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BETTY FRIEDAN AND JULIET MITCHELL:
CRITIQUES OF IDEOLOGY AND POWER

by

JENNIE EAGLE

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2018

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

Betty Friedan and Juliet Mitchell: Critiques of Ideology and Power

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Jennie Eagle

Advisor: Dagmar Herzog

My thesis attends to a common thread of critique in two founding documents of “second-wave” feminism: Betty Friedan’s book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and Juliet Mitchell’s article “Women: The Longest Revolution” (1966). I am interested in the ways both foundational texts de-naturalize male supremacy by defining it as ideological. The concept of ideology as employed by three notable social theorists – Marx’s concept of a social mythology disseminated by ruling elites to uphold various forms of hierarchy, operating through internal contradictions; French communist Louis Althusser’s concept of a social practice disseminated by the institutions of civil society; and Michel Foucault’s identification of ideology with discourses or regimes of representation that shape and delimit what can and cannot be said about a given topic – is central to both Friedan’s book and Mitchell’s article; although Mitchell, in keeping with her British socialist milieu, employs the term ideology much more extensively than Friedan, both authors provide a broad critical analysis of how ruling elites define and police “natural” and “deviant” forms of “femininity” and “the family” that can be summed up as a critical analysis of ideology. My thesis seeks to challenge and broaden the common critique of “second-wave” feminism as narrowly middle-class and elitist to demonstrate the

importance of Friedan's and Mitchell's insights for subsequent forms of radical social thought. In the first section, I will examine both the draft versions and the published version of *The Feminine Mystique* to show how Friedan explores the intellectual, emotional, and psychological work done by conservative gender ideology, how she establishes its relationship to ideas of progress and temporality, and how she attends to the ways in which its gaps, contradictions, and omissions strengthen rather than weaken its hold on society. In the second section I will perform the same analysis for Mitchell. I will conclude by analyzing how the work of Friedan and Mitchell helped pave the way for the critical insights of postmodern Left thought.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude, now and always, to my advisor, Professor Dagmar Herzog, who from her Fall 2016 Gender Theory for Historians class to the present has stimulated me with her wit, irony, and intellectual precision. I am also deeply grateful to the Schlesinger Library at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University for the opportunity to examine Betty Friedan's manuscript writings. Finally, I would like to express a lifetime's worth of love and gratitude to my parents, Ellen Sovern and Larry Eagle, for their invaluable help in everything I have ever accomplished.

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Introduction

Feminism as an ideological conviction and as a social movement has taken shape in interlocking and mutually reinforcing structures of power and privilege. Its significance – and the significance of any other social movement trying to alter or abolish these structures – lies in the fact that, as trans activist Michelle O’Brien notes in “Tracing This Body: Transsexuality, Pharmaceuticals, and Capitalism,” “[w]e are all in the midst of structures of tremendous violence, oppression, and exploitation. There is no easy escape or pure distance from them. Our ability to resist ... is deeply inseparable from our ongoing connection to these very systems.”¹ To understand how individuals at different historical moments have been able to craft more or less radical challenges to these systems, to understand what they could and could not perceive about the changeability or justice of dominant views of gender relations, we must examine what they thought about power and ideology.

For a variety of reasons, 19th-century supporters of changes in the legal, economic, and educational position of women tended to build their arguments on biologist constructions of gender. They were products of a society in which belief in the possibility and desirability of social change was powerfully constrained by a naturalist-Darwinist imagination that, even as it acknowledged the reality of biological and social evolution, assumed there were limits beyond which it could not go.²

¹ Michelle O’Brien, “Tracing This Body: Transsexuality, Pharmaceuticals, and Capitalism,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2*, ed. Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura (New York: Routledge [Taylor & Francis Group, LLC, an imprint of Informa PLC], 2013), 56-65.

² See, for example, Monique Wittig, “One Is Not Born A Woman,” in *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*, 3rd ed., ed. Carole R. McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim (New York: Routledge [Taylor & Francis Group, LLC, an imprint of Informa PLC], 2013): “feminism in the [19th] century could never resolve its contradictions on the subject of nature/culture, woman/society. Women started to fight for themselves as a group and rightly considered that they shared common features as a result of oppression. But for them these features were natural and biological rather than social. They went so far as to adopt the Darwinist theory of evolution. They did not believe like Darwin, however,

The political and social environment of the 1960s in which “second-wave” feminism took shape was very different. By the 1960s, it was easier than it had ever been before to understand that power relations, not immutable natural laws, shaped what could and could not be said about the nature, proper functions, and appropriate activities of women (and other social groups), and how prevalent constructions of these were governed by specifically ideological considerations.

I have chosen to focus on Betty Friedan’s 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique* and Juliet Mitchell’s 1966 essay “Women: the Longest Revolution” as key documents in the evolution of the second-wave feminist project of what Sally Haslanger, in her 2013 book *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique*, calls “ideology critique.” Ideology critique, in her words, “focuses on the conceptual and narrative frameworks that we employ in understanding and navigating the world, especially the social world ... it need not introduce a wholly new concept, but can just suggest a revision to a concept or a new understanding of a concept.”³ For Haslanger, ideology critique is allied to both critical theory and social constructionism: critical theory, in her words, “is situated theory ... with a commitment to a political movement and its questions,”⁴ while “one of the main goals of social constructionism is to lay bare the mechanisms by which social structures are formed and sustained so that we are better positioned to locate the levers for social change.”⁵

‘that women were less evolved than men, but they did believe that male and female natures had diverged in the course of evolutionary development and that society at large reflected this polarization ... the early feminists had failed to regard history as a dynamic process which develops from conflicts of interests. Furthermore, they still believed as men do that the cause (origin) of their oppression lay within themselves ... [they] found themselves at an impasse ... they upheld the illogical principle of ‘equality in difference’ ... [t]hey fell back into the trap ... [of] the myth of woman.” Wittig, “One Is Not Born a Woman,” 248-49. What this passage reveals is that the development of a principled rejection of all aspects of a hegemonic social order is impossible, not simply because of the social order itself (as though it were outside or separate from attempts to subvert it) but by the contradictions and inconsistencies within ideology critique and critical theory. This thesis is an attempt to show not how Friedan and Mitchell *resolved* these contradictions and inconsistencies, assuming that to be possible, but how they recognized and negotiated them.

³ Sally Haslanger, *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 17-18, Oxford Scholarship Online.

⁴ Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 22.

⁵ Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 30.

Friedan and Mitchell – the latter to a greater extent than the former – anticipated in their works what would later be a central insight of Foucauldian philosophy: the fact that modernity instantiated new forms of social power rather than simply removing old restrictions. Michel Foucault in his landmark 1975 book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* observed that the Janus faces of liberal modernity – of “a formally egalitarian juridical framework, made possible by the organization of a parliamentary, representative régime” – were “systems of micro-power that are essentially non-egalitarian and asymmetrical that we call the disciplines ... The ... disciplines constituted the foundation of the formal, juridical liberties.”⁶ In other words, developments that seem to free the individual from old restrictions impose new and more insidious ones. This problematizes emancipatory narratives of “progress” from a “benighted” or “barbaric” past. It forces us to rethink the nature of social change and to pay heed to the compromised origins and tactics of fights for social justice.

For both Friedan and Mitchell, modernity is not a one-way street to women’s freedom. Both *The Feminine Mystique* and “Women: the Longest Revolution” contain a powerful strain of argument and implication that anticipates the insight of Foucault described above. Friedan and Mitchell explore the profoundly ambiguous relationship of “modernity” and “progress” to gendered hierarchies of power and knowledge. They recognize that whatever changes have occurred in women’s condition in the 19th- and 20th-century West can be, and have been, used against them. Furthermore, both Friedan and Mitchell, with their Left backgrounds, are skeptical of attempts to claim increased power for women based on the very motherhood and domesticity used to subordinate them, claims which had been prominent in the rhetoric and ideology of earlier women’s

⁶ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books [Random House, Inc., an imprint of RCA], 1978), 222; see also 195-228.

movements.⁷ They see that new ways must be found to navigate the tensions within ideological constructions of “woman” that both deny and enable rights claims. For Friedan and Mitchell, ideology critique, critical theory, and social constructionism fuse in fascinating explorations of the nature of knowledge-as-power and its implications for feminist arguments and political strategies.

⁷ See, for example, William O’Neill, “The Origins of American Feminism,” in *The Other Half: Roads to Women’s Equality*, ed. Cynthia Fuchs Epstein and William J. Goode (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Spectrum Books, an imprint of Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971): “while feminism was born out of a revolt against stifling domesticity, and nurtured in the understanding that for women to be free the entire fabric of their lives had to be rewoven, by the end of the century most feminists had succumbed to what Charlotte Perkins Gilman called the ‘domestic mythology’ ... the effort to escape domesticity was accompanied by an invocation of the domestic ideal – woman’s freedom road circled back to the home from which feminism was supposed to liberate her.” O’Neill, “The Origins of American Feminism,” 162–63. We see here the enduring paradox of resistant social movements: they derive their existence and organizing principles from the conditions against which they rebel, or are seen to rebel. For more on how Friedan’s Left background influenced her resistance to the identification of “women” with the “domestic,” see Kirsten Fermaglich and Lisa M. Fine, introduction to *The Feminine Mystique: 50th Anniversary Edition*, by Betty Friedan, ed. Kirsten Fermaglich and Lisa M. Fine, Norton Critical Editions (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.), xiii–xv; Anonymous [Betty Friedan], “UE Fights for Women Workers,” UE Publication No. 232 (New York: United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America [UE], 1952), and my discussion of Friedan below. One of the sections in “UE Fights for Women Workers” is titled “Women Must Have Right to All Jobs”; see Anonymous [Friedan], “UE Fights for Women Workers,” 35.

Chapter 1

The historical importance of works of radical social critique lies not in their unequivocal rejection of the status quo or freedom from logics of domination, since radicalism –recognition that the wrongs of a practice or system are foundational to a society’s existence – is itself a product of these logics. Attempts to secure greater social justice spring from, and are anchored in, deep injustice. It is in contradictions, uncertainties, hesitations, and other examples of split consciousness – in *aporias* or gaps - that radical flashes of insight can be discerned, which exemplify the creative tension between acceptance and questioning of dominant social structures.

The act of noticing and criticizing violations of what has gradually become an international moral ideal – the principle that human flourishing (defined by Martha Nussbaum and others as the maximum of political, economic, educational, and artistic freedom and opportunity) is an end in itself and an essential precondition for a just society⁸ – is an act that has taken many forms in many different historical periods. As Haslanger notes, “the questions we ask arise out of a particular social-historical context ... it is not necessary to develop a single coherent position in order to promote social justice.”⁹ We cannot evaluate historical works of critique on the basis of ideological or thematic consistency, since, like all texts, they function through multiple unstable and opposed meanings. But we can evaluate the degree to which they manifest a political understanding of ideology-as-power.

Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, which called Cold War US society to task for its denial of opportunities to women, is both a product of a specific society at a specific historical

⁸ See, for example, Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), <https://books.google.com/books?id=9R69I--rpzUC&printsec=frontcover&dq=martha+nussbaum+capabilities&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj-kIyr6KrXAhUcM8AKHZW0Aw0Q6AEILjAB#v=onepage&q=martha%20nussbaum%20capabilities&f=false>.

⁹ Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 23-25.

moment and an exemplar of the broader world-historical significance of 1960s and post-1960s radical social thought. This chapter is a corrective to accounts of Friedan's work and legacy that neglect the radical potential of *The Feminine Mystique*, that focus on its omissions, hesitations, and totalizing claims without an adequate engagement with its profound insights and subtle analyses.¹⁰

Unintentionally, without a clear sense of where her argument led or could lead, Betty Friedan wrote a book about ideology-as-power. For the purposes of this thesis, and for Friedan's historical moment, the central insight of *The Feminine Mystique* is its elucidation of the ability of powerful social interests to shape the direction and flow of information about a socially disempowered group, and to shift the emphasis of this information when and where it suited their purposes. Friedan's pre-Foucauldian text made clear the decentralized, ubiquitous, and historically changeable nature of ideology-as-power; it revealed the interpenetration of individual and societal tendencies towards hegemonic gender and familial conservatism. Her description of how social scientists, business interests, and other shapers of public opinion exerted enormous force to keep women tied to The [implicitly white, Protestant, middle- and upper-class] Home called into question the very nature of knowledge itself, revealing it to be, if not purely a historical construct, then liable to ideological exploitation in the service of dominant social structures. *The Feminine Mystique* anticipates the later insight of the New Left Marxist-influenced scholar Douglas Hay: "An

¹⁰ Such accounts include bell hooks [Gloria Watkins], *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984; New York: Routledge [Taylor & Francis Group, LLC, an imprint of Informa PLC], 2015), https://books.google.com/books?id=L1WvBAAAQBAJ&pg=PA1&dq=bell+hooks+betty+friedan&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjQ6br5hp_XAhVDRiYKHRYbB_IQ6AEINjAC#v=onepage&q=bell%20hooks%20betty%20friedan&f=false: "Feminism in the United States has never emerged from the women who are most victimized by sexist oppression ... *The Feminine Mystique* ... was written as if these women did not exist ... Friedan's famous phrase, 'the problem that has no name,' often quoted to describe the condition of women in this society, actually referred to the plight of a select group of college-educated, middle- and upper-class, married white women." hooks, *Feminist Theory*, 1. Rachel Bowlby in "The Problem with No Name': Rereading Friedan's 'The Feminine Mystique,'" *Feminist Review* 27 (Autumn 1987): 61-75, JSTOR, reevaluates *The Feminine Mystique* as a text whose "contradictions in ... models of the self, of free choice and femininity leave all kinds of questions unresolved," but even Bowlby does not recognize Friedan as a critic of ideology per se. Bowlby, "The Problem with No Name," 74.

ideology endures not by being wholly enforced and rigidly defined. Its effectiveness lies first in its very elasticity ... [and] the fact that it seems to [men] the products of their own minds and their own experience.”¹¹ We can extend this insight to recognize, as Marx did, that ideology is an instrument of political and social power in the hands of ruling classes, used to pre-empt criticism of and obscure alternatives to unjust practices precisely because those classes have power over what Marx calls “the means of mental production” and can therefore impose their vision of reality on society at large.¹² *The Feminine Mystique* makes the crucial point that however comfortable, however “natural,” however desirable the life of a post-World War II white middle-class housewife may seem, it has a Janus face of foreclosed options, squelched talents, and general malaise.

