination of the claims that reality can be interpreted in a variety of ways, and that no regime can subsume all possible viewpoints, raises the possibility of the formation of counter-cultures, of which Cocks identifies four representative types: the eccentric, the critic, the traitor and the rebel. However, the theoretical foundations of this section, together with the claim that a power regime presents reality within a particular discourse, set definite limits to notions of liberation. For Cocks, one constructing discourse replaces another. However, the possibilities for new oppositions remain, so that "as soon as the elements of disorder coalesce in a new way, critical theory should reappear... to agitate on behalf of the exuberance of life against a too-avid fixing



and freezing of things." Given the experiences of twentieth-century attempts to apply doctrines of liberation to practical life, Cocks' conclusion seems particularly apposite.

In relation to existing feminist theory, Cocks' conclusions drawn from political theory are used to launch an attack on radical feminism. First, radical feminism accepted the phallicentric partial description of reality as reality itself, thus remaining blind to the variety of heterosexual encounters. Second, it took an instrumentalist approach to the masculine/feminine regime, claiming that men were its conscious creators. It thus engages in a simplistic explanation which, when faced with a more complex reality, can only result in disillusionment. Third, it has a fixed notion of male and female nature which is wrong, and denies that men and women can have a multiplicity of eroticisms.

However, there are problems with Cocks' assumptions. First, there is the notion of a "regime without a master," that is, a situation in which individuals are born into a discourse already defined by past generations so that "there are tendencies of practice for no reason that anyone ever devised." However, it is possible to attribute importance to past generations without falling, as Cocks does, into a non-explanation of what she refers to as the "metapower." Thus, Marx wrote of tradition weighing "like a nightmare on the minds of the living," while simultaneously supplying an explanation of the driving forces of the metapower by reference to the first creation of a surplus and the division of society into classes. Radi-

cal feminism would refer to male and female nature in its retrospective explanation for why previous generations behaved as they did.

A second problem with the work is that while I found Cocks' critique of radical feminism well-written, clear and sensible, it is not a refutation and provides no special reasons why radical feminists should stop being so. Thus, Cocks writes that radical feminism could gain insights into understanding power if only it were "not adamant that all established ways of understanding anything were not intrinsically 'male.'" The radical feminist could reply, "Yes, if I change my suppositions and share yours, then I'd write what you write," that is, radical feminism would dissolve itself. The issue thus comes down to whether one wants to accept the radical feminist or Cocks' view of male and female nature. I prefer Cocks' and agree with her conclusions; but the radical feminist could point to Cocks' claim that there is a dominant discourse and argue that hers remains within the male — thus *The Oppositional Imagination* works to the advantage of the "enemy."

## STRONG MOTHERS, WEAK WIVES

Miriam M. Johnson. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988

*By Christel Hus*

In the 1960s the women's movement minimized gender differences in order to stress the similarities between the sexes as an argument for equal rights. In recent years we have observed the opposite tendency: to emphasize the characteristics of females and to value their special qualities. These two contrasting tendencies face the same underlying question: What causes gender inequality?

Miriam M. Johnson, a professor of Sociology at the University of Oregon, has searched through a wealth of different theories to answer this central question. Her intention is not to provide new material, but to analyze the existing theories. She calls hers "a book not of discovery, but of interpretations." From the beginning Johnson states her underlying beliefs: Inequality is not inherent or inevitable in heterosexual relations. Therefore,

her book is "a search for gender equality." Her approach is one "that applauds women's less hierarchical way of thinking and women's ability to see connections instead of conflict."

In order to plan for a more egalitarian future we have to know what causes gender inequality. The answers that Johnson provides in her book are as follows. Male dominance is not enforced through the burden of mothering, as other feminists such as Shulamith Firestone have led us to believe, but through the specific relationship between man and wife. According to Johnson, it is not equal parenting which will solve the problem but the actual way in which parenting is done. This is best illustrated by Johnson's thesis that men learn from their fathers how to dominate women. Daughters, for their part, are groomed for their future roles as subservient wives through their relations with their fathers as "daddy's girl." "The father-daughter relationship of male dominance tends to reproduce in daughters a disposition to please men in a relationship in which the male dominates." Thus the fathers plant the seed for inequality through the way they relate to their children, but the way in which they relate to their wives

also serves as a model for their children's behaviour. This is where women are weak: not as mothers, but as wives. Women in their roles as wives consent to and reinforce the domineering and hierarchical attitudes in men.

Johnson's arguments are convincing, for in our society women gain status and identity mainly as wives of men. Their lives are defined to a much larger extent by whom they marry than are the lives of their male counterparts. Parents who "give their daughters away in marriage," romance novels and television, all reinforce women's childlike and dependent attitudes. As boys grow up, the patterns of dominance they learned in the family are strengthened in male peer groups in which females tend to be seen as sex-objects. Their "ultimate strategy is to define women as objects whose only purpose is to gratify men sexually."

Today, as more and more women join the workforce, they gain economic independence from men. But this new economic strength will lead toward a more egalitarian status for women only if they can gain strength in their relationships as wives. As it is now, they carry a double burden. Not only must they go out to work

but they also must perform the main load of household chores.

In order to end male dominance in our thinking we must differentiate between gender and sexuality. Psychoanalysis has traditionally assumed that the specific nature of masculinity and femininity defines gender. However, in separating gender from sexuality Miriam Johnson shows that gender difference is not primarily one of sexual difference, "but rather a difference of women's more relational stance and men's greater aggression and impersonality." Gender difference in itself, she notes, "need not produce inequality; it is what we make of gender difference and what we do about it that produces inequality."

The author discusses sociological as well as psychological and psychoanalytical approaches to explain gender differences. *Strong Mothers, Weak Wives* is not an easy book to read but it is definitely worth the effort. Fortunately, the reader is aided through the sheer mass of material by a summary at the end of each chapter. Johnson's work shows us our strengths as well as our weaknesses. In doing so she creates a new awareness of an old problem.



Teresa Dobrowska, "The Viewing Room" (1990). Exhibited in *Healing Images*, Toronto. Tactile, hollow forms of women's garments hang, suggesting that the invisibility of women is partially due to the tactic of objectifying us, of squeezing us into stereotypical roles: the career woman, whore, wife, etc.