A number of scholars have used the term “ideology” to describe the book’s critical evaluation of social norms. Sociologist Dorothy Smith noted the specific engagement of Friedan with the concept of ideology in her 1987 book *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*: “[Friedan] [made] central the critique of ideologies at work in our everyday lives ... [she] unveiled the ideological nature of the ‘values,’ ‘norms,’ and ‘beliefs’ concerning women’s role and the relations between the sexes, which we had taken for granted even as we had struggled with the divergence

¹¹ Douglas Hay, “Property, Authority, and the Criminal Law,” in *Albion’s Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England*, by Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, John G. Rule, E.P. Thompson, and Cal Winslow (New York: Pantheon Books [Random House, Inc., an imprint of RCA], 1975), 55.

¹² Karl Marx, *The German Ideology: Critique of Modern German Philosophy According to Its Representatives Feuerbach, B. Bauer and Stirner, and of German Socialism According to Its Various Prophets*, in *Marx & Engels Collected Works, Volume V: Marx & Engels 1845-47*, ed. Jack Cohen, Maurice Cornforth, Maurice Dobb, E.J. Hobsbawm, James Klugmann, Margaret Mynatt, James S. Allen et al. (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 59, http://www.hekmatist.com/Marx%20Engles/Marx%20&%20Engels%20Collected%20Works%20Volume%205_%20Ma%20-%20Karl%20Marx.pdf. The paragraph in which the term “means of mental production” appears reads thus: “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling *material* force of society is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relations, the dominant material relations grasped as ideas; hence of the relations which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance.” Marx, “The German Ideology,” 59. For more on Marx, see my discussion of him in relation to the work of Friedan and Mitchell below.

between the normative and the actually practiced.”¹³ Stephanie Coontz in her 2011 book *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s* also notes that “Friedan was highly effective in exposing the contradictions in [Freudian anti-feminist] ideology.”¹⁴ In her 2006 book *When Sex Became Gender*, Shira Tarrant claims that the work of a “cohort” of postwar feminist writers – she names Margaret Mead, sociologists Viola Klein and Mirra Komarovsky, Ruth Herschberger, and Simone de Beauvoir – evinced “methodological parallels ... [with] political theorists more broadly, particularly in regard to critiques of positivism, ideology, and presupposed knowledge.”¹⁵ I shall attempt to demonstrate that this is true of *The Feminine Mystique* – and Mitchell’s *Women: the Longest Revolution* – as well. My intention is to go beyond these historians’ somewhat cursory examinations of ideology as a second-wave feminist concept, and to re-evaluate the works of Friedan and Mitchell as, first and foremost, *ideology critiques*.

For the purposes of this thesis, I will divide Friedan’s and Mitchell’s critiques into three parts – analysis of the intellectual and emotional work performed by hegemonic gender ideology, analysis of its relationship to ideas of progress and temporality, and analysis of contradictions as the source of its power. I will evaluate the critiques using the mutually constitutive variations on the concept of ideology promulgated by Marx, French communist Louis Althusser, and Foucault, as described by

¹³ Dorothy E. Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987), 50, Social Theory.

¹⁴ Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s* (New York: Basic Books [Perseus Books Group]), 2011), 162, Kindle.

¹⁵ Shira Tarrant, *When Sex Became Gender*, Perspectives on Gender (New York: Routledge [Taylor & Francis Group, an imprint of Informa PLC], 2006), 21. For more on Mead, see Friedan’s criticisms of her described below; for more on Klein, see her book *The Feminine Character: History of an Ideology*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd, 1946; Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1971), in which she explicitly states her use of a framework emphasizing the “Sociology of Knowledge”; see Klein, *The Feminine Character*, 2-3. For more on Komarovsky, see her book *Women in the Modern World: Their Education and Dilemmas* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1953), quoted below in Coontz, *A Strange Stirring*, and criticized by Friedan as accommodating the feminine mystique; see Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique: 50th Anniversary Edition*, ed. Kirsten Fermaglich and Lisa M. Fine, Norton Critical Editions (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2013), 110-11. For more on Ruth Herschberger, see her book *Adam’s Rib* (New York: Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1948), quoted below. For more on de Beauvoir, see Juliet Mitchell’s summations and my quotes of *The Second Sex* below.

British social workers Malcolm Carey and Victoria Foster in their article “Social work, ideology, and the limits of post-hegemony.”¹⁶ Marx, in Carey and Foster’s words, saw ideology as “[inverting] our understandings of a *materially determined* political economy upon which inequitable social relations are established and maintained [emphasis in the original]”¹⁷; Althusser refined this concept with his distinction between “[r]epressive” and “ideological” state apparatuses, thus “[privileging] the role of civil society in generating an imaginary or illusionary relationship between people and their conditions of existence”¹⁸; and Foucault shifted the emphasis to the role of “discourse *formation(s)* and their capacity to create professional statements, concepts and strategies (within medicine, social work, education, and so on) that situate speakers, and position, subjugate or elevate social actors through codes of language that determine what can and cannot be said, as well as influencing more general perception and understanding [emphasis in the original].”¹⁹ These views of ideology enable us to understand what was so revolutionary about the work of Friedan and Mitchell. My account of

¹⁶ Malcolm Carey and Victoria Foster, “Social work, ideology, discourse and the limits of post-hegemony,” *Journal of Social Work* 13, no. 3 (2013): 248-66, SAGE Journals.

¹⁷ Carey and Foster, “Social work,” 250.

¹⁸ Carey and Foster, “Social work,” 250. British New Left theorist Stuart Hall in his 1985 article “Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Post-Structuralist Debates,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 2, no. 2 (June 1985): 91-114, EBSCO Publishing, notes that one of Althusser’s core propositions is “the insistence that ideology is practice. That is, it appears in practices located within the rituals of specific apparatuses or social institutions and organizations ... Ideologies are the frameworks of thinking and calculation about the world – the ‘ideas’ which people use to figure out how the social world works, what their place is in it and what they *ought* to do ... Althusser ... places the emphasis on where ideas appear, where mental events register or are realized, as social phenomena [emphasis in the original].” The term “social phenomena,” in my view, is crucial for understanding ideology as a phenomenon of broad cultural significance. Hall, “Signification, Representation, Ideology,” 99. For more on Althusser, see my discussion of him in relation to Friedan’s and Mitchell’s work below.

¹⁹ Carey and Foster, “Social work,” 251. Foucault in his landmark *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books [Random House, Inc., an imprint of Advance Publications, Inc.], 1990), pointed out that since power in any society is diffuse and multifaceted, there is correspondingly “no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations.” Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 95-96. This insight of Foucault’s is central to understanding the evolution of resistant social movements and their arguments. For more on Foucault, see my discussion of him in relation to the work of Friedan and Mitchell below.

Friedan's critique will rely both on original drafts of *The Feminine Mystique* and the final published version of the text.

I. Hegemonic Gender Ideology's Intellectual-Emotional Work

The Feminine Mystique's legendary opening sentence – “The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women”²⁰ – strikingly illustrates the truth of Sally Haslanger's contention that “[o]ne crucial task of ideology critique is *to reveal ideology as such* [emphasis added].”²¹ Friedan employs a fairly similar, if more extended, metaphor in her description of changes in the portrayal of heroines in women's magazines over a 20-year period: “A geologist brings up a core of mud from the bottom of the ocean and sees layers of sediment as sharp as a razor blade deposited over the years – clues to changes in the geological evolution of the earth.”²² *Buried, brings up, bottom, sediment, deposited* – these are striking metaphors to describe that facet of ideology critique in which, in Haslanger's words, “it is necessary to articulate [ideology] and make it accessible for critical reflection.”²³ The implication is that Friedan is a kind of explorer, a pioneer. On page 23 she writes, “[The] women I have talked to, who are finally listening to [their] inner voice, seem in some incredible way to be groping through to a truth that has defied the experts. I think the experts in a great many fields have been holding pieces of that truth under their microscopes for a long time without realizing it.”²⁴ With images of touch struggling through thickly-layered substances – *bringing up a core of mud, groping through* – Friedan testifies to the socially-constructed nature of “truth” and the enormous obstacles to understanding the particular “truth” she struggles to impress

²⁰ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 9.

²¹ Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 19.

²² Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 28, 28-36.

²³ Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 19.

²⁴ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 23.

on her readers. Friedan's book itself contains a substratum of buried, fragmented Marxist-influenced insights.

"[One] goal of ideology critique," writes Haslanger, "is to elucidate the conceptual and narrative frameworks that undergird our social interaction, thus making them available for critical examination."²⁵ What is important for this thesis is the multipronged nature of Friedan's attempt to "dissect the morning mist" – a phrase originally used by 19th-century British economist Harriet Martineau in her criticism of the idea of women's "influence" as a legitimate substitute for political power.²⁶ Friedan is keenly attuned to the power of words and their construction: "The image [of femininity dominant in US society]," she writes in an early draft of *The Feminine Mystique*, "has the power to create mindless women, since words are what the mind grows on."²⁷ Thus she examines a wide variety of printed texts – fiction and nonfiction in women's magazines, advertisements, social-scientific and psychoanalytic writings – and establishes points of continuity between them; in other words, she establishes them as forms of *ideological work*. Both the published and unpublished versions of *The Feminine Mystique* grapple with the problem of how to unveil and challenge assumptions largely unchallenged. Friedan's early drafts of *The Feminine Mystique*, as we will see, often go more deeply into the psychological roots of hegemonic gender ideology than does the book's final, published version.

Friedan's understanding of the economic basis of the feminine mystique – her Marxist-influenced delineation of the social forces converging to trap women in a domestic future, to paraphrase Sara Pursley in her 2012 dissertation "A Race Against Time: Governing Femininity and

²⁵ Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 19.

²⁶ Harriet Martineau, *Society in America*, vol. I (London: Saunders and Otley, 1837), <http://media.pfeiffer.edu/lridener/DSS/Martineau/v1p1c3s7.html>.

²⁷ Betty Friedan, draft of *The Feminine Mystique*, p. 186, Series III, Box 44, Folder 580, Betty Friedan Papers, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

Reproducing the Future in Revolutionary Iraq, 1945-1963”²⁸ – underwrites her critique of its overwhelming emotional and intellectual power. The “richness of honest, objective, concrete, realistic domestic detail – the color of walls or lipstick, the exact temperature of the oven” found in the “service article”²⁹ of women’s magazines, the “increasing mindlessness, increasing emphasis on things ... [forces] the men who make the images to see women only as thing-buyers.”³⁰ Friedan’s startlingly blunt coda to this build-up of insights is that “the really crucial function, the really important role that women serve as housewives is *to buy more things for the house*. In all the talk of femininity and woman’s role, one forgets that the real business of America is business. But the perpetuation of housewifery, the growth of the feminine mystique, makes sense (and dollars) when one realizes that women are the chief customers of American business [emphasis in the original].”³¹ It is not out of place to note that Calvin Coolidge, who coined the phrase “the business of America is business,” embodied the Puritan-influenced Protestant Ethic more than any other US president in the first half of the 20th century.

In the Marxist schema, as noted above, ideologies are underwritten by economic conditions. Friedan exposes the class basis of cultural prescriptions for full-time domesticity by analyzing the variety of economic-aesthetic desires women’s magazines arouse in their readers. One Texas housewife, in a story revealingly titled “How America Lives,” “sits on a pale aqua satin sofa gazing out her picture window ... wearing rouge, powder, and lipstick ... her cotton dress ... immaculately fresh.”³² Janice, presumably white and upper-middle-class, is, in her own words, “free to play

²⁸ Sara Pursley, “A Race Against Time: Governing Femininity and Reproducing the Future in Revolutionary Iraq, 1945-63” (Ph.D diss., CUNY Graduate Center, 2012), 11, 20, <http://library.gc.cuny.edu.central.ezproxy.cuny.edu:2048/legacy/items/show/13655>.

²⁹ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 44, 43.

³⁰ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 52-53.

³¹ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 173.

³² Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 51.

bridge, attend club meetings, or stay home and read, listen to Beethoven, and just plain loaf ... I love my home ... I'm so grateful for my blessings ... [my] big comfortable house ... good health and faith in God and such material possessions as two cars, two TV's [sic] and two fireplaces."³³ Good health, faith in God, two cars, two TVs, two fireplaces – this is, of course, the embodiment of the Protestant Ethic's marriage of material wealth and "eternal verities" sentimentalism. A later observation in "The Sexual Sell," Friedan's chapter on the advertising industry's manipulation of women's consumption habits, quotes an advertiser's report on "[a] new combination of an almost religious belief in the importance and beauty of married life on the one hand, and the product-centered outlook, on the other[.]"³⁴

More pointedly, Friedan's biting apothegm about "Housewife Writers" Jean Kerr, Shirley Jackson, and Phyllis McGinley – their comic writings "may or may not overlook the housekeeper or maid who really makes the beds"³⁵ – and her quote from an advertiser's report in "The Sexual Sell" – "housekeeping ... is a task for which society hires the lowliest, least-trained, most trod-upon individuals and groups"³⁶ – anticipate what would later become a crucial insight of feminist historians: the US Cult of Domesticity, from the 18th through the 20th centuries, was underwritten by the easy access of white women in comfortable circumstances to low-paid domestic service, often provided by African-Americans and other racialized minority groups.³⁷ The racial-economic interests of white men and women had underwritten their belief in a subordinate role for the latter.

Following Marxist historian Eleanor Flexner, Friedan also notes that, during the struggle for

³³ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 51-52.

³⁴ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 184; see also 183-84, 174-84.

³⁵ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 45.

³⁶ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 180; see also 174-80.

³⁷ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 44, 45. For broader accounts of the intersection of race, gender, and class hierarchies in the development of US domestic ideology, see Ruth Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White: Race and Sex in American Liberalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 5, 7, and Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Forced to Care: Coercion and Caregiving in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 24-29, 35-36.

women's suffrage, "[b]ehind the cries of 'save femininity,' 'save the home,' could ... be glimpsed the influence of political machines, quailing at the very thought of what ... women would do if they got the vote ... [brewers] as well as other business interests, especially those that depended on underpaid labor of children and women, openly lobbied against the woman's suffrage amendment."³⁸ As Jessica Weiss notes in her 2012 article "'Fraud of Femininity': Domesticity, Selflessness, and Individualism in Responses to Betty Friedan,"³⁹ about responses to Friedan's *McCall's* excerpt from *The Feminine Mystique* in March 1963, "[t]hose who identified women with the home and capitalism saw them as the glue that held the family together."⁴⁰

Several short but tantalizing moments in Friedan's early drafts of *The Feminine Mystique* point to the intersection of race, class, and gender as categories of social hierarchy. In the first reference, Friedan connects the socially-imposed ignorance of white Southern women to their virulent racism: "The mind [sic] of the New Orleans women, shrieking, cursing, spitting at the little Negro girls entering school, was [sic] created partly by the ideas they were never given, [sic] to read about. But where does the violence come from, in these feminine Southern housewife [sic], in those other happy housewives who stormed in such fury at [a Black girl integrating a school]?"⁴¹ The implication here is that *sexist limitations help to reinforce racism*; the Southern white woman's world is shrunk by editors writing for a female audience assumed to be white and middle-class. Editors are, in the published version of *The Feminine Mystique*, "truncating women's minds."⁴² In a later chapter, Friedan points to women of the US past as examples of "[strength] and independence, work and responsibility, self-

³⁸ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 82; see also 82 fn. 15, 315.

³⁹ Jessica Weiss, "'Fraud of Femininity': Domesticity, Selflessness, and Individualism in Responses to Betty Friedan," in *Liberty and Justice for All?: Rethinking Politics in Cold War America*, edited by Kathleen G. Donohue (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 124-54, JSTOR.

⁴⁰ Weiss, "'Fraud of Femininity,'" 137.

⁴¹ Friedan, draft, p. 186.

⁴² Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 53.

confidence, self-discipline, courage – freedom and equality ... the New England settlers, the westward pioneers, and the mothers and daughters who came in the steerage from Ireland and Italy, Russia and Poland, *or as slaves from Africa*, and worked in the sweatshops or the laundries [emphasis added].”⁴³ In the published version of this latter passage, “slaves from Africa” is omitted, for reasons that are not clear.⁴⁴

The Feminine Mystique’s lack of an extended, sophisticated analysis of racism is one of the book’s major problems, as many commentators have noted.⁴⁵ But to adequately understand why this is the case, we need to grasp Friedan’s larger point about the conservative political and social climate following the psychological dislocations of the Great Depression and World War II. “The uncritical acceptance of Freudian doctrine in America was caused, at least in part, by the very relief it provided from uncomfortable questions about objective realities ... It provided a convenient escape from the atom bomb, McCarthy, all the disconcerting problems that might spoil the taste of steaks,”⁴⁶ she writes, at a time when the Red Scare was still very much alive. “It was easier” in the postwar era, “safer, to think about love and sex than about communism, McCarthy, and the uncontrolled bomb ... easier to look for Freudian sexual roots in man’s behavior, his ideas, and his wars than to look critically at his society and act constructively to right its wrongs.”⁴⁷ Even social scientists, Friedan writes in an unpublished draft, make “a deliberate conscious choice [to insist that] regardless of the truth, regardless of the human possibilities, it is better not to move ahead [underline in the

⁴³ Friedan, draft, p. 290, Box 44, Folder 580.

⁴⁴ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 278. Coontz notes in *A Strange Stirring* that “in at least one case” during the 1950s, women’s magazines “removed favorable references [in Friedan’s submitted articles] to struggles against racial and religious prejudice.” Coontz, *A Strange Stirring*, 146. Self- and societal censoring seem to have worked in tandem in the drafting of *The Feminine Mystique*.

⁴⁵ For a sampling of examples of this criticism, see hooks, *Feminist Theory*, 1-3; Ashley Fetters, “4 Big Problems With *The Feminine Mystique*,” *The Atlantic*, February 12, 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/sexes/archive/2013/02/4-big-problems-with-the-feminine-mystique/273069/>.

⁴⁶ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 103.

⁴⁷ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 157.

original]”;⁴⁸ for Friedan, this is an abuse of social science, the purpose of which is to challenge cultural norms rather than reinforce them. The psychological and sociological model of functionalism, “an attempt to make social science more ‘scientific’ by ... studying an institution only in terms of its function within its own society ... to avert unscientific value judgments,”⁴⁹ was “an easy out ... [from] the need to formulate questions and answers that would be inevitably controversial (at a time in academic circles, as in America as a whole, when controversy was not welcome.”⁵⁰ Ideology can function simply by making certain questions and answers invisible. A climate of paranoia shades inexorably into a climate of intellectual and emotional brainwashing.

The ideological work of educators “more concerned with their students’ future capacity for sexual orgasm than with their future use of trained intelligence”⁵¹ is effective precisely because it plays on the combination of intellectual and emotional prohibitions women students have inherited. Friedan quotes psychoanalyst Helene Deutsch’s *fatwa* against women’s intelligence – “the intellectual woman is masculinized; in her warm, intuitive knowledge has yielded to cold unproductive thinking” – and adds the devastating observation: “A girl doesn’t have to be very lazy, very unsure, to take the hint ... she would have to do some very cold hard thinking about her own warm, intuitive knowledge to challenge this authoritative statement.”⁵² This deconstruction of a leading woman psychoanalyst’s opposition to the intellectual development of other women is one of the most brilliant exposés of ideological work in the brilliant exposé that is *The Feminine Mystique*. A statement like Deutsch’s has the power to disarm all possible resistance, to foreclose all suspicion of the status quo. What cultural forces are so invested in the disempowerment of a social group that

⁴⁸ Friedan, draft, p. 491, Box 45, Folder 583a.

⁴⁹ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 106.

⁵⁰ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 112.

⁵¹ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 131.

⁵² Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 145 fn. 19, 316, 318.

even its “educators ... [protect] [them] from the temptation to use their critical, creative intelligence – by the ingenious method of educating it *not* to be critical or creative[?]”⁵³

II. Hegemonic Gender Ideology, Progress, and Temporality

“Certainly, all the words written for American women today, telling them how to adjust to their role as women ... assume this is the end. In the women’s magazines – read by tens of millions of American women, reflecting, and shaping, their identity, their dreams, and the horizon of their world, this is woman, as she was, and is, and will be [underline in the original],” writes Friedan in an unpublished draft of *The Feminine Mystique*.⁵⁴ “I do not think,” she writes on the next page of the draft, “this image is the end – women [sic] as she is and was and always will be – for the fact is that this image has changed, even in the past 20 years, and is still changing ... [but] ... this image ... denies the actuality of changing life [underline in the original].”⁵⁵ Change does not automatically equal progress. “My generation of women grew up, already so different, that we felt no need to fight battles for women ... No one told us of the gap between winning freedom, and using it,”⁵⁶ she writes in the draft. To a certain extent Friedan’s observations chime with those of Martin Luther King in his iconic *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, published the same year: “time itself is neutral ... [human] progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability ... without ... hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation.”⁵⁷

Chapter 2 of Friedan’s book is designed to claim the Great Depression as a time when white, middle-class women’s confinement to domesticity did not seem immutable; when career aspirations

⁵³ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 131.

⁵⁴ Friedan, draft, page 180, Series III, Box 44, Folder 580.

⁵⁵ Friedan, draft, page 181.

⁵⁶ Friedan, draft, pp. 327-28, Folder 581.

⁵⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” 1963, African Studies Center, University of Pennsylvania, https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html.

for women were not condemned as they were in the postwar era.⁵⁸ In actual fact, many countries around the world had curtailed women's employment opportunities during the Great Depression – and the windows of opportunity for entry into “male” fields opened by World War II had closed when the war ended.⁵⁹ But for the purposes of this thesis, the point is not to condemn Friedan for her deviation from historical accuracy, but to see the creativity and ingenuity of her point that the postwar domestic ideal was a historical development and not a biological or social necessity. The troubled aftermath of a depression and a war was the backdrop for “avoiding personal commitment to truth in a catch-all commitment to ‘home’ and ‘family.’ For the social worker, the psychologist and the numerous ‘family’ counselors ... therapy for private patients on personal problems of sex, personality, and interpersonal relations was safer and more lucrative than probing too deeply for the common causes of mankind's suffering.”⁶⁰ “Under the Freudian microscope ... a very different

⁵⁸ Friedan mentions stories in women's magazines in 1939 that depicted “the spirit, courage, independence, determination – the strength of character [women] showed in their work as nurses, teachers, artists, actresses, copywriters, saleswomen.” Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 29, 28-31.

⁵⁹ For examples of international ambivalence and/or hostility towards women's wage work during the Great Depression, see Susan Pedersen, *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the Welfare State: Britain and France 1914-1945* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 363, 371, 395-97, 399. In interwar France, notes Pedersen, the idea that “[f]amily policy ... should work to enable married women to stay home” was “the lowest common denominator of party political consensus.” Pedersen, *Family*, 371. See also Open Door Council, “The Married Woman: Is She a Person?” (London: Open Door Council, 1938), 3, 4, Women and Social Movements International, 1840-Present. For examples of how the career openings made possible for US women by World War II were stage-managed so as to prepare them for a return to domesticity, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, an imprint of Perseus Books, LLC [Hachette Book Group, Inc.], 2017), 58-77, Kindle. Friedan herself acknowledges the intensity of post-World War II discrimination against US women in *The Feminine Mystique*: “When the war ended, of course, GI's came back to take the jobs and fill the seats in colleges and universities that for a while had been occupied largely by girls. For a short time, competition was keen and the resurgence of the old anti-feminine prejudices in business and the professions made it difficult for a girl to keep or advance in a job ... Subtle discrimination against women, to say nothing of the sex wage differential, is still an unwritten law today ... During the war, women's abilities ... were welcome; after the war they were confronted with that polite but impenetrable curtain of hostility.” Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 155-56. For more on postwar discrimination against women in Europe, see Bonnie Smith, “Introduction,” in *Women and Gender in Postwar Europe*, ed. Joanna Regulska and Bonnie G. Smith (New York: Routledge [Taylor & Francis Group, LLC, an imprint of Informa PLC]), 2012, <https://books.google.com/books?id=7PvIBQAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=bonnie+smith+regulska&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewisrITJmJLYAhXE1CYKHZD0BBcQ6AEIKTAA#v=onepage&q=bonnie%20smith%20regulska&f=false>. Smith notes that postwar Western Europe as a whole “hoped to get women out of the workforce” and that the odd provision of forcing stores to close at 5 p.m. in West Germany and the Netherlands was instituted for this purpose.

⁶⁰ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 157.

concept of family began to emerge ... singled out for special attention was the 'mother.' It was suddenly discovered that the mother could be blamed for almost everything ... By unfortunate coincidence, this attack against mothers came about at [sic] the same time that American women were beginning to use the rights of their emancipation."⁶¹ Here, as we will see in the following chapter, Friedan anticipates Juliet Mitchell's claim that the family is an ideological and not a natural structure.

As historian Rebecca Jo Plant has noted in her book *Mom: The Transformation of Motherhood in Modern America*, Friedan at once reproduces and challenges the misogynistic claims made by psychoanalysis and social science about white, middle-class women as mothers.⁶² For this thesis, the insight can be modified into the claim that Friedan's arguments both reify and question ideologies of the normal family. Friedan's book reflects a tension that Rebecca Jo Plant has identified in postwar ideologies of motherhood: "despite their tendency to portray maternal instinct in biological terms, experts betrayed profound doubts about middle-class women's 'natural' capacities as nurturers."⁶³ Although Friedan does not articulate a coherent argument for the historical changeability of the concept of motherhood itself, she makes it clear that the forms of social reproduction predominant in the postwar United States are not final or natural, but historically conditioned.

⁶¹ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 159.

⁶² Rebecca Jo Plant, *Mom: The Transformation of Motherhood in Modern America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), locs 2301-49 of 3974, Kindle. What Friedan tries to do is to claim that mothers who are themselves psychologically and physically undeveloped will impose such arrested development on their children; see, for example, her claim that "the greater [a woman's] own infantilism, and the weaker her core of self, the earlier the girl will seek 'fulfillment' as a wife and mother and the more exclusively will she live through her husband and children ... a woman who evades her own growth by clinging to the childlike protection of the housewife role will ... suffer increasingly severe pathology ... [h]er motherhood will be increasingly pathological." Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 241. So pathological, in fact, that it can result in juvenile delinquency, autism, child abuse, and worse: Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 245, 247-48, 228-57.

⁶³ Plant, *Mom: The Transformation of Motherhood*, locs 225-29 of 3974.

In evaluating Freud's work, Friedan makes perhaps her most explicit social-constructionist and relativist claim: "no social scientist can completely free himself from the prison of his own culture: he can only interpret what he observes in the scientific framework of his own time ... Much of what Freud believed to be biological, instinctual, and changeless has been shown by modern research to be a result of specific cultural causes."⁶⁴ In this she echoes the earlier emphasis of psychoanalyst Karen Horney – and Freud himself in his later years – on the significance of environmental influences in the formation of personality; Horney had claimed in 1939 that "[t]he relevant factor[s] in the genesis of neurosis [are] ... adverse influences which make a child feel helpless and defenseless."⁶⁵ (Friedan quotes Horney at the beginning of Chapter 13, "The Forfeited Self," as an example of a thinker who "postulate[s] some positive growth tendency within the organism, which, from within, drives it to fuller development, to self-realization.")⁶⁶ Freud's alleged belief in eating as a major indicator of conflict between mother and child, for example, is challenged by Friedan: "a noticeable decline in children's 'eating problems' ... has the culture removed eating as a focus for early childhood problems – by the American emphasis on permissiveness in child care, or simply by the fact that in our affluent society food has become less a cause for anxiety in mothers?"⁶⁷ Friedan's quote of a sociologist's claim that "[modern] 'scientific child care' enforces a constant supervision and diffused worrying ... in an intensely competitive milieu middle-class parents from the day of birth are constantly comparing their own child's development with that of the neighbors' children"⁶⁸ opens dominant US ideals of childrearing to critical scrutiny. The very "glorification of 'woman's role' ... seems to be in proportion to society's reluctance to treat women as complete human beings; for the

⁶⁴ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 88.

⁶⁵ Dagmar Herzog, *Cold War Freud: Psychoanalysis in an Age of Catastrophes* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 26; see also 22-33.

⁶⁶ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 258.

⁶⁷ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 90.

⁶⁸ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 169.

less real function that role has, the more it is decorated with meaningless details to conceal its emptiness.

This phenomenon has been noted, in general terms, in the annals of social science and history.”⁶⁹

Here, again, Friedan may have been influenced by Horney: “The restriction of woman to a private emotional sphere leads to inferiority feelings,” said Horney in a speech to the National Federation of Business and Professional Women’s Clubs in July 1935, “because a sound and secure self-confidence must draw on a broad basis of human qualities – such as initiative, courage, independence, capacity for mastering situations, talents ... [a]s long as homemaking was a big task with plenty of responsibilities ... woman knew that she was a constructive factor in the economic process ... With the change in social conditions, woman has lost one important foundation for feeling herself valuable.”⁷⁰

Friedan devotes a segment of “The Sex-Directed Educators” to challenging several implicit premises of “family-life education”⁷¹: “It is functional ‘knowledge’ that ‘only the exceptional woman can make a go of a commitment to a career. Of course, since most women in the past have not had careers, the few who did were all ‘exceptional.’”⁷² In criticizing Margaret Mead for her “vision ... [that] women, by merely being women and bearing children, will earn the same respect accorded men for their creative achievements,” Friedan notes that “[in] such a world ... [femininity]

⁶⁹ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 199.

⁷⁰ Karen Horney, “Woman’s Fear of Action (1935),” in *The Unknown Karen Horney: Essays on Gender, Culture, and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Bernard J. Paris (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 121. Other feminist writers of the same period made similar points. Ellen Dorothy Abb, in her now-forgotten polemic *What Fools We Women Be!* (London: Cassell and Company, Ltd, 1937), wrote, “[a]t one time women could be satisfied with the home, when it was a centre of productive activities of every kind. But now that the interest has been [page 16] taken out of the home and woman is isolated in it all day long, she is wasted and she is bored. The home of to-day is rarely sufficient occupation for the grown-up woman.” Abb, *What Fools We Women Be!*, 15-16. A generation earlier, in 1914, novelist James Oppenheim claimed that since “the industries that were formerly kept within the home have gone into the mills ... [i]n [the] home, as the home must be constituted in this day, [woman] cannot get a real and sufficient outlet for [her] energy.” See “Feminist a Better Home Maker than the Old-Time Wife,” *New York Times* May 3, 1914, ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Note that Horney, Abb, and Oppenheim did not seek to entirely disentangle the discursive linkage between “woman” and “home,” but urged an adaptation to changed realities.

⁷¹ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 141.

⁷² Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 143.

becomes a value which society must protect from the destructive onrush of civilization like the vanishing buffalo.”⁷³ Biology itself is not outside history: “Female biology ... may be changeless ... but the nature of the human relationship to biology *has* changed ... Even ... simple [biological needs of hunger, thirst, and sex] in men or women today, are not the same as they were in the Stone Age or in the South Sea cultures.”⁷⁴ Belief in biology as destiny actually contributes to a “high incidence of cramps with menstruation, nausea and vomiting during pregnancy, depression with childbirth, and severe physiological and psychological distress at menopause[,] [which] have come to be accepted as a ‘normal’ part of feminine biology. Are these stigmata ... part of the fixed and eternal nature of women as they are popularly assumed to be?”⁷⁵ We see here, and in analysis of Mead’s writings quoted below, how Friedan shows up the timidity, instability, and vacillation of Mead’s writings on gender roles – how Friedan points out Mead’s oscillation between viewing women as creatures of (seemingly timeless) biology and creatures of (alterable) environment.

Friedan’s close reading of Mead explores the role played by the idea of progress in Western social thought. The concept of progress – and its obstruction – forms a major theme in Friedan’s critique. “To live according to the feminine mystique depends on a reversal of history, a devaluation of human progress ... even the mystique makers felt the need to defend themselves against the question, ‘are we, in suggesting that women might ... recapture some of their functions around the home ... trying to turn back the clock of progress?’ Progress is not progress, they argued.”⁷⁶ In “Stepford U.S.A.: Second-Wave Feminism, Domestic Labor, and the Representation of National Time,” Jane Elliott argues that *The Feminine Mystique* “consistently argues that women’s oppression

⁷³ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 120.

⁷⁴ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 121.

⁷⁵ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 223.

⁷⁶ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 211.

is experienced primarily as a temporal problem ... [s]tuck in the same repetitive drudgery, [housewives] trudge through the 'endless boring days' that constitute static time."⁷⁷ The paradox of progress-stasis is one of many functional contradictions of the feminine mystique.

III. Hegemonic Gender Ideology's Althusserian Dialectics

"Instead of destroying the old prejudices that restricted women's lives, [postwar] social science in America merely gave them new authority. By a curious circular process, the insights of psychology and anthropology and sociology, which should have been powerful weapons to free women, somehow *canceled each other out*, trapping women in dead center," writes Friedan [emphasis added].⁷⁸ Friedan employs a variant of the Hegelian-Marxist concept of "supersession" ("the *maintenance-of-what-has-been-negated-in-its-very-negation*" [emphasis in the original], to quote Althusser in his 1965 book *For Marx*) to explain the survival of conservative gender ideology in an ostensibly democratic society.⁷⁹ Her close reading of the work of Margaret Mead and other social theorists reveals how easily egalitarian social-scientific language can be redirected from emancipatory ends to maintain an uneasy status quo – which, of course, makes it all the more bewildering. As Stephanie Coontz notes in *A Strange Stirring*, "Postwar ideology was particularly disorienting for many women because it often came in the guise of a forward-thinking rejection of 'traditional' ideas about gender and sexuality."⁸⁰ Indeed, as Friedan herself notes, "the feminine mystique itself – with its acknowledgement of woman as subject and not just object of the sexual act, and its assumption that her active, willing participation was essential to man's pleasure – could not have come without

⁷⁷ Jane Elliott, "Stepford U.S.A.: Second-Wave Feminism, Domestic Labor, and the Representation of National Time," *Cultural Critique*, no. 70 (Fall, 2008), 45, JSTOR.

⁷⁸ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 105.

⁷⁹ See, for example, Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Verso, 1996), 115, 115-16, Social Theory.

⁸⁰ Coontz, *A Strange Stirring*, 75.

the [partial] emancipation of women to human equality.”⁸¹ Friedan illustrates how easily ideologies and discourses of emancipation can be deployed in the service of new forms of oppression. She also illustrates the extent to which emancipation itself can be given with one hand and taken away with the other, how it can function as the more “positive” side of a coin of social control.

Friedan’s criticism of Margaret Mead, the “Housewife Writers,” and other women who shape public opinion in the direction of the feminine mystique is extraordinarily subtle and incisive, profoundly attuned to their own troubled subject positions as women in a male-dominated world. In Chapter 2, “The Happy Housewife Heroine,” Friedan points to the paradox of Dorothy Thompson, “newspaper woman, foreign correspondent, famous columnist,” telling readers of the *Ladies’ Home Journal* they “can save more money by their managerial talents inside the home than they can bring into it by outside work.”⁸² Women writers and professionals serve as a buffer class, their privilege of work outside the home resting on the domestic containment of other women: “If the real women editors [of women’s magazines] were not, somehow, able to give up their own careers, all the more reason to ‘help’ other women fulfill themselves as wives and mothers.”⁸³ In one of her unpublished drafts Friedan speculates, “It may not be relevant [Friedan seems to think that the word “relevant” does as well as the word “irrelevant” for clarifying her point], whether a brilliantly successful woman in a science dominated by men wanted her singular stature diminished by the influx of a lot of other women into such fields ... the role of Margaret Mead as the professional spokesman [sic] of femininity would have been less important, if more women moved

⁸¹ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 274.

⁸² Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 31, 32, 31-32. This, of course, is yet another example of how ideology functions in a Marxist sense as an instrument of ruling-class economic interests; Thompson assumes that her readers have the *option* not to work outside the home.

⁸³ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 44.

on ... to take their own place on the frontiers of thought ... instead of listening to what [Mead] said in her books.”⁸⁴

As we have already seen, Friedan recognizes in the published text that Mead’s “influence, for women, has been a paradox. A mystique *takes what it needs from any thinker of the time* [emphasis added]”⁸⁵ – in other words, it exploits the ambiguities, retreats, and hesitations embedded in “liberal,” “emancipatory” ideologies and makes them “[cancel] each other out.” Friedan quotes Mead’s acknowledgement that the “great variety of ways ... in which the roles of the two sexes have been patterned” are often “flatly contradictory to each other,” but Mead turns around to claim that “we always find the patterning ... Are we dealing with a [biological, social, and/or cultural requirement] that ... although not so deeply rooted, still is so very socially convenient and so well tried that it would be uneconomical to flout it?”⁸⁶ I would argue that Friedan’s quote of Mead’s intellectual contortions shows how gender conservatism can function by fusing with or balancing “feminist” language, in the dialectical sense of contradictions and inconsistencies “[canceling] each other out.” I think this point is further illustrated when Friedan quotes Mead’s claim that the “tendency to make artificial definitions that limit an activity to one sex ... is a vicious circle ... [those] who would break the circle are themselves a product of it, express some of its defects in their every gesture, may only be strong enough to challenge it, not able actually to break it.”⁸⁷ The very caution of Mead’s language, her vacillations, her inconsistencies, strengthens the feminine mystique. Friedan captures a central paradox of liberal discourse: its potential both to reinforce and oppose structures of domination.

⁸⁴ Friedan, draft, pp. 467-68, Box 45, Folder 583a.

⁸⁵ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 114; see also 105, 107, 113-25.

⁸⁶ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 115-16.

⁸⁷ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 123.

This is in part because of what Friedan calls the “therapeutic caution, the manipulative superiority, typical of too many American social scientists.”⁸⁸ Recall that the “[feminine] mystique is broadcast by the very agents of education and social science that are supposed to be the chief enemies of prejudice.”⁸⁹ Postwar psychoanalysis and social science were mutually reinforcing in their pronouncements on women’s appropriate nature and role.⁹⁰ Friedan’s “sex-directed educator,” influenced by both fields of study, a product of the modernizing optimism of the postwar United States, feeds his students “a sophisticated soup of uncritical prescriptions and presentiments far more binding on the mind and prejudicial to the future than all the traditional do’s and don’ts.”⁹¹ University education for US women, “as psychology and anthropology and sociology permeated the total scholarly atmosphere,” has, to use a piquant phrase of a woman quoted in the 1960 *Redbook* magazine article “Why Young Mothers Feel Trapped, “come full circle and the American housewife is once again trapped in a squirrel cage ... the cage is now a modern plate-glass-and-broadloom ranch house or a convenient modern apartment.”⁹² Friedan’s quote of the “squirrel cage”

⁸⁸ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 121.

⁸⁹ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 86.

⁹⁰ See, for example, Coontz, *A Strange Stirring*; “psychiatrists explained [the naturalness of women’s domesticity and the unnaturalness of their rejection of it] in circular reasoning disguised as the latest scientific thinking ... [s]ociologists argued that unless society encouraged a clear differentiation of the sexes, everything from the nuclear family to the economy itself could disintegrate.” Coontz, *A Strange Stirring*, 68-69. Eli Zaretsky in his fascinating 2004 article “Charisma or Rationalization? Domesticity and Psychoanalysis in the United States in the 1950s,” *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 2 (Winter, 2000): 328-54, JSTOR, notes that by the post-World War II period psychoanalysis “was becoming a this-worldly program of ethical rationalization, with links to such normalizing agencies as medicine, the social service professions, the social sciences, and the welfare state.” It was, in other words, part of a general regime of what Zaretsky calls “social control,” which included “the growth of the professions not only because professionals supplied a model of autonomous collegial organization, but also because they generated the necessary techniques of planning, classification, and ordering.” Social control was a society-wide phenomenon; in Zaretsky’s words, it “pervaded the military, the workplace, the welfare state, and the professions ... the resanctification of domesticity and the accompanying familialization of personal life were aspects of rationalization. The result was to destroy preexisting communities and group solidarities and to create new, bureaucratically and instrumentally organized forms of order – psychiatry, medicine, the welfare state, the multiversity, the military.” Zaretsky, “Charisma or Rationalization?,” 333, 341. Gender conservatism was so pervasive in the postwar era because processes of homogenization and modernization cut across different sectors of US society.

⁹¹ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 132.

⁹² Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 132, 20 fn. 4, 314.

metaphor indicates that the difficulty of challenging the boundaries of the feminine mystique lies precisely in the modernity of the social-scientific and psychoanalytic doctrines that buttress it. “Freud’s concept of the superego helped to free man from the tyranny of the ‘shoulds,’ the tyranny of the past ... [y]et Freudian thought helped create a new superego that paralyzes educated modern American women – a new tyranny of the ‘shoulds,’ which chains women to an old image, prohibits choice and growth, and denies them individual identity.”⁹³ Friedan was not, of course, the first person to realize that the language of freedom and progress can have an underside of repression and stagnation. In her 1949 polemic *Adam’s Rib* Ruth Herschberger responded to psychoanalyst Erich Fromm’s hope that “social conditions can be created which will develop the positive side of the peculiarities of persons, sexes, and national groups”⁹⁴ thus: “[there] is no rule by which we must develop only what we have ‘uniquely’ to offer ... [the] progressive school with its admonition to ‘be creative’ often has preconceptions of what the creative is to be. These premeditated potentialities are given a few years of grace in which to emerge, but if they have not come out of hiding by that time – back to the birch rod.”⁹⁵

The insidious uses to which the supposedly emancipatory, modernizing language of “creativity”⁹⁶ can be put are abundantly in evidence in Friedan’s book. Friedan quotes a motivational research expert who claims that he has “helped [woman] rediscover the home as the *expression of her creativeness* ... If [a manufacturer] tells [a woman] that all she can be is a wife and mother, she will spit in his face. But we ... *liberate* her need to be creative in the kitchen [emphasis added].”⁹⁷ This statement is a masterful combination of a carrot and a stick; it entices women into the trap of Hansel

⁹³ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 86-87.

⁹⁴ Ruth Herschberger, *Adam’s Rib* (New York: Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1948), 156.

⁹⁵ Herschberger, *Adam’s Rib*, 168.

⁹⁶ Variants of the noun “creativity,” the verb “create,” and the adjective “creative” appear repeatedly throughout “The Sexual Sell.” See Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 177, 178, 179, 180, 182, 186.

⁹⁷ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 189-90.

and Gretel's gingerbread house. "Liberation" is here used for conservative purposes. In Friedan's words, "[education], independence, growing individuality, everything that made [women] ready for other purposes had constantly to be countered, channeled back to the home."⁹⁸ In fact, claims an advertising publication, "[the] modern bride seeks *as a conscious goal* that which in many cases her grandmother saw as a blind fate and her mother as slavery: to belong to a man, to have a home and children of her own, to *choose* among all possible careers the career of wife-mother-homemaker [emphasis added]."⁹⁹ The language of consciousness and choice is here used to give the illusion of freedom. The term "illusion," in Friedan's hands, signifies advertisers' pre-emption of women's desires for intelligence, independence, "creativity"; "a certain cleaning device ... let the housewife have the illusion that she has become 'a professional, an expert'"¹⁰⁰; "Science should not relieve housewives of too much drudgery; it must concentrate instead on creating the *illusion* of that sense of achievement that housewives seem to need [emphasis in the original]."¹⁰¹

Friedan and, later, Mitchell, imply but do not state that ideologies of modernity, of progress, of creativity, can themselves be obstacles to social justice. The very claim that a society has solved a social inequality, or that a social inequality has become benign, is itself ideological work. The ideology of housewifery-as-modernity promulgated by advertisers keeps white middle-class women ever more firmly in the home. The very time that labor-saving devices and the rationalization of the US economy have permitted to women is given with one hand and taken away with the other. As Friedan writes in the chapter "Housewifery Expands to Fill the Time Available," "when the mystique of feminine fulfillment sent women back home again, housewifery had to expand into a full-time

⁹⁸ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 176.

⁹⁹ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 184.

¹⁰⁰ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 179.

¹⁰¹ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 181.

career ... each labor-saving appliance *brought a labor-demanding elaboration of housework*. Each scientific advance that might have freed women from the drudgery of cooking, cleaning, and washing ... instead imposed new drudgery, until housework not only expanded to fill the time available, but could hardly be done in the available time [emphasis added].”¹⁰² Women are trapped by the very wealth, the very devices, they are told to be grateful for.

The Feminine Mystique is thus a story of the totalitarian potential embedded in the supposedly emancipatory forces of industrialization, automation, mechanization, and social science. In Friedan’s telling, the freedom promised by modernity is premised on social control. Queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s 1991 claim that “social-engineering momentum [is] apparently built into every one of the human sciences of the west” is also made, implicitly, by *The Feminine Mystique* nearly 30 years earlier.¹⁰³ Friedan’s critique can be seen as an extension of German philosopher and sociologist Alfred Schutz’s earlier observation, quoted in Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann’s 1966 *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*: “All typifications of common-sense thinking are themselves integral elements of the concrete historical socio-cultural *Lebenswelt* within which they prevail as taken for granted and as socially approved.”¹⁰⁴ Friedan’s contribution to the “sociology of knowledge” is to expose the problems embedded in liberal ideologies of progress, to challenge totalizing assumptions of inevitable advance, even while, as Rachel Bowlby notes, she herself employs a “triumphalist rhetoric of emancipation.”¹⁰⁵ “The very twists of [Friedan’s] argument,” Bowlby recognizes, “with all the oddity of its details and

¹⁰² Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 200.

¹⁰³ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “How To Bring Your Kids Up Gay,” *Social Text*, No. 29 (1991), 25.

¹⁰⁴ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1966; New York, Penguin Books, 1991), 28, <http://perflensburg.se/Berger%20social-construction-of-reality.pdf>

¹⁰⁵ Bowlby, “The Problem with No Name,” 71.

contradictions ... makes problematic the easy conceptualization of feminist progress.”¹⁰⁶ In Juliet Mitchell’s “Women: the Longest Revolution,” Friedan’s challenge is vastly extended and elaborated.

Chapter 2

“Women: the Longest Revolution”: Juliet Mitchell’s New Conceptual Paradigms

Where Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* advances somewhat tentative claims about connections between ideology and power, Juliet Mitchell’s 1966 article “Women: the Longest Revolution,” published in the British socialist *New Left Review*, clearly states the linkages. Where Betty Friedan, writing for a mass-market audience in the Cold War United States, cannot explicitly refer to her Old Left roots or apply the theories of Marx or Engels to women’s situation,¹⁰⁷ Mitchell grounds her feminist critique in Marxist historical materialism. For Mitchell, the situation of women is governed by exploitative contradictions. It is precarious and menaced even by developments – industrialization, automation, the birth-control pill – that are thought to promote it. Ironically for an essay published in a socialist journal and written with a Marxist framework, Mitchell does not pay attention to class differences in women’s roles or self-conceptions. She examines the status of women *as women* and not as baronesses or factory workers. “Women: the Longest Revolution” is a short and pointed political manifesto, an overview of problems arising from women’s situation, rather than a book-length exposé like *The Feminine Mystique*.¹⁰⁸ What is

¹⁰⁶ Bowlby, “The Problem with No Name,” 74.

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, Fermaglich and Fine, introduction to *The Feminine Mystique*, xiv.

¹⁰⁸ Mitchell justifies her lack of attention to the role of class in women’s lives in the following footnote: “The capitalist mode of production separates the family from its earlier immediate association with the economy, and this marginality is unaffected directly by the transformation of the relations of production from private to public ownership in the transition to a socialist society. As the essence of woman’s contemporary problem derives from this marginality, for this problem, *but for this problem only*, the distinction between industrial and preindustrial societies is the significant one. Categories meaningful for one element of the social totality may well be irrelevant or even pernicious if extended to the whole of historical development. Similar arguments, but principally lack of space in a short article must excuse the total neglect of problems arising from class distinctions in the functions and status of women.” Juliet Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” *New Left Review*, November 1, 1966, 34 fn. 51, ProQuest.

significant about the essay is not simply that she takes the necessity and desirability of women's liberation for granted – not an automatic assumption even on the British Left in 1966 – but that she moves the parameters of the discussion to an entirely new level.

Like *The Feminine Mystique*, “Women: the Longest Revolution” is keenly attuned to the power relations embedded in dominant views of gender and sexuality. But where Friedan's critique of ideology-as-power is mainly implicit and indirect, Mitchell openly states that “there is nothing inevitable about the form or role of the family any more than there is about the character or role of women. *It is the function of ideology to present these given social types as aspects of Nature itself* [emphasis added].”¹⁰⁹ This forthrightly radical statement differs profoundly from the claims made by earlier generations of suffragists and feminists. While many progressive Victorian and post-Victorian Britons had earlier criticized aspects of family life they deemed detrimental to women's interests, only one person in early 20th-century Britain, to my knowledge, explicitly hoped to denaturalize the married couple (not so much the family itself) as the unit of the social: the feminist, sexologist, and communist Stella Browne.¹¹⁰ As Mitchell herself points out later in her article, “[t]he notion that ‘family’ and ‘society’ are virtually co-extensive terms, or that an advanced society not founded on the nuclear family is now inconceivable, is widespread.”¹¹¹ Simply by directly calling this assumption into question, Mitchell challenges a fundamental organizing worldview of British

¹⁰⁹ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution.”

¹¹⁰ F.W. Stella Browne, “The Feminine Aspect of Birth Control,” in *Report of the Fifth International Neo-Malthusian and Birth Control Conference, Kingsway Hall, London, July 11th to 14th, 1922*, ed. Raymond Pierpoint (London: William Heinemann [Medical Books] Ltd., 1922), 40-43. At this conference Browne expressed hope that monogamy would “no longer be *stereotyped* as the one lifelong and unvarying form of legally recognised expression for anything so infinitely variable and individual as the sexual impulse.” Browne, “The Feminine Aspect of Birth Control,” 41. Browne, as her biographer Lesley Hall notes, “advanced ideas presaging those of the so-called ‘second wave’ of the feminist movement”; Lesley Hall, *The Life and Times of Stella Browne: Feminist and Free Spirit* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 3, <https://books.google.com/books?id=eH9NNHzY4lUC&printsec=frontcover&dq=lesley+hall+stella+browne&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewihhOClsJTYAhXhmeAKHftSAcgQ6AEIKTAA#v=onepage&q=lesley%20hall%20stella%20browne&f=false>. But Browne seems to have been an exceptional figure. As we will see, gender essentialism and familialism figured prominently in British suffrage rhetoric and ideology.

¹¹¹ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 20.

society throughout the lifetimes of her readers. She opens up possibilities for entirely different forms of social organization, in ways that, as we will see, go to the very conceptual core of the “political” itself.

I. Hegemonic Gender Ideology’s Emotional-Intellectual Work

“The situation of women is different from that of any other social group ... Women are essential and irreplaceable; they cannot therefore be exploited in the same way as other social groups can. They are fundamental to the human condition, yet in their economic, social and political roles, they are marginal. It is precisely this combination – fundamental and marginal at one and the same time – that has been fatal to them.”¹¹² These opening sentences of “Women: the Longest Revolution” make clear to readers the profoundly unique nature of women’s subjection – the political, social, and economic disadvantages they face not *despite* but *because of* their centrality in the human imaginary. “Within the world of men,” Mitchell writes, “their position is comparable to that of an oppressed minority; but they also exist outside the world of men. The one state justifies the other and precludes protest.”¹¹³ In other words, it is precisely because the separate position of women, as women, *seems* to be natural, biologically inevitable, advantageous to themselves and others, that it is so difficult to recognize as unjust. It is worth noting here that one of the letters written to Betty Friedan referenced just this sense of female isolation: Anne Parsons, the daughter of sociologist Talcott Parsons, claimed that being an “unmarried career woman” was “like being a Negro or Jew, with the difference that the prejudices are manifest in such subtle ways that it is very hard to pin

¹¹² Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 11.

¹¹³ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 11.

them down, and that the feminine mystique is so strong and attractive an ideology that it is very hard to find a countervailing point of view from which to fight for oneself.”¹¹⁴

As Mitchell herself acknowledges, “[t]here is no widespread *demand* for changes in [key components of their status] on the part of women themselves – the governing ideology has effectively prevented critical consciousness.”¹¹⁵ Here Mitchell employs the concept of false consciousness, as deployed by Marx and subsequent Left thinkers, to explain women’s blindness to their own interests.¹¹⁶ It is *ideology* – not nature or conflicting social patterns – that institutionalizes women’s disadvantage. Ideology provides a useful tool for Mitchell to grasp the forces securing women’s adherence to an inequitable status quo. She, like Friedan, understands that ideology succeeds by presenting itself as immutable truth. “Like woman herself, the family appears as a natural object, but it is actually a cultural creation ... The ‘true’ woman and the ‘true’ family are images of peace and plenty; in actuality they may both be sites of violence and despair ... what Marx wrote about the bourgeois myths of the Golden Ancient World describes precisely women’s realm: ‘in one way the child-like world of the ancients appears to be superior, and this is so, insofar as we seek for closed shape, form and established limitation.’”¹¹⁷ Here Mitchell, following Friedan, challenges the permanence of current concepts of “femininity” and “the family”, but adds a more explicit criticism of *the very concepts themselves*. As Rachel Bowlby notes, *The Feminine Mystique*

¹¹⁴ Coontz, *A Strange Stirring*, 84.

¹¹⁵ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 32.

¹¹⁶ In the words of sociologist Ron Eyerman in his 1981 article “False Consciousness and Ideology in Marxist Theory,” *Acta Sociologica* 24, no. 1/2 (1981): 43-56, JSTOR, “Marx and Engels ... [used] the term [ideology] to refer to the distorted beliefs intellectuals held about society and the power of their own ideas. Those who produced ideologies suffered from false consciousness; they were deluded about their own beliefs. In the development of these concepts through the work of Antonio Gramsci and Georg Lukács to the early Frankfurt School, a distinction between the meaning and the application of false consciousness and ideology was maintained. False consciousness came to mean a distorted and limited form of experience in society that could be applied to all social groups and classes; ideology was applied to those explanations offered by intellectuals to legitimate such experience.” Eyerman, “False Consciousness and Ideology in Marxist Theory,” 43.

¹¹⁷ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 11.

“fails to ask whether there *is* a difference [emphasis added]”¹¹⁸ between men and women; it also fails to ask, in so many words, why “the family” is taken for granted as the basic social unit. Mitchell’s ideology critique and social constructionism take a more radical form than Friedan’s, because the former attends more to the concept of ideology itself.

As philosopher Charles Mills notes in his 2007 essay “White Ignorance,” it is through “the category ‘ideology’” that “[i]n the orthodox left tradition, [the] set of issues [relating to the adequacy of conceptions of the world] is handled.”¹¹⁹ Ideology is the conceptual rubric Mitchell uses to explain the internal contradictions and inconsistencies of gender as a social structure. For Mitchell, “the family” is not a given in relation to which women’s aspirations must be negotiated, but a specifically bourgeois formation. “[W]omen’s role in reproduction has become, in capitalist society at least, the spiritual ‘complement’ of men’s role in production. Bearing children, bringing them up, and maintaining the home – these form the core of woman’s natural vocation, in this ideology. This belief has attained great force *because of the seeming universality of the family as a human institution* [emphasis added].”¹²⁰ The family *seems* to be universal, but is not necessarily so. In a footnote, Mitchell restates the contention of Philippe Ariès in his landmark 1960 *Centuries of Childhood* that “though the family may in some form always have existed it was often submerged under more forceful structures ... according to Ariès it has only acquired its present significance with the advent of industrialization.”¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Bowlby, “The Problem with No Name,” 14.

¹¹⁹ Charles Mills, “White Ignorance,” in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, ed. Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2007), 25.

¹²⁰ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 20.

¹²¹ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 20, fn. 22.

Mitchell's offhand observation that "[b]ourgeois society is obsessed by the physical, moral and sexual problems of childhood and adolescence"¹²² points to another paradoxical facet of the problem of women's status. As Lee Edelman notes in his 2004 book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, "the fantasy subtending the image of the Child invariably shapes the logic within which the political itself must be thought."¹²³ It also, historically, has shaped the logic within which the problem of women's status itself must be thought. Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, conservative and radical women's advocates and modernizing states justified reforms in women's legal, educational, and political position with reference to the strengthening of the hegemonic Child, Home, Family, and Nation.¹²⁴ This ambiguous legacy forms the backdrop against which Mitchell, Friedan, and their contemporaries attempt to formulate new social roles for women.

Marxism, Mitchell notes, has failed to adequately grapple with the Woman Question. "[T]he classical [socialist and communist] literature on the problem of woman's condition is predominantly economist in emphasis,"¹²⁵ and so many of the social and psychological props of male supremacy and female subordination are left unexamined. "The complete failure to give any operative content to the slogan of 'abolition' of the family" has left a "void ... occupied by [purportedly] traditional beliefs."¹²⁶ What is striking here is Mitchell's assumption that it is the obligation of people on the Left to put forward alternatives to dominant familial ideology, and that only the absence of such alternatives leads to a conservative cultural consensus. It is also remarkable that she assumes that

¹²² Mitchell, "Women: the Longest Revolution," 28.

¹²³ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 1, Kindle.

¹²⁴ For an astute and witty "first-wave" summation of this fact, see Suzanne La Follette, *Concerning Women* (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1926), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015002620295;view=1up;seq=25>; "mingled with the voices of those critics who have demanded the subjection of woman for the sake of children, have been the voices of other critics demanding her emancipation for the sake of children ... The argument that woman must be free for the sake of the race, is an argument of expediency; as nine-tenths of the arguments against her legal subjection have been, and indeed had to be." La Follette, *Concerning Women*, 9.

¹²⁵ Mitchell, "Women: the Longest Revolution," 16.

¹²⁶ Mitchell, "Women: the Longest Revolution," 20.

international socialism and communism had always or even often made the “‘abolition’ of the family” a central element in its program. Throughout much of the 19th and 20th centuries, it was *on behalf of* the family and essentialist visions of womanhood that socialists and even communists in modernizing states made their claims for wealth redistribution. Racist and organicist gender ideologies had blinded many socialists of different nations to the possibilities of alternative family formations.¹²⁷

Significantly, it is in this section that Mitchell makes her only explicit reference to race and racism. If from “[t]he biological function of maternity ... follows ... the stability and omnipresence of the family ... women’s social subordination – however emphasized as an honourable, but different role (cf. the equal but ‘separate’ ideologies of Southern racists) – can be seen to follow inevitably as an *insurmountable* bio-historical fact. The lynch-pin in this line of argument is the idea of the family [emphasis in the original].”¹²⁸ As Maxine Baca Zinn notes in her essay “The Family as a Race Institution,” “[t]he dominant definition of ‘the family’ is an ideological code that expresses

¹²⁷ For examples of how this occurred in late-Victorian Britain, see Sandra Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy: Women’s Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain, 1900-1918* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986), https://books.google.com/books?id=3P3iQCEOoDQC&printsec=frontcover&dq=sandra+stanley+holton&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewilnp_NhfzXAhWKUd8KHXYgCnEQ6AEIKTAA#v=onepage&q=Rowbotham&f=false; she notes that “[Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks] ... have suggested an increasing conservatism by the 1890s in British socialist ideas concerning women. They find that critiques of conventional monogamy were being replaced by an increasing emphasis on the importance of the family.” Holton, *Feminism and Democracy*, 16. For more information on how it occurred in Europe, see Helmut Gruber, “The ‘New Woman’: Realities and Illusions of Gender Equality in Red Vienna,” in *Women and Socialism, Socialism and Women: Europe Between the Two World Wars*, ed. Helmut Gruber and Pamela Graves (New York: Berghahn Books, 1998), 56-86, ACLS Humanities E-Book; he makes clear that rather than supporting the “dissolution” of the family, socialists in interwar Vienna were instrumental in the creation of state apparatuses to monitor and preserve it. Gruber, “The ‘New Woman,’” 69; see also 57, 62-69. In Gruber’s words, “[t]he orderly, stable worker family, long considered by the industrial bourgeoisie as essential in building a stable workforce, became a prominent goal of the Socialist party as well.” Gruber, “The ‘New Woman,’” 84. After a period of experimentation in the 1920s, the French Communist Party in the Depression 1930s gradually retreated to essentialist views of the family and women’s nature and role; in 1937, for example, its paper *L’Humanité* changed the name of its “‘Woman’s” page to the “‘Woman and Child” page. Christine Bard and Jean-Louis Robert, “The French Communist Party and Women 1920-1939: From ‘Feminism’ to Familialism,” trans. Nicole Dombrowski, in *Women and Socialism, Socialism and Women: Europe Between the Two World Wars*, ed. Helmut Gruber and Pamela Graves (New York: Berghahn Books, 1998), 343; see also 321-44, ACLS Humanities E-Book.

¹²⁸ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 20.

differences from and superiority over ‘other’ family forms ... [s]ymbolic meanings of family are shaped in opposition to the family forms of racial ‘others’.”¹²⁹ The very hegemony of one type of family in the British imagination, Mitchell implies, emerges from a complex of social hierarchies, including racial hierarchy. “The beliefs [sic] that the family provides an impregnable enclave of intimacy and security in an atomized and chaotic cosmos,” Mitchell writes, “assumes [sic] the absurd.”¹³⁰ As we will see later, Mitchell contends that this belief inhibits the development of radical anti-capitalist critique. Her criticism of “equal but ‘separate’ ideologies” is part of a long historical tradition of using anti-racist and other radical movements as entering wedges for raising feminist claims.¹³¹

The central organizing principle of Mitchell’s essay is her “[differentiation]” of “woman’s condition” into “separate structures, which together form a complex – not a simple – unity.”¹³² This “complex unity” – of “Production, Reproduction, Sex and Socialization of children”¹³³ – is always, in an Althusserian sense, “overdetermined.”¹³⁴ Mitchell’s footnote on Althusser’s use of the Freudian term “overdetermination” emphasizes the complex interplay of temporality and dialectics in Althusser’s thought; different aspects of the social structure have different “time-scales,” whose “synthesis ... means that sometimes contradictions cancel each other out and sometimes they reinforce one another.”¹³⁵ Mirra Komarovsky’s observation in her 1953 book *Women in the Modern*

¹²⁹ Maxine Baca Zinn, “The Family as a Race Institution,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Race and Ethnic Studies*, ed. Patricia Hill Collins and John Solomos (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2010), 373, SAGE Publications.

¹³⁰ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 32.

¹³¹ As historian Karen Offen notes, “[f]eminist claims are primarily political claims for change in specific settings; they erupt frequently in times of political unrest.” Karen Offen, “The History of Feminism is Political History,” The American Historical Association, May 2011, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/may-2011/political-history-today/the-history-of-feminism-is-political-history>.

¹³² Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 16.

¹³³ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 17.

¹³⁴ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 16.

¹³⁵ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 17, fn. 13.

World: Their Education and Their Dilemmas – “technological and social changes over the past century and a half have disturbed an old equilibrium without as yet replacing it with another. As a result, our society is a veritable crazy quilt of contradictory beliefs and practices”¹³⁶ – provides a similar, unacknowledged prefiguration of Mitchell’s dive into the paradox of change.

II. Hegemonic Gender Ideology, Progress, and Temporality

Mitchell’s emphasis on the difficulty of distinguishing between progress and reaction parallels Friedan’s. But whereas Friedan, in Bowlby’s words, “[sets] up feminism as freedom gained and lost,”¹³⁷ Mitchell understands history in a more circular than linear fashion. Recall her quotation from Marx: “[T]he ancients provide a narrow satisfaction, whereas the modern world leaves us unsatisfied or where it appears to be satisfied with itself, is vulgar and mean.”¹³⁸ The implication here is that neither an idealized past nor an open future can be looked to for contemporary panaceas.

This implication becomes more specific when Mitchell grapples with concrete ways of measuring and actualizing progress. For Mitchell, earlier socialist discussions of women’s condition suffered from an ahistorical, inadequately specific futurism. August Bebel’s canonical *Woman in the Past, Present and Future* “was a vague reverie, quite disconnected from his description of the past”¹³⁹; Lenin “inherited a tradition of thought which ... [equated] socialism with feminine liberation without showing concretely how it would transform woman’s condition”¹⁴⁰; even de Beauvoir’s “prospect for women’s liberation at the end [of *The Second Sex*] is quite divorced from any historical development.”¹⁴¹ Altogether, “the classical literature on the problem of woman’s condition ... fails

¹³⁶ Coontz, *A Strange Stirring*, 108. This remark appears on page 48 of Komarovsky’s *Women in the Modern World*, which itself reflects this disequilibrium in its simultaneous acceptance of and challenge to the gender order.

¹³⁷ Bowlby, “The Problem with No Name,” 74.

¹³⁸ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 11.

¹³⁹ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 15.

¹⁴⁰ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 15.

¹⁴¹ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 16.

noticeably to project a convincing image of the future, beyond asserting that socialism will involve the liberation of women as one of its constituent ‘moments.’”¹⁴² Here, Mitchell’s emphasis is on the limitations of an open-ended assumption of progress – and, indeed, she problematizes the concept of progress itself, prefiguring Edelman’s much later insight that “the hope of forging ... some more perfect social order ... only reproduce[s] the constraining mandate of futurism.”¹⁴³

For Edelman, “politics, however radical the means by which specific constituencies attempt to produce a more desirable social order, remains, at its core, conservative insofar as it works to affirm a structure, to authenticate social order, which it then intends to transmit to the future in the form of its inner Child.”¹⁴⁴ As Sara Pursley argues, “reproductive *futurism* [the term coined by Edelman] is constituted by an interplay between cyclical-biological time and linear-historical time that is both modern and nationalist. For female citizens, as agents of reproduction, this interplay heralds new opportunities but also the consolidation of more formidable pressures. Having been finally freed from the past, the nation’s women were henceforth to be trapped in its future [emphasis added].”¹⁴⁵

Mitchell grapples with the problem of what modernity can mean for women long before these critical insights. There is for her no automatic road to women’s liberation, no one development whose promise is free of potential setbacks, co-optations, or contradictions. We have seen how cogently Betty Friedan criticized the labor-elaborating (techno)logics of household appliances.

Industrialization, as Mitchell points out in a footnote, has not reduced the time women must spend

¹⁴² Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 16.

¹⁴³ Edelman, *No Future*, 3. We will see that the futurism embraced by Mitchell, as influenced by Marx and Simone de Beauvoir, is rather different from the futurism Edelman has in mind.

¹⁴⁴ Edelman, *No Future*, 2. Edelman’s book is an extended protest against the cultural mandate of heterosexual reproduction and the homophobia associated with it. Rather than assert the “selfrighteous [sic] bromides of liberal pluralism” in response to a homophobic prediction that “acceptance or indifference to the homosexual movement will result in society’s destruction,” Edelman acknowledges that the person who made the prediction “might be right – or, more important ... he ought to be right: that queerness should and must define such notions as ‘civil order’ through a rupturing of our foundational faith in the reproduction of futurity.” Edelman, *No Future*, 16.

¹⁴⁵ Pursley, “A Race Against Time,” 10-11; see also Edelman, *No Future*, 2.

on housework: “it has been calculated in Sweden, that 2,340 million hours a year are spent by women in housework compared with 1,290 million hours in industry. The Chase Manhattan Bank estimated a woman’s overall working hours as averaging 99.6 per week.”¹⁴⁶ Women, Mitchell asserts, are exploited in the labor market as well as at home: “when the woman is gainfully employed ... her job tends to be inferior to that of the man’s, to which the family then adapts”¹⁴⁷; “[w]omen are poorly unionized (25 per cent) and receive less money than men for the work they do perform: in 1961 the average industrial wage for women was less than half that for men, which ... represents a massive increment of exploitation for the employer.”¹⁴⁸ (Unsurprisingly, Mitchell does not break these statistics down by class.) Mitchell uses the Marxist concept of “coercion,” quoting Marx himself for a definition – “[treating] the slave or serf as the ‘inorganic and natural condition of its own reproduction’”¹⁴⁹ – to explain the fact of women’s continued subordination: “coercion has been ameliorated to an *ideology* shared by both sexes [emphasis added].”¹⁵⁰ The structural relationship of coercion and ideology is itself dialectical – women are “anatomically smaller and weaker,”¹⁵¹ but historically have been given enormous amounts of backbreaking labor to do.¹⁵²

In an earlier (1964) article for *New Left Review* on “Women’s Education,” Mitchell notes the ominous potential of the increased free time promised by automation: “Automation will bring more leisure, women must be trained to provide this. Simone de Beauvoir hoped that automation would eliminate man’s physical superiority over woman ... but if automation is seen ... as the harbinger of a consumer civilization where leisure becomes a prolonged private domesticity, this instrument of

¹⁴⁶ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 17, fn. 14.

¹⁴⁷ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 30.

¹⁴⁸ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 35.

¹⁴⁹ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 18.

¹⁵⁰ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 19.

¹⁵¹ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 17.

¹⁵² Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 17-18.

potential liberation could *in itself* become the most serious contemporary threat to women's emancipation."¹⁵³ In "Women: the Longest Revolution," Mitchell extends this insight into a prediction of women's insecure status in a postmodern workplace: "[i]ndustrial labor and automated technology both promise the preconditions for woman's liberation ... but no more than the preconditions ... De [sic] Beauvoir hoped that automation would make a decisive, qualitative difference ... [b]ut any reliance on this ... accords an independent role to technique which history does not justify. Under capitalism, automation could lead to an ... [expulsion of] women – the latest and least integrated recruits to the labour force and ideologically the most expendable for a bourgeois society ... from production after only a brief interlude in it."¹⁵⁴

Why are women "ideologically the most expendable" waged workers "for a bourgeois society?" Surprise, surprise – it is Edelman's Child! "Women's absence from the critical sector of production historically ... has been caused not just by their physical weakness ... but also by their role in reproduction."¹⁵⁵ Historically, opposition to married women's work outside the home has been greatly influenced by the fear of its detrimental impact on children. Friedan assures her readers that "[i]n countries like Israel and Russia, where women are expected to be more than just housewives ... home and children and love are evidently not neglected."¹⁵⁶ She does not challenge the assumption that it is mothers who must care for children. Mitchell has a different orientation.¹⁵⁷

"[R]eproduction, sexuality, and the socialization of children ... are historically, not intrinsically, related to each other in the present modern family."¹⁵⁸ The "suitability" of women for socializing

¹⁵³ Mitchell, "Women's Education," *New Left Review*, November 1, 1964, 74, ProQuest.

¹⁵⁴ Mitchell, "Women: the Longest Revolution," 19.

¹⁵⁵ Mitchell, "Women: the Longest Revolution," 20.

¹⁵⁶ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 210.

¹⁵⁷ It should be noted, however, that even Mitchell reverts to an assumption of "the need for intensive maternal care in the early years of a child's life" later in her article. See Mitchell, "Women: the Longest Revolution," 36.

¹⁵⁸ Mitchell, "Women: the Longest Revolution," 20.

children does not automatically equate to the “inevitability” of their serving as socializing agents.¹⁵⁹ Mitchell accepts that “we know far more than ever before how delicate and precarious a process the passage from birth to childhood is for everyone. The fate of the adult personality can be largely decided in the initial months of life.”¹⁶⁰ These findings represent “undoubted advances in the scientific understanding of childhood,”¹⁶¹ but “the need for permanent, intelligent care of children in the initial three or four years of their lives can be (and has been) exploited ideologically to perpetuate the family as a total unit, when its other functions have been visibly declining.”¹⁶² The “emphasis of familial ideology” is itself subject to historical change; it has “shifted away from a cult of the biological ordeal of maternity ... to a celebration of mother-care as a social act.”¹⁶³ Historical changes – the shrinking both of the family and of the time women spend in caring for children – mean that “the qualitative importance of socialization during the early years of the child’s life has acquired a much greater significance than in the past – while the quantitative amount of a mother’s life spent either in gestation or child-rearing has greatly diminished.”¹⁶⁴ Like Friedan, Mitchell here implies, but does not state, that supposedly incontestable scientific knowledge has a social-historical as well as an independent factual basis. The very factors of modern life that have minimized certain aspects of the maternal role – and that, therefore, could work towards women’s liberation from the home – have maximized other aspects of that role.

Furthermore, Mitchell recognizes even more explicitly than Friedan the potential of “progressive” developments to recreate existing forms of inequality. Polygamy – in ancient China, for example – was certainly “a total derogation of woman’s autonomy, and [constituted] an extreme

¹⁵⁹ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 26.

¹⁶⁰ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 27.

¹⁶¹ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 27.

¹⁶² Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 32.

¹⁶³ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 28.

¹⁶⁴ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 28.

form of oppression,” but “[i]n the West ... the advent of monogamy was in no sense an *absolute* improvement. It certainly did not create a one-to-one equality – far from it.”¹⁶⁵ In the 16th century in England, “[c]apitalism and the attendant demands of the newly emergent bourgeoisie accorded woman a new status as wife and mother ... The formal, juridical equality of capitalist society and capitalist rationality now applied as much to the marital as to the labour contract. In both cases, nominal parity masks real exploitation and inequality. But in both cases the formal equality is itself a certain progress, which can help to make possible a further advance.”¹⁶⁶ The birth-control pill could mean that “child-bearing ... need no longer be the sole or ultimate vocation of woman,”¹⁶⁷ but “oral contraception ... has so far been developed in a form which exactly repeats the sexual inequality of Western society.”¹⁶⁸ We have already seen Mitchell’s skepticism about the potential of industrialization and automation to liberate women: as she phrases it elsewhere in the article, “automation promises the *technical* possibility of abolishing completely the physical differential between man and woman ... but under capitalist relations of production, the *social* possibility of this abolition is permanently threatened, and can easily be turned into its opposite, the actual diminution of woman’s role in the labour force.”¹⁶⁹ Mitchell asserts that the percentage of women in England’s labor force has barely increased since 1911, although, again, she does not provide a class breakdown of this statistic.¹⁷⁰ Moreover, the proportion of female to male university students has not changed in England since the 1920s (here again, a class breakdown of the statistic is lacking)¹⁷¹ – and, as

¹⁶⁵ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 23.

¹⁶⁶ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 24.

¹⁶⁷ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 21.

¹⁶⁸ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 31.

¹⁶⁹ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 30.

¹⁷⁰ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 30.

¹⁷¹ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 35.

Mitchell notes in “Women’s Education,” the equivalent proportion of women in the United States has actually decreased.¹⁷²

In both “Women’s Education” and “Women: the Longest Revolution,” Mitchell, a British socialist, drops subtle hints that the United States is actually *less*, not more, progressive than Europe in the matter of women’s status, not despite its wealth and international hegemony, but because of it. In “Women’s Education,” she reminds her readers that the United States is “the most developed capitalist country of all”¹⁷³ immediately before letting her readers know about the decrease in the proportion of women to men students there. Furthermore, “within this decrease there is evidence that greater and greater numbers of women are choosing courses that will be useful for marriage and maternity, not for a career. With structural unemployment running at 6 million a year, the American economy is likely to have less work to offer women. In Europe this is not yet the case.”¹⁷⁴ (As in “Women: the Longest Revolution,” so in “Women’s Education,” Mitchell does not provide class breakdowns of these statistics.) In “Women: the Longest Revolution,” Mitchell notes that the US birthrate in the decade preceding her article has outstripped that of “under-developed” countries such as India.¹⁷⁵ “[T]his reflects ... the lesser economic burden of a large family in conditions of economic boom in the richest country in the world. But it also reflects the magnification of familial ideology as a social force.”¹⁷⁶ Certainly gender conservatism was widespread across the postwar world; it was not specific to the United States. But Mitchell was correct about the relationship

¹⁷² Mitchell, “Women’s Education,” 74.

¹⁷³ Mitchell, “Women’s Education,” 74.

¹⁷⁴ Mitchell, “Women’s Education,” 74.

¹⁷⁵ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 31. Friedan also notes this statistic at the beginning of *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 10.

¹⁷⁶ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 31.

between consumer capitalism, a “bigger and better” ethos, and conservative domestic ideology.¹⁷⁷

This brings us to Mitchell’s understanding of the contradictions and inconsistencies in dominant ideologies of gender and social progress.

III. Hegemonic Gender Ideology’s Althusserian Dialectics

Mitchell’s understanding of contradiction as a driving force of gender conservatism parallels Friedan’s, in that they both grasp the complex and paradoxical relationships between and among economic growth, rationalization, automation, liberal democracy, and social insistence on women’s domestic role. For Mitchell, women’s economic situation is, and has been historically, full of contradictions. We have seen her claim that industrialization and automation do not automatically equate to women’s liberation, and in fact can even result in their further exclusion from wage labor (assuming, as she does for the purposes of “Women’s Education” and “Women: the Longest Revolution,” that women are a unitary entity not divided by class – or race). We have also seen her claim that the very economic changes that reduce the importance of certain aspects of women’s maternal role also elaborate and extend other aspects of it. The underlying paradox here (which Friedan, as we have seen, also addresses) is that economic and political modernity and increased prosperity, which bring concrete material and psychological benefits to women, also contract their aspirations and impose on them new restrictions.

¹⁷⁷ For examples of how the US consumer ethos shaped and limited women’s aspirations both in the United States and postwar Europe, see Sara Lennox, “Constructing Femininity in the Early Cold War Era,” in *German Pop Culture: How “American” Is It?*, ed. Agnes C. Mueller (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2004), 66-80, <https://books.google.com/books?id=Tiaz1jNlcMcC&pg=PA66&lpg=PA66&dq=constructing+femininity+early+cold+war&source=bl&ots=tzDXbZQX4K&sig=nLCUdQtNK32onIKnyktlOE276oc&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiL9c2Uj67XAhXJ4yYKHQcjCqQQ6AEIOTAE#v=onepage&q=constructing%20femininity%20early%20cold%20war&f=false>. See also May, *Homeward Bound*: “[Cold War] domestic ideology emerged as a buffer against ... disturbing political and sexual tendencies. Yet domesticity ultimately fostered the very tendencies it was intended to diffuse: materialism, consumerism, and bureaucratic conformity.” May, *Homeward Bound*, 13.

It is helpful here to quote sociologist Alice Rossi, a co-founder, with Friedan, of the National Organization for Women. In a 1965 magazine article, “Women in Science: Why So Few?” Rossi quotes Harriet Martineau’s 1834 claim that “‘the prosperity of America is a circumstance unfavorable to its women,’ meaning women are not ‘put to the proof as to what they are capable of thinking and doing.’”¹⁷⁸ Rossi also notes that “[s]ome child specialists may say that the mother is *more necessary at home than ever*, not only to love and care for the child but to stimulate the growing mind of the child [emphasis added].”¹⁷⁹ Recall Mitchell’s own recognition that “we know far more *than ever before* how delicate and precarious a process the passage from birth to childhood is for everyone [emphasis added].” Not even Rossi or Mitchell can fully recognize the cultural bias embedded in the idea that science, as such, has the right to claim from women “better” or “more” care than in the past. Yet Mitchell recognizes that the very exaltation of women’s role as mothers is the Janus face of their low social status: “[E]ven if the woman has emotional control over her child, legally and economically both she and it are subject to the father. The social cult of maternity is matched by the real socio-economic powerlessness of the mother. The psychological and practical benefits men receive from this are obvious.”¹⁸⁰ Furthermore, “[u]ltimate responsibility for [problems of childhood and adolescence] is placed on the mother.”¹⁸¹ The modernizing ideology of postwar motherhood was, like its earlier moral and republican version, “both empowering and humiliating,” as Gail Collins writes in *When Everything Changed: The Amazing History of American Women from 1960 to the Present*.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Alice Rossi, “Women in Science? Why So Few?”, in *The Other Half: Roads to Women’s Equality*, ed. Cynthia Fuchs Epstein and William J. Goode (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Spectrum Books, an imprint of Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), 111.

¹⁷⁹ Rossi, “Women in Science,” 115.

¹⁸⁰ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 22.

¹⁸¹ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 28.

¹⁸² Gail Collins, *When Everything Changed: The Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to the Present* (New York: Little, Brown and Company [Hachette Book Group], 2009), 5, Kindle.

Mitchell recognizes the contradictions in dominant ideologies of sexuality and their alteration as they relate to women's status as well. "Historically ... there has been a dialectical movement, in which sexual expression was 'sacrificed' in an epoch of more-or-less puritan repression, which nevertheless produced a greater parity of sexual roles, which in turn creates the precondition for a genuine sexual liberation."¹⁸³ Nonetheless, although "the current wave of sexual liberalization ... could become conducive to the general freedom of women[,] [e]qually it could presage new forms of oppression. The puritan-bourgeois creation of woman as 'counterpart' has produced the *precondition* for emancipation. But it gave statutory [sic] legal equality [sic] to the sexes at the cost of greatly intensified repression."¹⁸⁴ The promise of change, here as elsewhere, is always already a threat as well. "[T]he dominant sexual ideology," Mitchell notes, "is proving less and less successful ... [sexuality] ... is evidently the weak link in the chain – the particular structure that is the site of the most contradictions."¹⁸⁵ These contradictions have "progressive potential,"¹⁸⁶ but they are also products of a capitalist society, and are symptoms of Herbert Marcuse's "repressive de-sublimation," which Mitchell defines as "the freeing of sexuality for its own frustration in the service of a totally co-ordinated and drugged social machine."¹⁸⁷ For Mitchell, the so-called sexual revolution, "while it presently may contain the greatest potential for liberation – can equally well be organized against any increase in its human possibilities. New forms of reification are emerging which may void sexual freedom of any meaning."¹⁸⁸

More broadly, "the liberation of women can only be achieved if *all four* structures [production, reproduction, sex, and socialization of children] in which they are integrated are transformed. A

¹⁸³ Mitchell, "Women: the Longest Revolution," 24-25.

¹⁸⁴ Mitchell, "Women: the Longest Revolution," 25.

¹⁸⁵ Mitchell, "Women: the Longest Revolution," 32.

¹⁸⁶ Mitchell, "Women: the Longest Revolution," 32.

¹⁸⁷ Mitchell, "Women: the Longest Revolution," 33.

¹⁸⁸ Mitchell, "Women: the Longest Revolution," 33.

modification of any one of them can be offset by a reinforcement of another, so that mere permutation of the form of exploitation is achieved.”¹⁸⁹ Women’s suffrage, “though a simple completion of the formal legal equality of bourgeois society ... left the socio-economic situation of women virtually unchanged. The wider legacy of the suffrage was nil: the suffragettes proved quite unable to go beyond their initial demands, and many of their leading figures later became extreme reactionaries.”¹⁹⁰ The Soviet Union in the 1920s passed astonishingly radical legislation “aimed at liberating women above all in the field of sexuality,” but the effects of this were seen to be so destabilizing that “Stalinism soon produced a restoration of iron traditional norms.”¹⁹¹ In contemporary China, “all the emphasis is being placed on liberating women in *production*. This has produced an impressive social promotion of women. But it has been accompanied by a tremendous repression of sexuality and a rigorous puritanism [emphasis in the original].”¹⁹² The implication here, as with Friedan, is that the idea of liberation can easily be turned into its opposite, and that, in fact, that the concept of “liberation” can be only one side of a coin of social control.

For Mitchell, a really desirable change in women’s condition requires “a transformation of all the structures into which they are integrated, and an [Althusserian] ‘*unité de rupture*.’”¹⁹³ Althusser uses the term “*unité de rupture*” in *For Marx*, in trying to explain how revolution happens.¹⁹⁴

Elaborating on the Leninist metaphor of the “weak link in the chain,”¹⁹⁵ Althusser explains that “anyone who wants to attack [a situation] ... need only discover [its] one weakness to make all its

¹⁸⁹ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 29.

¹⁹⁰ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 29.

¹⁹¹ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 29.

¹⁹² Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 29-30.

¹⁹³ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 30, fn. 43; see also 17, fn. 13.

¹⁹⁴ Althusser, *For Marx*, 99.

¹⁹⁵ Althusser, *For Marx*, 94.

power precarious.”¹⁹⁶ Mitchell, as we have seen, uses the phrase “the weak link in the chain” to describe “the structure that is the site of the most contradictions” – sexuality.¹⁹⁷ But we have seen that neither changes in the sexual structure nor in any of her other three structures automatically “liberate” women. If radical social changes in the industrialized West, and even in the Eastern Bloc, have not resulted in real freedom for women, the implication is that the mutually reinforcing aspects of their disadvantageous position require an explosive force to obliterate the tendencies of overdetermination.

I argue that the “lynch-pin” of her insight into women’s condition is indeed her challenge to “the idea of the family.” Mitchell is well aware of the ways in which women’s labor-force participation has been played off against their family responsibilities, to the detriment of their position in both areas. Historically, the vulnerabilities of women in the labor market – their lack of choices, inability to advance up the job ladder, unsanitary conditions, sexual exploitation, and low pay – have been corollaries of their responsibility for social reproduction in the home. Mitchell seems to grasp that as long as a hegemonic Family is held up as the foundation of British society and the very essence of its continuation, conservative gender ideology will prevail. Mitchell goes beyond the majority of earlier suffragists and feminists in her refusal to accept that women are wives and mothers first and foremost. Although “[m]odern industrial development ... tends toward the separating out of the originally unified function of the family ... procreation, socialization, sexuality, economic subsistence, etc.,” such “‘structural differentiation’ ... has been checked and disguised by the maintenance of a powerful family ideology.”¹⁹⁸ The circle must be squared; modernity must be made to live up to its potential. The very “attempt to focus women’s existence exclusively on

¹⁹⁶ Althusser, *For Marx*, 94.

¹⁹⁷ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 32.

¹⁹⁸ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 34.

bringing up children, is manifestly harmful to children ... Exclusive maternity is often in this sense 'counter-productive.'"¹⁹⁹ But it is just as wrong to simply call for "the 'abolition of the bourgeois family.' This slogan ... is maximalist in the bad sense, posing a demand which is merely a negation without any coherent construction subsequent to it."²⁰⁰ A totalizing, negative aim is worse than no aim at all, since it leaves unchallenged the concept that is being negated. It is the concept of the family itself, in Mitchell's view, which must be rethought.

"[A]ll human experience shows that intersexual and intergenerational relationships are infinitely various ... while the institutionalized expression of them in our capitalist society is utterly simple and rigid."²⁰¹ This points to another paradox of the postwar era: at the very point when the multiplication of human activity along various lines of endeavor should have ensured a less socially constrained life for everyone, rigid conceptions of the family and women's role became even more hegemonic.²⁰² This contradiction is neatly captured by Jessica Weiss: "[t]he Cold War liberalism that nourished Friedan's ideals of individual equality for women harbored a contradictory ideal that pulled just as strongly in the opposite direction. In this view, women's continued selflessness in the face of increased options created individualism in the next generation."²⁰³ Mitchell wrestles with this central problem of reproduction, rights, and power: "No human being can create another human being. A person's biological origin is an abstraction. The child as an autonomous person inevitably threatens the activity which claims to create it continually merely as a *possession* of the parent ...

¹⁹⁹ Mitchell, "Women: the Longest Revolution," 32.

²⁰⁰ Mitchell, "Women: the Longest Revolution," 35.

²⁰¹ Mitchell, "Women: the Longest Revolution," 36.

²⁰² Eli Zaretsky asserts that "[t]he dominant ideology of the postwar family ... reflected the shift from a class- and community-based industrial society to a family-centered postindustrial society oriented to mass consumption. With hitherto undreamed-of possibilities for private consumption, personal life ... now assumed a mass form for the first time." See Zaretsky, "Charisma or Rationalization?," 338.

²⁰³ Weiss, "Fraud of Femininity," 142.

[a]nything the child does is therefore a threat to the mother herself who has renounced her autonomy through this misconception of her reproductive role.”²⁰⁴

The paradoxes of women’s situation thus go to the very heart of what it means to be human - the very heart of humanity’s potential for biological, psychological, and social growth and change. For Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, “what peculiarly signalizes the situation of woman” is “that she – a free and autonomous being like all human creatures – nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other. They propose to *stabilize* her as object and to *doom her to immanence* [emphasis added]” – in other words, men block women from “a continual reaching out toward other liberties ... [an] expansion into an indefinitely open future.”²⁰⁵ Here de Beauvoir hitches her wagon to the star of futurism – but, as we shall see, her and Mitchell’s futurism is different from the reproductive futurism Edelman criticizes. The end of “Women: the Longest Revolution” shares de Beauvoir’s emphasis on temporality and progress; it is a paragraph-long disquisition – with quotes from Marx – on the desirability of an open-ended vision of the future.

“Circumstantial accounts of the future,” Mitchell writes, “are idealist and worse, static. Socialism will be a process of change, of becoming.”²⁰⁶ Mitchell quotes Marx’s definition of progress: “the absolute elaboration of (man’s) creative dispositions, without any preconditions other than antecedent historical evolution which makes the totality of this evolution – i.e. the evolution of all human powers as such, unmeasured by any *previously established* yardstick – an end in itself ... a situation where man does not reproduce himself in any determined form, but produces his totality[.]

²⁰⁴ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 22.

²⁰⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, “Introduction to *The Second Sex*,” in *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*, 3rd ed., ed. Carole R. McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim (New York and London: Routledge [Taylor & Francis Group, LLC, an imprint of Informa PLC], 2013), 47.

²⁰⁶ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 36.

Where he does not seek to remain something formed by the past, but is the absolute movement of becoming[.]”²⁰⁷ For Mitchell – as well as for Marx and de Beauvoir – the ideal of progress is an *anti*-reproductive futurism, a repudiation of what de Beauvoir calls “the ‘en-soi’ – the brutish life of subjection to given conditions.”²⁰⁸ This kind of progress contrasts with that envisioned by the experts criticized by Friedan, who commend the “modern bride” for consciously “[choosing] among all possible careers the career of wife-mother-homemaker.” The emphasis of the latter kind of progress is on rationalized planning for limited options; the emphasis of the former kind of progress is on movement toward an *unspecified*, but always implicitly revolutionary, end, one not confined by contemporary prejudices. The irony here is that Mitchell, who has criticized earlier socialist thinkers for their failure to paint a clear picture of a free society, is no more able to give a definite account of the future than they were. We see here the ultimate reliance of radical thought on shifting goalposts and reference points; the alternative to the “closed form and established limitation” of Marx’s past is not a wholly closed and established program, but an indefinitely expandable period of trial and error. Futurism functions dialectically in radical thought, split between the conflicting imperatives of creative freedom and concrete planning.

Thus Mitchell, as influenced by de Beauvoir and Marx, carefully rethinks the relationships between and among reproduction, freedom, improvement, progress, and temporality. Many suffragists and feminists in Victorian and Edwardian Britain had shared an Edelmanian focus on the Child and had described women in essentialist, familial terms; as noted by Sandra Stanley Holton in her 1986 book *Feminism and Democracy: Women’s Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain, 1900-1918*, they had claimed “that because women mothered they were more caring and nurturant ... [i]t

²⁰⁷ Mitchell, “Women: the Longest Revolution,” 37.

²⁰⁸ de Beauvoir, “The Second Sex,” 47.

was ... claimed that women, because they nurtured and men did not, could offer skills and understanding of particular relevance to ... the education of children, public health, and the management and care of the poor.”²⁰⁹ One early 20th-century suffragist claimed the vote on the basis of “our very womanhood, with its inborn instinct to childward care”²¹⁰; another, agreeing with an anti-suffragist that “no sane person can deny that men and women are different, for Nature has made them so. It is only in combination as a group – father, mother, child – that they reach completion; it is only thus in the effort of rearing children for the race that they best develop,” added, “my belief in the truth of this contention is my chief reason for believing in the necessity for removing the sex-disability.”²¹¹ Mitchell, writing some six decades later, recognizes that such organicist and biologist views of the family and women’s role can handicap a critical socialist approach. For Mitchell – and Friedan – it is not enough to claim that women’s difference, their unique moral qualities, their familial responsibilities, necessitate an improvement in their political and social position. They take a more radical approach – an approach that assumes that *natural* is a smokescreen for *ideological*. Women are not mothers who can nurture the nation, but individuals who are trapped by the very concept of motherhood and the ideological and discursive formations surrounding it.

²⁰⁹ Holton, *Feminism and Democracy*, 11.

²¹⁰ Holton, *Feminism and Democracy*, 12.

²¹¹ Agnes Geraldine Grove, Lady Grove, *The Human Woman* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1908), 184-85, https://books.google.com/books?id=dtdnzNi7m34C&pg=PA101&lpg=PA101&dq=the+threatened+re-subjection+of+women&source=bl&ots=lxXKrojF9_&sig=PymoYtstcFB3iSLY8oFAY12vBCY&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewi2h6PMoezTAhXJSyYKHExNB1MQ6AEIJjAB#v=onepage&q=child&f=false.

Conclusion

Feminism as a social current has never been a unitary entity. It is precisely because the political category of “women” and the arguments made on behalf of improving their social position have been so internally inconsistent and incomplete – and yet so profoundly relevant for the lives of all those identified as “women” and all those identified as belonging to other gender categories – that the historical evolution of these arguments is so absorbing a topic of study. For the two authors under discussion in this essay and for others before and after them, constituting “women” as a political group whose status should be changed has meant grappling with complex and shifting realities of power, status, language, and temporality. As I have shown, for Betty Friedan and Juliet Mitchell to challenge established views on the proper relationship of “women” to 1960s modernity in its manifold forms (automation, globalization, the so-called sexual revolution), they had to recognize that “scientific,” psychoanalytic, and consumerist discourses were not the final word on the nature and proper functions of women. They had to understand how the discursive field of possibilities for social change was constructed and delimited and how it could be expanded. Last, but not least, they had to recognize the complexity of liberal reformism, of proposals for social change that proposed to partially restructure these relations.

It is evident that the work of both Friedan and Mitchell is radical on all three of these counts. Friedan, as we have seen, uses the words of Freudian psychologists and Freudian-influenced social scientists against them; she performs a masterful close reading of Margaret Mead in particular, alerting her readers to the inherently unstable, contradictory, and challenging nature of liberal claims. Mitchell goes even further in her recognition of gender and sexuality as ideological structures

mediated by society as a whole, profoundly shaped by the ever-present possibilities of compromise and retreat.

If there is any foundation on which the critical epistemologies and disciplines of the post-1960s Left and postmodernism in general rest, it is the conviction that virtually every feature of the physical, social, and political world is mediated if not actually created by shifting fields of power-knowledge – with the explosive corollary that there is no given beyond which human social formations cannot go, no unchangeable hierarchy of bodies, knowledge, and institutions. What makes this most radical of all human insights possible is a critical concept of ideology. This concept not only enables the leap from an organicist theological worldview such as that of medieval Europe, but the leap – hardly less revolutionary – from a Victorian Darwinist worldview in which hierarchies of gender, race, and physical “fitness” were construed as having a biological basis, beyond which they could only shift so far, if at all.²¹²

This theoretical shift, with its profound implications for all forms of human thought, is anticipated in the work of Friedan and Mitchell. It is, of course, wholly erroneous to claim that either Friedan or Mitchell go to the extreme of claiming that there are no “pure” facts, no absolute realities. But their work is hugely important for feminist ideology critique, critical theory, and social constructionism, which are crucial pillars of a coherent anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-homophobic philosophy. Radical ideology critique is important precisely because of its vulnerability and fragility, its rootedness in the very structures of domination it tries to undo; the histories of 19th- and 20th-century feminism – and of the abolitionism that was its progenitor – vividly illustrate this. What is

²¹² For more on how existentialist, structuralist, and postmodern thinkers such as Foucault have revolutionized the very concept of knowledge itself, and provided the intellectual foundations for a critique of science (and, by extension, other fields of endeavor), see Robert Markley, “Foucault, Modernity, and the Cultural Study of Science,” *Configurations* 7, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 153-73, Project MUSE.

significant about Friedan and Mitchell is not simply that they issue fundamental challenges to male dominance as an organizing principle of society – itself a profoundly difficult, and still unusual, endeavor in the 1960s – but that they recognize the contradictions and vulnerabilities in such challenges. To understand that deep and corrosive injustices are foundational to a society, and to recognize that surface changes will not eliminate them, takes a unique act of imagination and courage. But to recognize that there is no pure form of resistance to these injustices, to question totalizing narratives and utopian, conflict-free visions of a social order, is to attain a historically unprecedented profundity of moral awareness.

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